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# UNIT 1 EMERGENCE OF SOCIOLOGY IN EUROPE

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit deals with the emergence of sociology in Europe. After studying this unit, you should be able to

- outline the background to the emergence of sociology
- describe the social conditions prevailing in Europe from the fourteenth to approximately eighteenth century
- list the main features of the French and the Industrial Revolution and
- define the main intellectual trends of that period which influenced the emergence of sociology.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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This is the first unit of Block 1 of ESO-13 on “Sociological Thought”. This Unit will trace the relationship between the emergence of sociology and the social and intellectual conditions of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe. This we will do because sociology, the subject that we study today, emerged first in Europe. Sociology can in this sense be studied as a response to the social and intellectual climate prevailing in Europe of that time. A proper understanding of this linkage will help you better appreciate the ideas of the Founding Fathers. These ideas you will study in the units that will follow the first unit.

Section 1.2 of the first unit describes the background to the emergence of sociology. To explain the social, cultural, political and economic conditions of Europe before the emergence of sociology, we give briefly in Section 1.3 an account of the Commercial Revolutions and the Scientific Revolution which took place in Europe from about fourteenth century to the eighteenth century.

We will then discuss in sections 1.4 and 1.5 two salient events of the period, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. They followed the Commercial Revolution and the Scientific Revolution in Europe, and left a lasting impact on the main themes of sociology.

You will learn in section 1.6 how different intellectual theories, the **Enlightenment** onwards, affected the growth of sociology.

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## 1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIOLOGY

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To understand the emergence of sociology in Europe we need to appreciate the relationship between society and ideas. There is always a connection between the social conditions of a period and the ideas, which arise and are dominant in that period.

To give you an example, let us remind you of the National Movement in our country. When India was under the British Raj, she had to suffer all

the ills of colonialism. Indians were economically exploited, politically bonded, socially humiliated, culturally bereft. At the same time, the Indian middleclass emerged as a product of the economic policies of colonialism. They had also been exposed to the **liberal** and radical European social thought. They were therefore disturbed by the exploitation of colonialism and started writing, campaigning and building up a movement to free India. Culture, theatre, songs, literature were pervaded by the spirit of freedom. Premchand's novel *Karma Bhumi*, which was serialized on television in the 1980s, depicts the changes of that time. You can thus see that ideas are normally rooted in their social context. It is in this context that we need to see the emergence of sociology as a discipline. Let us begin with a discussion of the Enlightenment period.

### 1.2.1 The Enlightenment Period

The roots of the ideas developed by the early sociologists are grounded in the social conditions that prevailed in Europe. The emergence of sociology as a scientific discipline can be traced to that period of European history, which saw such tremendous social, political and economic changes as embodied in the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. This period of change in European society is known as the Enlightenment Period as it embodies the spirit of new awakening in the French philosophers of the eighteenth century.

The Enlightenment Period marked a radical change from the traditional thinking of **feudal** Europe. It introduced the new way of thinking and looking at reality. Individuals started questioning each and every aspect of life and nothing was considered sacrosanct - from the church to the state to the authority of the monarch and so on.

The roots of the ideas, such as the belief that both nature and society can be studied scientifically, that human beings are essentially rational and that a society built on rational principles will make human beings realize their infinite potentials, can be traced in the development of science and commerce in Europe. The new outlook developed as a result of the Commercial Revolution and the Scientific Revolution and crystallised during the French and the Industrial Revolutions gave birth to sociology as a discipline.

To understand the social changes that were taking place in European society, we will first look at the kind of society that existed in traditional Europe, i.e. prior to the Enlightenment period.

### 1.2.2 Structure and Change in European Society

Old Europe was traditional. Land was central to its economic system. There were owners of land, the feudal lords and the peasants who worked on the lands. The classes were distinct and clearly demarcated. Religion formed the corner stone of society. The religious heads decided what was moral, what was not. Family and kinship were central to the lives of the people. Monarchy was firmly rooted in society. The king was believed to be divinely ordained to rule over his people.

The New Europe ushered in by the two Revolutions, the French and the industrial, challenged each and every central feature of old Europe. Classes

were recognised. Old classes were overthrown. New classes arose. Religion was questioned. Religion lost its important position. Family loyalties gave way to ideological commitments. The position of women changed. And finally monarchy was overthrown. **Democracy** was heralded in.

The central concepts of society, namely, religion, community, power, wealth, etc. were all taking on new bearings and new implications.

The contrast between present and past seemed stark. For the aristocrat, threatened with the loss of life and property the present was terrifying. For the peasant, the present was intoxicating as it offered new opportunities and powers.

Thus, you can see that everybody was affected. Since the significance of the changes that were taking place in Europe cannot be overestimated, it is better that you study about them in greater detail in the next section.

### Check Your Progress I

i) Mention two features of the old European society. Use about two lines.

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ii) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.

- a) The Indian Middle Classes had been exposed to the ..... and ..... European social thought during the Freedom struggle.
- b) .....was central to the economic system of old Europe.
- c) The ..... Europe ushered in by the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution challenged each and every .....feature of old Europe.

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## 1.3 THE SOCIAL CONDITIONS IN WHICH SOCIOLOGY EMERGED

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Sociology emerged as a distinct science in nineteenth century Europe. Europe then was passing through a period of immense changes which had set in with the French and the Industrial Revolutions. Indeed, sociology can be considered above all a science of the new industrial society.

But before we go on to describe the salient points of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution we will explain to you the Commercial Revolution and the Scientific Revolution which took place in Europe between the fourteenth century and the eighteenth century. It was during these two Revolutions in Europe, covered by what is popularly known as the “Renaissance” period, when there took place a revival of art, literature, music, sculpture, science and so on.

### 1.3.1 The Commercial Revolution

The “Commercial Revolution” refers to a series of events between 1450 to approximately 1800. These events signaled to a shift from the largely subsistence and stagnant economy of medieval Europe to a more dynamic and worldwide system. The Commercial Revolution in this sense, signified the expansion of trade and commerce that took place from the fifteenth century onwards. It was of such a large scale and organised manner that we call it a Revolution. This expansion was as a result of the initiative taken by certain European countries to develop and consolidate their economic and political power. These countries were Portugal, Spain, Holland and England.

Let us now study some of the important aspects of the Commercial Revolution, namely overseas discoveries and conquests. Europe’s trade with the Oriental or Eastern countries like India and China was transacted by land routes. The northern Italian cities of Venice and Genoa were the major centers of trade. The result of the Italian monopoly was that the prices of goods like spices and silks imported from the East were extremely high. Portugal and Spain therefore, wanted to discover a route to the Orient that would be independent of Italian control.

Thus began a shift from land routes to sea-routes. The Portuguese were the pioneers in adventurous navigation and exploration, you probably know of the historic voyage of Vasco da Gama who, in 1498 landed on the Indian coast after having sailed around the southern tip of Africa.

Christopher Columbus, an Italian under the patronage of the Spanish King and Queen, set sail for India. However, he landed on the shores of North America. This accidental discovery of America was to prove very beneficial to Spain. It laid the foundations of what was to become a Spanish empire in America.

Britain, France and Holland soon followed Spain and Portugal. The parts of India and Africa, Malacca, the Spice Islands, West Indies and South America came under the economic control of Spain, Portugal, England, France and Holland. Commerce expanded into a world enterprise. The monopoly of the Italian cities was destroyed.

European markets were flooded with new commodities; spices and textiles from the East, tobacco from N. America, Cocoa, Chocolate and quinine from S. America, ivory and, above all, human slaves from Africa. With the discovery of the Americas, the range of trade widened. Formerly, the items sought for were spices and cloth, later, gold and silver were added to the list.

As the Commercial Revolution progressed, the position of Portugal and Spain declined. England, Holland and France came to dominate Europe and the world.

#### 1.3.1.1 Expansion of Banking

One of the important features of the Commercial Revolution was the growth of banking. Credit facilities were expanded, making it easy for merchants

all over Europe to do business. The “cheque” was invented in the eighteenth century. Paper money came to replace gold and silver coins.

Growth of companies: As trade and commerce expanded, new kinds of business organizations had to be devised to cope with this growth. “Regulated companies” arose in the 16th century. These were associations of merchants who bonded together to cooperate for a common venture.

“Joint-stock” companies emerged in the 17th century. In this set-up, shares of capital were distributed to a large number of investors. Some of these were also “chartered companies”, their governments gave them a charter or a contract which guaranteed them a monopoly of the trade in a particular region. Examples of these companies include the British East India Company and the Dutch East India Company.

### 1.3.1.2 Rise of a New Class

As hinted at earlier in this section, one of the most distinctive characteristics of this period was the rise of the middle class to economic power. By the end of the 17th century, the middle class had become an influential group in nearly every western European country. It included merchants, bankers, ship-owners and investors. Their power, at this stage, was mainly economic. But later in the unit, we shall see how they became politically powerful in the 19th century. “Europeanisation” of the world

By this term, we mean the transplanting of European manners and culture in other societies. The activities of traders, missionaries and conquerors saw the Europeanisation of the Americas. Later, with the strengthening of colonialism, this process took root in Asia and Africa as well.

#### Activity 1

You have just read the details about the Commercial Revolution, which took place from 14th-18th century approximately in Europe. Now read a textbook on ancient Indian history and find out whether there was a parallel kind of Commercial activity in India during this period.

This period saw the strengthening of monarchy, the decline of the Church and the rise of the middle class. It marked the beginning of the process of “Europeanisation”, which was to reach a peak with colonialism. Thus Europe charted new areas for economic expansion - the whole world had become Europe’s oyster. Now let us examine the revolution in science.

### 1.3.2 The Scientific Revolution and the Renaissance Period

In this section, we shall examine the changes and developments that took place in a very significant area of human activity - science. Europe produced a “scientific revolution” in the Renaissance period of fourteenth to sixteenth century A.D. The impact of the scientific revolution was crucial not just in changing material life, but also people’s ideas about Nature and Society.

To begin with, let us clarify what we mean by the “history of science”, which is what we will be describing in this section. The history of science does not mean a list of dates and events to be memorized. It is a story of



the interconnection between science and society, polity, economy and culture.

### **1.3.2.1 Social Functions of Sciences**

Science does not develop independent of society, rather, it develops in response to human needs e.g. various vaccines were not developed just out of the blue, but out of the necessity to cure diseases.

Apart from influencing the physical or material life of society, science is intimately connected with ideas. The general intellectual atmosphere existing in society influences the development of science. Similarly, new developments in science can change the attitudes and beliefs in other areas as well. It is important to keep this fact in mind. We shall constantly be demonstrating how new scientific ideas influenced scholars to think about society in new ways. The emergence of sociology in Europe owes a great deal to the ideas and discoveries contributed by science.

### **1.3.2.2 Science in the Medieval Period**

As we have described in the earlier section, medieval society was characterised by the feudal system. The Church was the epicenter of power authority and learning. Learning was mostly of the religious variety. Nothing could challenge the 'dogmas' or rigid beliefs of the Church. New, daring ideas could not flower in such an atmosphere. Thus the development of science was restricted mainly to improvements in techniques of production.

### **1.3.2.3 The Renaissance period**

The 'Renaissance' period saw the beginning of the 'Scientific Revolution'. It marked an area of description and criticism in the field of science. It was a clear break from the past, a challenge to old authority. Let us briefly observe some of the major developments in art and science of this period.

#### **Visual art**

Art, literature and science all flourished. A scientific approach to Nature and the human body became prevalent. We can see this in the paintings of that period, which explored the smallest details of Nature and the human body.

#### **Medicine**

Dissection the human body became acceptable. Doctors and physiologists directly observed how the human body was constructed. The fields of anatomy, physiology and pathology thus benefited greatly.

#### **Chemistry**

A general theory of chemistry was developed. Chemical processes like oxidation, reduction, distillation, amalgamation etc. were studied.

#### **Navigation and astronomy**

Vasco da Gama reached the Indian shores in 1498. Columbus discovered America in 1492. Remember, this was the era of expansion of trade and the beginnings of colonialism. A strong interest in astronomy, important for successful navigation also grew.

### 1.3.2.4 The Copernican Revolution

The first major break from the entire system of ancient thought came with the work of the Dutchman, Nicholas Copernicus.

It was generally believed that the earth was fixed or stationary and the sun and other heavenly bodies moved around it. (This is known as a 'geocentric' theory.)

Copernicus however thought otherwise. With the help of detailed explanations, he demonstrated that the earth moved around a fixed sun. (This is a 'heliocentric' theory.) The work of Copernicus is considered revolutionary because it drastically altered patterns of thought about the universe. Human being was not at the center of the universe, but a small part of a vast system.

In a nutshell, science in the Renaissance period was marked by a new attitude towards man and nature. Natural objects became the subject of close observation and experiment.

The Copernican revolution shattered the very foundations on which the old world rested.

Let us now outline some major scientific developments of the post-Renaissance era.

### 1.3.3 Important Post-Renaissance Developments

Here we describe the developments in different fields that led to new methods and perspectives in scientific research.

#### 1.3.3.1 Experimental Method in Physics and Mathematics

The work of physicists and mathematicians like Galileo Galilei (1564-1642), Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) and subsequently, Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) revolutionised science. It brought to the forefront the experimental method. Old ideas were challenged and alternatives were suggested. If these alternative ideas could be proved and repeatedly verified and checked out, they were accepted. If not, new solutions were sought.

Scientific methods thus came to be regarded as the most accurate, the most objective. You will later see how the use of the 'scientific method' to study society was recommended by pioneer sociologists.

#### 1.3.3.2 Biology and Evolution

As has been mentioned earlier, dissection of the human body helped people gain a better understanding of its working: Circulation of blood was discovered by William Harvey (1578-1657). This led to a lot of rethinking. The human organism came to be viewed in terms of interrelated parts and interconnected systems. This had its impact on social thought of Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, to name a few.

Let us now come to one of the most interesting contributions in biology, which created a furor in the society of that time. The British naturalist Charles Darwin (1809-1882) published the *Origin of Species* in 1859. It was based on the observations made whilst traveling for five years all over



the world. Darwin put forward the theory that various living organisms compete for the limited resources the earth has to offer. Thus “survival of the fittest” is the natural law. Some species evolve or develop certain traits, which make their survival possible, other species die out.

Darwin studied ‘human evolution’, tracing it in his work, *Descent of Man* (1863). He traced the origins of the human species to some ape-like ancestors, which, over the centuries, evolved into modern human beings. This book created an uproar. It was believed that ‘God’ made humans “in his own image” and conservatives were not willing to accept that they were descended from the monkey.

Darwin’s evolutionary theory did, however, gain wide acceptance. It was applied to the social world by ‘evolutionary’ thinkers, notably Herbert Spencer. Not just organisms, but societies were seen as constantly ‘evolving’ or developing from a lower to a higher stage.

The forces of change set in by the Commercial Revolution and the Scientific Revolution would have now become clear to you by now. We will next describe the salient aspects of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, which have together provided the social conditions which led to the emergence of sociology as a discipline. Since these two revolutions are of considerable significance let us discuss them in the next two sections (1.4 and 1.5). Before going on to them, let us complete Check Your Progress 1.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) What do you understand by the Commercial Revolution in Europe? Describe it in about six lines.

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- ii) Describe at least two developments in science during the “Scientific Revolution”. Use about six lines.

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iii) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.

- a) Sociology can be considered above all a science of the new ..... society.
- b) It emerged as a distinct science in the ..... century.
- c) The Commercial Revolution and the “Scientific Revolution” in the history of Europe fall within the ..... period.

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## 1.4 THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

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The French Revolution, which erupted in 1789 marked a turning point in the history of human struggle for freedom and equality. It put an end to the age of feudalism and ushered in a new order of society. An outline of this revolution will explain to you the kind of turmoil that occurred in Europe. This revolution brought about far reaching changes in not only French society but in societies throughout Europe. Even countries in other continents such as, India, were influenced by the ideas generated during this revolution. Ideas like liberty, fraternity and equality, which now form a part of the preamble to the Constitution of India, owe their origin to the French Revolution. Let us first examine some of the major aspects of this revolution.

### 1.4.1 The Basic Picture of the French society: Division into Feudal Estates

The French society was divided into feudal ‘**estates**’. The structure of the feudal French society comprised the ‘Three Estates’. Estates are defined as a system of stratification found in feudal European societies whereby one section or estate is distinguished from the other in terms of status, privileges and restrictions accorded to that estate.

- a) **The First Estate** consisted of the clergy, which was stratified into higher clergy, such as the cardinal, the archbishops, the bishops and the abbots. They lived a life of luxury and gave very little attention to religion. In fact, some of them preferred the life of politics to religion. They spent much of their time in wasteful activities like drinking, gambling, etc. In comparison to the higher clergy, the lower parish priests were over worked and poverty-stricken.
- b) **The Second Estate** consisted of the nobility. There were two kinds of nobles, the nobles of the sword and the nobles of the robe.

The nobles of the sword were big landlords. They were the protectors of the people in principle but in reality they led a life of a parasite, living off the hard work of the peasants. They led the life of pomp and show and were nothing more than ‘high born wastrels’; that is, they spent extravagantly and did not work themselves. They can be compared to the erstwhile zamindars in India.

The nobles of the robe were nobles not by birth by title. They were the magistrates and judges. Among these nobles, some were very

progressive and liberal as they had moved in their positions from common citizens who belonged to the third estate.

- c) **The Third Estate** comprised the rest of the society and included the peasants, the merchants, the artisans, and others. There was a vast difference between the condition of the peasants and that of the clergy and the nobility. The peasants worked day and night but were overloaded with so many taxes that they lived a hand to mouth existence. They produced the food on which the whole society depended. Yet they could barely survive due to failure of any kind of protection from the government. The King, in order to maintain the good will of the other two estates, the clergy and the nobility, continued to exploit the poor. The poor peasants had no power against him. While the clergy and the nobility kept on pampering and flattering the King.

As compared to the peasants, the condition of the middle classes, also known as the bourgeoisie comprising the merchants, bankers, lawyers, manufacturers, etc. was much better. These classes too belonged to the third estate. But the poverty of the state, which led to a price rise during 1720-1789, instead of adversely affecting them, helped them. They derived profit from this rise and the fact that French trade had improved enormously also helped the commercial classes to a great extent. Thus, this class was rich and secure. But it had no social prestige as compared with the high prestige of the members of the first and the second estates.

In spite of controlling trade, industries, banking etc. the bourgeoisie had no power to influence the court or administration. The other two estates looked them down upon and the King paid very little attention to them. Thus, gaining political power became a necessity for them.

The clergy and the nobility both constituted only two per cent of the population but they owned about 35 per cent of the land. The peasants who formed 80 per cent of the population owned only 30 per cent of the land. The first two estates paid almost no taxes to the government. The peasantry, on the other hand, was burdened with taxes of various kinds. It paid taxes to the Church, the feudal lord, taxed in the form of income tax, poll tax, and land tax to the state. Thus, you can see how much burdened and poverty stricken the peasants had become at this time. They were virtually carrying the burden of the first two estates on their shoulders. On top of it all the prices had generally risen by about 65 per cent during the period, 1720-1789.

### **1.4.2 The Political Aspects of the French society**

Like in all absolute monarchies, the theory of the Divine Right of King was followed in France too. For about 200 years the Kings of the Bourbon dynasty ruled France. Under the rule of the King, the ordinary people had no personal rights. They only served the King and his nobles in various capacities. The King's word was law and no trials were required to arrest a person on the King's orders. Laws too were different in different regions giving rise to confusion and arbitrariness. There was no distinction between the income of the state and the income of the King.

### 1.4.3 The Economic Aspects of the French society

The kings of France, from Louis XIV onwards, fought costly wars, which ruined the country, and when Louis XIV died in 1715, France had become bankrupt. Louis XV instead of recovering from this ruin kept on borrowing money from bankers. His famous sentence, “After me the deluge” describes the kind of financial crisis that France was facing. Louis XVI, a very weak and ineffective king, inherited the ruin of a bankrupt government. His wife, Queen Marie Antoinette, known for her expensive habits, is famous for her reply, which she gave to the poor, hungry people of France who came to her asking for bread. She told the people that, ‘if you don’t have bread, eat cake’.

Now let us examine the intellectual developments in France, which proved to be the igniting force in bringing about the revolution.

### 1.4.4 Intellectual Developments in France

France, like some other European countries during the eighteenth century, had entered the age of reason and rationalism. Some of the major philosophers, whose ideas influenced the French people, were rationalists who believed that all true things could be proved by reason. Some of these thinkers were, Montesquieu (1689-1755), Locke (1632-1704), Voltaire (1694-1778), and Rousseau (1712-1778).

Montesquieu in his book, *The Spirit of the Law*, held that there should not be concentration of authority, such as executive, legislative, and juridical, at one place. He believed in the theory of the separation of powers and the liberty of the individual.

Locke, an Englishman, advocated that every individual has certain rights, which cannot be taken by any authority. These rights were (i) right to live, (ii) right to property, and (iii) the right to personal freedom. He also believed that any ruler who took away these rights from his people should be removed from the seat of power and replaced by another ruler who is able to protect these rights.

Voltaire, a French philosopher, advocated religious toleration and freedom of speech. He also stood for the rights of individuals, for freedom of speech and expression.

Rousseau wrote in his book, *The Social Contract*, that the people of a country have the right to choose their sovereign. He believed that people can develop their personalities best only under a government which is of their own choice.

The major ideas of these and several other intellectuals struck the imagination of the French people. Also some of them who had served in the French army, which was sent to assist the Americans in their War of Independence from British imperialism, came back with the ideas of equality of individuals and their right to choose their own government. The French middle class was deeply affected by these ideas of liberty and equality.

So far you have learnt about the basic picture of the French society just before the Revolution. Now we will describe some of the major of the major events that took place during the Revolution.

### 1.4.5 Important Events

- i) In France there was a parliamentary body called the Estates-General in which all the three estates were represented but which had met last in 1614. It was in 1778 that the King, Louis XVI, was forced to impose a tax on everyone irrespective of his or her social status. The French government had become bankrupt due to the extravagance of the King, as well as, the help that they had given to the Americans in their War of Independence.

This imposition of tax led the rich nobles and the clergy to demand a meeting of the Estate-General, which they felt, was the only body, which could levy tax. The Estate-General met on May 5, 1778, but in this meeting, unlike the earlier practice, the representatives of the third estate wanted all the estates to meet and vote as one assembly. But the first two estates did not agree to this.

The refusal of the first two Estates to meet with the third Estate as a single body led to the formation of the National Assembly. The meeting of the National Assembly led by middle class leaders and some liberal minded nobles was met with stiff resistance. On 20th June 1789 when a meeting was to be held in the Hall at Versailles near Paris, the members found that it was closed and guarded by the King's men. Therefore, the National Assembly members led by their leader Baillet-Latour went to the next building which was an indoor tennis court. It was here that they took an Oath to draw a new constitution for France. This Oath, which marks the beginning of the French Revolution, is popularly known as the Oath of the Tennis Court.

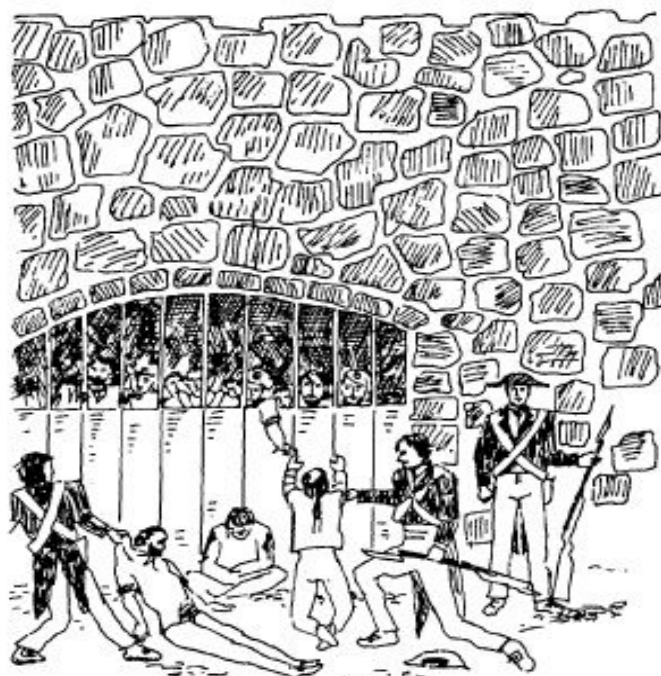


Figure 1.1: Storming of the Bastille

- ii) On July 14th, 1789 took place one of the most important events of the French Revolution. It was the storming of the Bastille, an ancient royal prison that stood as a symbol of oppression (see Figure 1.1: Storming of the Bastille). On this date the mobs of Paris, led by some



middle class leaders, broke open this prison and set its inmates free. The causes for this event were the shortage of food, on the one hand, and the dismissal of a very popular minister called Necker, on the other. The mobs of Paris rebelled against the ruling class, especially the King. This day is celebrated in France as its Independence Day.

- iii) Declaration of Rights of Man by the Constituent Assembly, (1789-1791), comprising the members of the third estate and some liberal minded members of the other two estates, guaranteed freedom of speech, freedom of religion, and freedom from arbitrary punishments. It abolished the special rights and privileges of the clergy and the nobility. The King was no longer to rule by Divine Right and several important social and economic changes were brought about. According to this declaration 'all men were born and remains equal before law. They have a right to choose their government and to resist oppression. Personal liberty becomes a right given to all individuals. Thus, the ideas of liberty and equality put an end to the age of serfdom, despotism and hereditary privileges found in the old feudal society.
- iv) In 1791 the king tried to escape from France but was recognised at the frontier and brought back. Since then he become a virtual prisoner.
- v) In Paris, the new Legislative Assembly (1791-1792) was formed. It comprised two very radical groups, namely the Girondin and the Jacobin. These groups considered the king a traitor and were in favour of establishing a Republic.
- vi) The King, Louis XVI, was beheaded in public on 21st January 1793 after being proved guilty of treason. The Queen was also beheaded later in the same year. France was declared a Republic.
- vii) A period referred to as "Reign of Terror" took place in France when several of the nobles, priests, some of the revolutionaries themselves were guillotined i.e. beheaded. This period lasted for three years.
- viii) Establishment of the Directorate took place in 1795. It lasted for four years till a young artillery officer from Corsica, a neighbouring island, overthrew the Directorate in 1799. He was Napoleon Bonaparte. He made himself the new Director and provided a much sought after stable government to the people of France. Thus the French Revolution ended with the overthrow of the Directorate by Napoleon.

You would have by now developed a rough idea of what the French Revolution was and how significant its role has been in the history of human civilisation. It changed the political structure of European society and replaced the age of feudalism by heralding the arrival of democracy. There were many significant themes, which arose due to the impact of this Revolution, which have been the focus of interest of the early sociologists. These significant themes included the transformation of property, the social disorder, caused by the change in the political structure and its impact on the economic structure. A new class of power holders emerged - the bourgeoisie. In order to understand more about these themes, we need to learn the details of the Industrial Revolution.



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## 1.5 THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

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The Industrial Revolution began around 1760 A.D. in England. It brought about great changes in the social and economic life of the people first in England, then in the other countries of Europe and later in other continents. In Europe, especially England, the discovery of new territories, explorations, growth of trade and commerce and the consequent growth of towns brought about an increase in demand for goods. Earlier goods (i.e. consumer items like cloth, etc.) were produced at domestic levels. This means that there existed a domestic system of production. With increased demand, goods were to be produced on a large-scale.

### 1.5.1 New Invention

During Industrial Revolution, new tools and techniques were invented, which could produce goods on a large-scale. During 1760-1830 A.D., a series of inventions in tools and techniques and organization of production took place and it gave rise to the factory system of production. Thus, a change in economy from feudal to **capitalist** system of production developed. Subsequently, there emerged a class of capitalists, which controlled the new system of production. Due to this revolution society moved from the old age of hand-made goods to the new age of machine-made goods. This shift heralded the emergence of Industrial Revolution.

One of the significant mechanical inventions, which led to a quicker and better method of production in various industries, was the Spinning Jenny, invented in 1767 by James Hargreaves, an English weaver. It was a simple machine rectangular in shape. It had a series of spindles, which could be turned by a single wheel. In 1769, Arkwright, an English barber, invented another tool, which was named after the name of its inventor and called Arkwright's Water Frame. This Water Frame was so large that it could not be kept in one's home and a special building was required to set it up. Thus on account of this it is said that he was responsible for introducing the factory system. Another invention called "the Mule" was by Samuel Crompton in 1779 in England. There were several other inventions, which all contributed to the industrial growth of European society.

### 1.5.2 Impact of the Industrial Revolution on Society

With the change in the economy of society several social changes followed. As capitalism became more and more complex, the developments of banks, insurance companies, and finance corporations took place. New class of industrial workers, managers, capitalists emerged.

The peasants in the new industrial society found themselves with thousands of other people like themselves, winding cotton in a textile mill. Instead of the famous countryside they found themselves in unhygienic living conditions. With the increase in production, population started increasing. Rise of population led to the increased rate of urbanisation. The industrial cities grew rapidly. In the industrial cities socio-economic disparities were very wide. The factory workers were involved in repetitive and boring work, the result of which they could not enjoy. In Marxist terms the worker became alienated from the product of his/ her labour. City life in the industrial society became an altogether a different way of life.

These changes moved both conservative and radical thinkers. The conservatives feared that such conditions would lead to chaos and disorder. The radicals like Engels felt that the factory workers would initiate social transformation.

Though the judgement of values differed, social thinkers of the time were agreed upon the epoch-making impact of the Industrial Revolution. They also agreed upon the importance of the new working class. The history of the period from 1811 to 1850 further indicates that this class increasingly agitated for their rights.

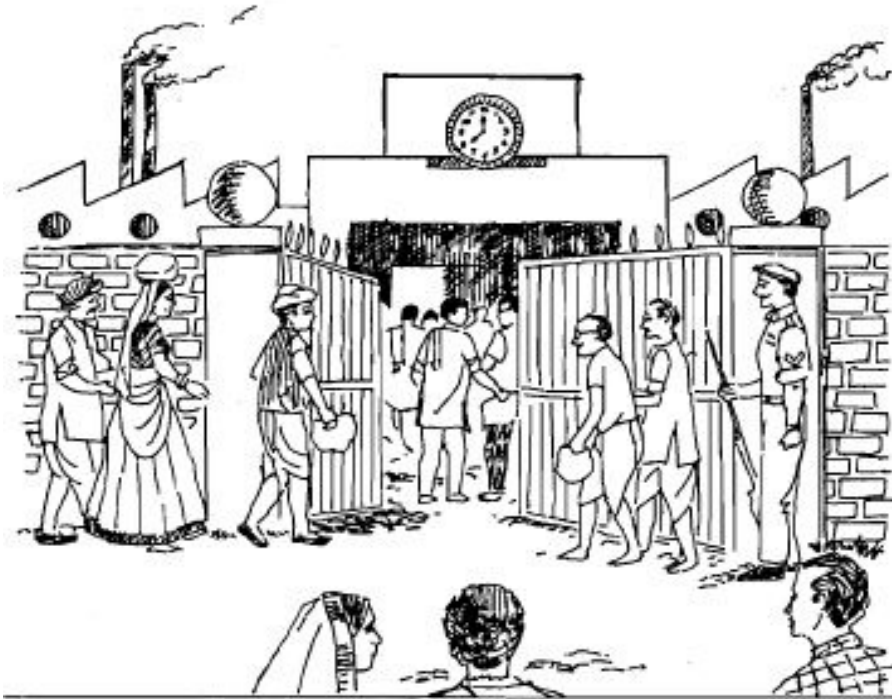
### 1.5.3 Significant Themes of the Industrial Revolution

The significant themes of the Industrial Revolution, which concerned the early sociologists, were as given below.

- i) **The condition of labour:** A new population earning their livelihood by working in the factories arose. In the early years this working class lived in poverty and squalor. They were socially deprived. At the same time they were indispensable in the new industrial system. This made them a powerful social force. Sociologists recognised that the poverty of this class of workers is not natural poverty but social poverty. Thus the working class became during the nineteenth century the subject of both moral and analytical concern.
- ii) **The transformation of property:** The traditional emphasis on land lost its value while money or capital became important during the Industrial Revolution. The investment in new industrial system came to be recognised. The feudal landlords became less significant while the new capitalists gained power. Many of these new capitalists were the erstwhile landlords.

Property was one of the central issues that were raised in the French Revolution too. Its influence on the social order is considerable. Property is related to economic privileges, social status and political power. A change in the property system involves a change in the fundamental character of society. Sociologists have grappled with the question of property and its impact on social stratification since the days of Marx, Tocqueville, Taine and Weber.

- iii) **The industrial city, i.e. urbanism:** Urbanisation was a necessary corollary of the Industrial Revolution. Industries grew and along with it grew great cluster of populations, the modern towns and cities. Cities were present in ancient period too, such as Rome, Athens, etc. but the new cities, such as Manchester in England, famous for its textile, were different in nature. Ancient cities were known as repositories of civilised graces and virtues while the new cities were known as repositories of misery and inhumanity. It was these aspects of the new cities, which concerned the early sociologists.
- iv) **Technology and the factory system:** Technology and the factory system has been the subject of countless writings in the nineteenth century. Both the conservative and radical thinkers realised that the two systems would alter human life for all times to come.



**Figure 1.2: Shift from Domestic to Factory Work**

The impact of technology and factory system led to large-scale migration of people to the cities. Women and children joined the work force in the factories. (See Figure 1.2: Shift from Domestic to Factory Work). Family relations changed. The siren of the factory seemed to rule peoples' life. The machine rather than man seemed to dominate work. As mentioned earlier the relation between the labourers and the products of their labour changed. They worked for their wages. The product was the child of everybody and of the machine in particular. The owner of the factory owned it. Life and work became depersonalised.

### Activity 2

Read the section on the significant themes of the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution carefully. Discuss with two elders the four significant themes given in the unit, in the context of our own society. Write a note of one page on any one of these four themes in the context of Indian society, for example, "Indian Society and the Condition of Labour".

Marx saw a form of enslavement in the machine and a manifestation of alienation of labour. Social scientists, felt that men and women had grown mechanical in heart, as well as in hand due to the industrial system of production. Thus themes, which you will notice in the units of this Block and other Blocks of ESO-13, kept recurring in the works of pioneers among sociologists, such as Durkheim, Marx and Weber.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) List three changes, which took place in Europe due to the Industrial Revolution.
- a) .....

- b) .....
- c) .....
- ii) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.
  - a) Industrial Revolution led to the transformation of the economy from ..... to capitalist.
  - b) The French Revolution put an end to a political structure based on ..... privileges and feudalism.
  - c) July 14th, 1789 is celebrated by the French people as their ..... day.

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## 1.6 THE INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES AFFECTING THE EMERGENCE OF SOCIOLOGY

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Sociology emerged as a response to the forces of change, which took place during eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe. The ideas, which are discussed again and again in early sociological writings, are thus essentially ideas of that period.

The thinkers of the Enlightenment of eighteenth century affected much of the early sociology. The Enlightenment appears as the most appropriate point of departure in the study of the origins of sociological theory, for various reasons including those mentioned below.

Firstly, a scientific approach to the study of society dates back to the tradition of Enlightenment. The eighteenth century thinkers began more consistently than any of their predecessors to study the human conditions in a scientific way using the methods of the natural sciences. They consciously applied scientific principles of analysis to the study of human beings and their nature and society.

Secondly, the eighteenth century thinkers upheld reason as a measure to judge social institutions and their suitability for human nature. Human beings, according to them, are essentially rational and this rationality can lead them to freedom of thought and action.

Thirdly, the eighteenth century thinkers believed that human beings are capable of attaining perfection. By criticising and changing social institutions they can create for themselves even greater degrees of freedom, which, in turn would enable them increasingly to actualise the potentially creative powers.

Sociological thinkers are concerned with the above three assumptions. Apart from them, three other intellectual influences current in the post-Enlightenment period influenced the emergence of sociology in Europe. They can be identified as

- i) the philosophy of history

- ii) the biological theories of evolution; and
- iii) the surveys of social conditions.

These three intellectual influences are the precursors of sociology and are reflected the writings of the early sociologists.

### 1.6.1 The Philosophy of History

In the early part of the nineteenth century the philosophy of history became an important intellectual influence. The basic assumption of this philosophy was that society must have progressed through a series of steps from a simple to complex stage. We may briefly assess the contributions of the philosophy of history to sociology as having been, on the philosophical side, the notions of development and progress. On the scientific side, it has given the concepts of historical periods and social types. The social thinkers who developed the philosophy of history such as Abbe Saint Pierre, and Giambattista, were concerned with the whole of society and not merely the political, or the economic, or the cultural aspects (Bottomore 1962: 14-15). Later the contributions of Comte, Spencer, Marx and many others reflected the impact of the loss of this intellectual trend in their sociological writings.

### 1.6.2 The Biological Theories of Evolution

The influence of the philosophy of history was further reinforced by the biological theory of evolution. Sociology moved towards an evolutionary approach, seeking to identify and account for the principal stages in social evolution. It tended to be modeled on biology, as is evident from the widely diffused conception of society as an organism, and from the attempts to formulate general terms of social evolution. Herbert Spencer and Durkheim are good example of this kind of writing.

### 1.6.2 Surveys of Social Conditions

Social survey forms an important element in modern sociology. It emerged due to two reasons, one was the growing conviction that the methods of the natural sciences should and could be extended to the study of human affairs; that human phenomenon could be classified and measured. The other was the concern with poverty ('the social problem'), following the recognition that poverty was not natural but social. The social survey is one of the principal methods of sociological inquiry. The basic assumption, which underlines this method, is that through the knowledge of the social conditions one can arrive at solutions to solve the social problems prevalent in society.

Having considered at length, the social conditions in which sociology emerged, it is now time to complete Activity 3 and Check Your Progress 4 before summing up the contents of the unit.

#### Activity 3

You have just now read about the relationship between society and the ideas that are generated from time to time in a society. You also learnt about the social change that took place in European society from the

fourteenth to the eighteenth century A.D. and during the period when the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution took place.

Keeping these ideas and developments in mind give at least two examples from Indian society where ideas have influenced society or where events taking place in society have influenced the ideas.

#### Check Your Progress 4

- i) Which of the following would you categorise as factors responsible for the growth of sociology?
  - a) The Enlightenment
  - b) The progress of Natural Sciences
  - c) The growth of religious authority
  - d) The strengthening of monarchy
  - e) The factory system
  - f) The growth of urban slums
  - g) Increase in poverty and squalor
  - h) The Industrial Revolution
  - i) The rise of modern state system
  - j) The concept of individual rights
  - k) The decline in the concept of divine will
  - l) The belief that society is man-made
  - m) The belief that men and women can change society
- ii) Identify two intellectual approaches affecting the emergence of sociology. Use about eight lines.

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## 1.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you studied how social conditions affect the ideas which people have. You learnt how certain changes taking place in the eighteenth and nineteenth century in Europe bothered social thinkers. Sociology thus grew essentially as a product of the reflections of the great thinkers reflecting on society.

You learnt about the sociologically significant themes of the Commercial, the French and the Industrial Revolutions. Finally, you read about the intellectual influences such as the philosophy of history, biological theories of evolution and surveys of social conditions, which affected the emergence of sociology in Europe.

After learning about the setting in which sociology as a discipline emerged in Europe, you will now in the next two units read about the ideas of the founding fathers of sociology and contributions of these ideas to development of sociology.



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## 1.8 KEY WORDS

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<b>Capitalist</b>	In an industrial system of production, the class of owners of the means of production (such as, the capital i.e. the money, the property, the tools, etc.) is called the capitalists.
<b>Democracy</b>	A form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people collectively. It is a state of society characterised by recognition of equality of rights and privileges, social and legal equally.
<b>Enlightenment</b>	It refers to that period in European history, which embodies the spirit of the French philosophers of the eighteenth century. During this period a belief developed that both nature and society can be studied scientifically. Human reason and the ideas of progress developed.
<b>Estate</b>	The system of stratification followed in medieval European society of around 17th-18th century, in which society was divided into different social groups having a different set of laws and social status for each
<b>Feudal</b>	A system of tenure in agricultural areas whereby a vassal or serf served the landlord to whom the land belonged. In return the landlord allowed the serf to till his land and live on his land
<b>Liberal</b>	A person who is broad minded and not bound by authority or traditional orthodoxy i.e. old fashioned beliefs

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## 1.9 FURTHER READING

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Berger, P. 1963, *Invitation to Sociology A Humanistic Perspective*, Anchor Books Double Day & Company, Inc.: New York

Bottomore, T.B. 1962, *Sociology A Guide to Problems and Literature*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd.: London

Inkeles, A. 1975, *What is Sociology?* Prentice-Hall: New Delhi.

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## 1.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) The old European society was traditional feudal society in which land was the basic property. Religion provided the foundation to this society.
- ii)
  - a) liberal, radical
  - b) land
  - c) new, central

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The forces of change in the largely subsistent and stagnant economy of the Medieval Europe from about 1450-1800 century A.D. led to what it called the Commercial Revolution in Europe. The cause of this Revolution was expansion of trade and commerce initiated by certain European countries. These countries, such as Portugal, Spain, Holland etc. tried to consolidate their political and economic power through overseas trade and commerce and conquests of new territories.
- ii) During the scientific revolution, the following two developments, among many others, took place and helped in advancement of knowledge. Dissection of human body started which led to an increased knowledge of the anatomy. Modern medicine developed due to this knowledge. The ancient belief that the earth was fixed and the sun revolved around it was shattered by Copernicus, who proved that it is the sun, which is fixed, and the earth, which revolves around it. This is called the “heliocentric theory”.
- iii) a) Industrial  
b) nineteenth  
c) renaissance

### Check Your Progress 3

- 1) a) The production process of Europe was transformed with the new capitalistic factory system replacing the old feudal, largely agricultural system.  
b) A new working class employed as wage labour in the industries arose.  
c) The growth of urban slums changed both the physical as well as the social life of people.
- ii) a) feudal  
b) hereditary  
c) Independence

### Check Your Progress 4

- i) a), b), e), f), g), h), i), j), k), l), m)
- ii) Two intellectual approaches affecting the emergence of sociology are Philosophy of History: According to this approach, each society moves through a series of steps from a simple to complex stage and therefore progress is both natural and inevitable.

**The Biological Theories of Evolution:** The comparison of society to a biological organism made sociologists believe that (i) society moves inherently from a simple to complex structures, and (ii) society like an organism operates on the same principles of adjustments to an equilibrium.

### Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Early Origins
- 2.3 Auguste Comte (1798-1857)
  - 2.3.1 Biographical Sketch
  - 2.3.2 His Social Environment
  - 2.3.3 The Central Ideas
    - 2.3.2.1 The Law of the Three Stages
    - 2.3.2.2 Hierarchy of the Sciences
    - 2.3.2.3 Static and Dynamic Sociology
  - 2.3.4 Significance of Auguste Comte’s Ideas to Contemporary Sociology
- 2.4 Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)
  - 2.4.1 Biographical Sketch
  - 2.4.2 His Social Environment
  - 2.4.3 The Central Ideas
    - 2.4.3.1 The Evolutionary Doctrine
    - 2.4.3.2 Organic Analogy
    - 2.4.3.3 The Evolution of Societies
  - 2.4.4 Significance of Herbert Spencer’s Ideas to Contemporary Sociology
- 2.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.6 Key Words
- 2.7 Further Reading
- 2.8 Specimen Answers To Check Your Progress

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## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit deals with the central ideas of two of the founding fathers of sociology. After studying this unit, you should be able to

- outline the biographical details of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer
- describe the social environment to which they belonged
- discuss the central ideas of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer
- compare and contrast the approaches outlined by them
- show the relevance of contributions of these early thinkers to contemporary sociology.

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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You have already studied about the growth of sociology in Europe (Unit 1). Here we will introduce you to the pioneers of sociology. In this unit, we will confine our attention to the founders, Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. In the next unit, we shall deal with some other founding fathers of sociology like Georg Simmel, Thorstein Veblen and Vilfredo Pareto.

You will find it interesting to notice how the themes of sociology, discussed in Unit 1, are dealt by each of the sociologist whom you will study in this unit. Section 2.2 explains the early origins of sociology. Section 2.3 discusses the social environment to which Auguste Comte (1798-1857) belonged, his central ideas and the significance of his sociology to the contemporary period. Section 2.4 elaborates upon the social environment to which Herbert Spencer belonged, his central ideas and the significance of his ideas on contemporary sociology. Finally, section 2.5 provides you the summary of this unit.

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## 2.2 EARLY ORIGINS

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In the previous unit, Unit 1 of ESO-03, you learnt about the emergence of sociology in Europe. Here we are describing the early origins of sociology to explain the social background of the founding fathers of sociology. As students of sociology we must know the central ideas of the founding fathers since their work reflects the main social concern of sociology and provides the basic foundation for discipline of sociology.

As you know, human beings have always been curious about the sources of their own behaviour. You must have pondered some time or the other on the strange ways of society. Why, you may have asked, must we behave in this way? Why is our society so traditional? Why is the society of other people so different from our own? These questions strike us now, just as they struck our forefathers before us.

Men and women have attempted to answer these questions. But earlier their attempt to understand themselves and society relied on ways of thinking passed down from generation to generation and expressed in religious terms.

The systematic study of human behaviour and human society is a relatively recent development, whose beginnings can be found in the European society of the late eighteenth century. The background to the new approach was the series of sweeping changes associated with the Enlightenment, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. The shattering of traditional ways of life prompted those studying human behaviour to develop a new understanding of both the social and the natural worlds.

Just as natural scientists sought to explain the mysteries of life and nature, sociologists sought to explain the complexities of social life. A **science** of society was founded. To begin with the very beginning we shall start with Auguste Comte (1798-1857), commonly regarded as the founder of Sociology. It was he who coined the name 'sociology'. He was a French

man. Next, we will discuss the second founding father of sociology, Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), who was a Britisher.

Before we start discussing Comte's ideas, you should be warned about the constraints of this unit. The period in which sociology emerged was marked with the rise of writers of distinction. Our treatment of the founding fathers has therefore been highly selective, with the single aim in mind of achieving clarity in seeing the major elements and tendencies which constituted the 'beginnings' of sociology.

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## 2.3 AUGUSTE COMTE (1798-1857)

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Auguste Comte was born in 1798 during the ferment of the French Revolution, that vast complex of events which heralded the birth of the modern world. You have already read in Unit 1 about the shattering changes taking place in the European social order in the aftermath of the French Revolution. To understand Auguste Comte's ideas fully, one has to appreciate how passionately he was concerned with the problems which people and society of his time were faced with. In order to gain an insight into Auguste Comte as a person, let us discuss his biographical sketch.

### 2.3.1 Biographical Sketch

Auguste Comte (1798-1857), a French sociologist, was born at Montpellier France of Catholic royalist parents (see Figure 2.1: Auguste Comte, 1798-1857). In 1814 he was admitted to one of the most prestigious educational institutions of France at that time called the Ecole Polytechnique. Here most of the professors were scholars in mathematics and physics. They had little interest in the study of society. But young Auguste Comte, being sensitive to the kind of social disorder that France was undergoing due to the Revolution, was keenly interested in human affairs and the study of society. Comte was involved in a student protest at the Ecole Polytechnique because of which he was expelled.

At the Ecole Polytechnique, he came under the influence of such traditionalist social philosophers as L.G. Bonald and Joseph de Maistre. It was from them that he borrowed the notion of an order governing the evolution of human society. From Condorcet, another major philosopher of France, who was beheaded later, Comte got the idea that this evolution occurs along with progress in human societies. In 1824, he became a secretary to Saint-Simon, an aristocrat by birth but an utopian socialist in ideas. He became a close friend and disciple of Saint-Simon, who stimulated his interest in economics. It was at this period that Auguste Comte worked out the general conception of a science of society, which he named sociology.

Auguste Comte's ambition was the political reorganisation of human society. According to him, such reorganisation will have to depend upon the spiritual and moral unification of society. Thus, with Saint-Simon, he developed several major ideas. However, their partnership was shortlived and they ended up quarreling with each other. Later Auguste Comte published some of his lecture notes in, *Cours de Philosophie Positive* (6

Vols., Paris 1830-42, 5<sup>th</sup> ed.). In this work he wrote about the law of three stages and developed his conception of a science of society. While working on this book, he discovered the principle of cerebral hygiene. This meant that in order to keep his mind uncontaminated he stopped reading other people's works.

Between 1851-1854, he wrote a treatise entitled, *System of Positive Politics*, (4 Vols.). In this book he applied the findings of theoretical sociology towards solving the social problems of his society. It was during this period that he met Clotilde de Vaux who became a close friend. Her death in 1846, a year after they met, affected Auguste Comte to such a great degree that his ideas turned towards mysticism and religion. His ideas, which he put down in *Systems of Positive Politics*, shifted partly from positivism to construct a religion of humanity. Due to this change in ideas he lost many of his disciples and intellectual friends such as, J.S. Mill of England. He took his role as the prophet of social regeneration so seriously that he even sent a plan to the Russian King suggesting ideas to reorganise society. However, till his end Auguste Comte's works were not recognised in France. Only after his death, in 1857 (a very important year in Indian history) he became popular first in England and then in France and Germany. The direct imprint of his thinking can be seen in the French scientific movement of the last half of the nineteenth century, represented by such thinkers as, Taine, Renan, Berthelot and such outstanding English figures as J.S. Mill.

### 2.3.2 His Social Environment

During the early nineteenth century the intellectual climate in France was favourable to the development of new, critical and rational ideas. Achievements in natural sciences and mathematics were a matter of pride and a new confidence had developed in the use and application of methods. You already know about the emphasis that the Enlightenment philosophers placed on the ideas of progress and human reason.

Auguste Comte, being a product of his time, was also affected by the social destruction brought by the French Revolution. He lived in the aftermath of the French Revolution. He was continually distressed and disturbed by the disorder of his time, and by the material and cultural poverty of the people. His fundamental and lifelong preoccupation was how to replace disorder by order; how to bring about a total reconstruction of society.

He saw the French Revolution as a crucial turning-point in the history of human affairs. The ancient regime was gone. Society was unable to cope with the new developments in scientific knowledge and industrialisation. A new order of social institutions in keeping with the changes taking place had not yet taken a firm hold. Amidst this confused state people too were in a state of flux. Their thoughts were disoriented. There were great differences between belief and knowledge. In other words the traditional value system was disturbed during this period. And the cultural values and goals of people lacked coherence, confidence and worthwhile objectives. Erstwhile loyalties had broken. New ones were yet to take root. The people were, therefore, in a state of confusion. A new policy or a new order of feeling, thought and action was necessary for the new, complex, industrial society. But this reconstruction needed a reliable basis of knowledge.



The question posed by Auguste Comte was – what would this body of knowledge be built upon? And the answer given by Comte was that people themselves have to take initiatives and found a science which would provide them with an alternative world view. It was no longer possible to fall back upon Gods, upon religion, upon metaphysical forces, traditional modes of belief and action. People were now responsible for their own destiny. They must make their own society.

You will ask, how? And it is towards answering this that Comte formulated his central ideas about sociology. But before we move on to the study of the central ideas formulated by Comte, let us tell you about the influence of Saint-Simon on Auguste Comte. It is important to know about Saint-Simon (1760-1825) because many of the ideas developed by Comte had their roots in Saint-Simon's works (see Box 2.1). In fact, Auguste Comte worked as a secretary to Saint-Simon and together they formulated the idea of a science of society.

### **Box 2.1: Saint Simon, a Utopian Socialist**

Saint-Simon was a French aristocrat, but in his ideas he was one of the first utopian socialists (i.e. one who believes in an ideal society where everyone gets an equal share of opportunities and resources). He believed that the problems of his society could be best solved by reorganising economic production. This will deprive the class of property owners from their means of production and thus they will lose their economic freedom which was an important value of his time (Timasheff 1967:19). If you recall the main ideas about the French Revolution, you will remember that the feudal French society was divided into three estates, the first being the clergy, second the nobility and the third, the commoners. The first two estates between themselves owned the major portion of the landed property as well as wealth and status. It is this social and economic structure that Saint-Simon wanted to reorganise.

In a joint publication *Plan of the Scientific Operations Necessary for the Reorganising of Society*, (1822) Saint-Simon and Comte wrote about the law of three stages through which each branch of knowledge must pass. They said that the object of social physics, the positive science of society later renamed as 'sociology', is to discover the natural and immutable laws of progress. These laws are as important to the science of society as the laws of gravity, discovered by Newton, are to the natural sciences. The intellectual alliance between Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte did not last long and in fact ended in a bitter quarrel.

According to Auguste Comte, sociology is the abstract theoretical science of social phenomena. He had initially called it social physics but later he reluctantly changed this name. He changed it because he found that a Belgian scientist, Adolphe Quetelet, had used this term to describe simple statistics. Thus, Auguste Comte was compelled to use the word sociology, a combination of a Latin and a Greek word which denotes "the study of society on a highly generalised or abstract level" (Timasheff 1967: 4).

Now in the next few pages we will discuss the central ideas of Auguste Comte, such as the law of three stages, the hierarchy of sciences and his division of **static** and **dynamic** sociology.

### 2.3.3 The Central Ideas

You have noticed that Auguste Comte wanted to reorganise society on new lines. He felt that the momentous changes taking place in European society, especially French, will have to be accompanied by new principles. These new principles will have to integrate and balance the different aspects of human life. Thus, for him, the discovery of social laws, which explain these principles of change in society, were very important.

Auguste Comte was not only talking about sociology as a science of society but also believed that it must be used for reorganizing society. He wanted to develop a naturalistic science of society. This science would be able to both, explain the past development of mankind as well as, predict its future course. According to him the society of human beings must be studied in the same scientific manner as the world of nature. The progress in natural sciences in establishing the laws of nature, such as Newton's laws of gravity, Copernicus's discovery that it is the sun which is fixed and the Earth and other planets which revolve around it, and so on; led him to believe that even in society we can discover social laws.

Auguste Comte maintained that the new science of society must rely on reasoning and observation instead of depending on the authority of tradition. Only then can it be considered scientific. But every scientific theory must also be based on observed facts and vice versa.

Thus, Comte's science of society, that is sociology, was to be patterned after the natural sciences. It was to apply the methods of inquiry used by the natural sciences, such as observation, experimentation, and comparison. However, along with the natural science methods given above, he also introduced the historical **method**. This historical method (different from the one used by historians) was a healthy advance in sociology. Historical method compares societies throughout the time in which they have evolved. This method is at the core of sociological inquiry since historical evolution is the very crux of sociology.

Through these methods Comte wanted to discover social laws because only when we know the laws in society can we restructure it. Thus, in his view social action beneficial to human beings became possible once the laws of motion of human evolution are established. It is these laws which, according to Auguste Comte, define the basis for social order.

According to Comte, nothing is absolute. Every knowledge is true in a relative sense and does not enjoy everlasting validity. Thus, science has a self-corrective character and whatever does not hold true is rejected. In this sense this new science, which was also called positive science, replaced the authority of tradition that could not be refuted (Coser 1971: 5).

#### 2.3.3.1 The Law of the Three Stages

In, as early as 1822 when Auguste Comte was still working as Saint-Simon's secretary, he attempted to discover the successive stages through which human race had evolved. In his study he began from the state of human race, not much superior to the great apes, to the state at which he found the civilised society of Europe. In this study he applied scientific methods



Figure 2.1: Auguste Comte (1798-1857)

Auguste Comte believed that the evolution of the human mind had taken place along with the evolution of the individual mind. In other words, he holds that just as each individual develops from the stage of a devout believer in childhood, to a critical metaphysician (one who questions the abstract notions of existence) in adolescence, to a natural philosopher in adulthood, so also the human beings and their system of thought have evolved in three major stages. These three stages of the evolution of human thought are

- i) the **theological** stage;
  - ii) the metaphysical stage; and
  - iii) the **positive** stage.
- i) In the theological stage, the mind explains phenomena by ascribing them to beings or forces comparable to human beings. In this stage, human being attempts to discover the first and the final causes (the origin and purpose) of all effects. Thus, human mind at this level supposes that all phenomena are produced by the immediate action of supernatural beings. For example, some tribes believed that diseases like small pox, cholera were the expressions of God's anger.
  - ii) In the metaphysical stage, the mind explains phenomenon by invoking abstract entities like 'nature'. These abstract entities are personified abstractions. Human beings pursue meaning and explanation of the world in term of 'essences', 'ideals', 'forms', i.e. in short, in a conception of some ultimate reality, such as God.

- iii) In the positive stage human beings cease to look for 'original sources' or final causes because these can be neither checked against facts nor utilised to serve our needs. Human mind at this stage applies itself to the study of their laws, i.e. their invariable relations of succession and resemblance (Cosser 1971: 7). Human beings seek to establish laws which link facts and which govern social life.

Auguste Comte maintained that each stage of the development of human thoughts necessarily grew out of the preceding one. Only when the previous stage exhausts itself does the new stage develop. He also correlated the three stages of human thought with the development of social organisation, types of social order, the types of social units and material conditions found in society. He believed that social life evolved in the same way as the successive changes in human thought took place.

According to Auguste Comte all societies undergo changes. There is a stage in which a society enjoys social stability. Intellectual harmony prevails in such a society and various parts of the society are in equilibrium. This is the organic period of the society. But when the critical period comes the old traditions, institutions, etc. become disturbed. Intellectual harmony is lost and there is a disequilibrium in society. The French society, in Auguste Comte's view, was undergoing this critical period. He said that there is always a transitional state of anarchy which lasts for some generations at least and the longer it lasts the more complete is the renovation of that society (Cosser 1971: 8).

In terms of the history of human race, the theological stage of human thought, in relation to political dominance, was dominated by the priests and ruled by military men. The metaphysical stage which corresponded roughly to the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, was dominated by the Church men and lawyers. The positive stage, which was just dawning, will be dominated by industrial administrators and scientific moral guides.

The theological stage, in terms of social unit, had family as its important unit, the metaphysical stage had state as its important unit, and the positive stage will have the whole human race as the operative social unit.

Auguste Comte believed that intellectual evolution, i.e. the evolution of human thought, was the most important basis of his explanation of human progress. However, he did not rule out other causal factors. For example, he considered growth in human population a major factor that determined the rate of social progress. The more population there was, the more division of labour occurred. The more division of labour there was found in a society, the more evolved it became. Thus, he saw division of labour as a powerful force in the process of social evolution. Following on his footsteps, Emile Durkheim developed his theory of social division of labour which you will learn in Block 3 of this course.

The law of the three stages was also linked with the hierarchy of the sciences. The same way as thought systems evolved, as did the different sciences came to be established. All the sciences, except sociology had reached the positive stage but with the development of sociology the process was complete. Let us examine the hierarchy of the sciences in the next

sub-section (2.3.2.1) and before proceeding to it, it is better to complete Activity 1.

### Activity 1

You have just read the central ideas of Auguste Comte. In relation to his ideas of society, in an organic period there is social stability and equilibrium and in a critical period there is social unrest, disequilibrium, etc. Discuss with two elders the social situation in our own country.

On the basis of your discussion, write a short note on Indian Society and its State of Disequilibrium.

Compare your note, if possible, with those of other students at your Study Centre.

### 2.3.3.2 Hierarchy of the Sciences

Auguste Comte felt that an examination of the several established sciences showed not only that human thoughts in general have passed through the three stages mentioned earlier, but also each subject has developed in the same way. That is, each subject has evolved from a general, simple level to a highly complex level. He put forth a hierarchical arrangement of the sciences in a way which coincided with

- i) the order of their historical emergence and development
- ii) the order of dependence upon each other (each rests on the one which precedes it, and prepares the way for the one that follows it)
- iii) their decreasing degree of generality and the increasing degree of complexity of their subject matter, and
- iv) the increasing degree of modifiability of the facts which they study.

Thus, the final arrangement of the sciences in terms of their emergence and complexity on this basis were Mathematics, Chemistry, Astronomy, Physics, Biology, Sociology, and finally Morals – by which Comte really meant a study of human beings as individuals (a study which followed sociology and was a mixture of psychology and ethics).

Sociology was the most complex science because it had to study the most complex matter, i.e. society. Sociology therefore also arose much later than the other sciences. The object of study of the other subjects was relatively simpler than sociology. Sociology thus emerged because human beings recognised a new set of objective facts concerning their society; such as social disorganisation, development of slums, poverty, etc. which they could not explain, but which they needed to explain in order to deal effectively with them. When Auguste Comte spoke of Sociology as the ‘crowning edifice’ of the hierarchy of sciences, he had the general **unifying** nature of science in mind. He was not claiming any superior status for sociology. He only felt that with the growth of positive knowledge all sciences can be brought into relationship with each other.

According to Auguste Comte, all sciences pass through the three stages, the theological, the metaphysical and finally, the positive stage. But the



individual sciences do not move through these three stages simultaneously. In fact, the higher a science stands in the hierarchy, the later it shifts from one stage to another. With the growth of positive knowledge he also advocated the use of positive methods for sociology (Timasheff 1967: 23).

### **2.3.3.3 Static and Dynamic Sociology**

Auguste Comte divided sociology into two major parts, namely, static and dynamic sociology. The idea of this division is borrowed from biology, which is in keeping with his notions of a hierarchy of sciences. Biology is a science which precedes sociology and thus shares common features with this science.

The static sociology studies the conditions of the existence of society, while the dynamic sociology studies the continuous movement or laws of the succession of individual stages in society. In other words, the first part studies the social order and the second social changes or progress in societies.

In his discussion on Auguste Comte, Timasheff writes that statics is a theory of order or harmony between the conditions of man's existence in society. Dynamics, according to Comte, is a theory of social progress, which amounts to the fundamental development or evolution of society. Order and progress, are closely interlinked because there cannot be any social order if it is not compatible with progress while no real progress can occur in society if it is not consolidated in order. Thus although we distinguish between static and dynamic sociology for analytical purposes, the static and dynamic laws must be linked together throughout the system. Auguste Comte's distinction between statics and dynamics each associated with the idea of order and progress is no longer acceptable today since societies are far more complex than to be explained by the simple notions of order and progress. Auguste Comte's perception was guided by the spirit of the Enlightenment period in which these ideas developed. Contemporary sociologists do not agree with these ideas. But his basic division of sociology continues to exist in the terms, social structure and social change (Timsheff, 1967: 25).

### **2.3.4 Significance of Auguste Comte's Ideas to Contemporary Sociology**

You must have realised by now that the origin and development of sociology as a science of society owes deeply to the contributions of Auguste Comte. His ideas have influenced several major sociologists like, Sorokin, J.S. Mill, Lester Ward, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and several others.

Auguste Comte's law of three stages has been more or less rejected by the contemporary sociologists. But the essential notion of stages of development in ideas and culture in a modified form has been accepted. This can be perceived in the major works of such sociologists as Sorokin.

Auguste Comte's ideas anticipate majority of trends, which are observable in contemporary sociology. His propositions concerning the scope and methods of sociology have been rediscovered in later sociology. In the next section you will learn about another founding father of sociology,



Herbert Spencer, whose ideas proved to be equally significant to the history of sociology.

Before moving on to Herbert Spencer, let us complete Check Your Progress 1.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Which of the following would you categorise as a part of Auguste Comte’s theory?
  - a) A typology of three stages of development
  - b) Emphasis on building a science of society on the model of a natural science
  - c) One of the three stages of development in society is the democratic stage.
  - d) The final stage of development is the positivist stage.
  - e) Sociology is one of the earliest sciences to emerge.
  - f) In the metaphysical stage, the mind explains phenomena by referring to abstract concepts like ‘nature’.
  - g) The task of positive science is the discovery of laws.
  - h) Positivism was thought to be one of the bases of change.

ii) List our three central concepts in Auguste Comte’s sociology.

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iii) Discuss Auguste Comte’s ideas about division of labour in society. Use about four lines.

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**2.4 HERBERT SPENCER (1820-1903)**

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Herbert Spencer, an Englishman and a contemporary of Auguste Comte, contributed several key ideas to the field of sociology. Like Comte, he too was trying to establish sociology as the science of society. Spencer had come into contact with Comte’s ideas but he did not accept them. Instead, he brought about a shift in the study of society. His sociology is based on the evolutionary doctrine and the organic analogy. You will learn more about these ideas in section 2.4.3. Let us first discuss the biographical sketch of Spencer and the social environment to which he belonged.

### 2.4.1 Biographical Sketch

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) was born in a middle-class family in Derby, England, on 27<sup>th</sup> April. His father, George Spencer, was a school master. He and his whole family were staunch nonconformists and were individualists in outlook. Spencer was the eldest of nine children and the only one to survive into adulthood. This was perhaps one of the reasons why he advocated the idea of the “survival of the fittest” in his theory of evolution (see Figure 2.2: Herbert Spencer, 1820-1903: Survival of the Fittest).



Figure 2.2: Herbert Spencer, 1820-1903: Survival of the Fittest

Spencer never went to a conventional school but was taught at home by his father and uncle. He went to some small private schools but only for short periods, according to his autobiography, his training in mathematics was the best. In spite of not receiving a systematic training in other subjects like natural sciences, literature, history, he wrote outstanding treatises on biology and psychology.

At a young age Spencer started working as an Engineer in the railroad engineering field. After this work he changed his job and became a journalist. He started working as an Editor of the *Economist*, a well known English publication. After a few years he resigned his position and became an independent writer. He became a close friend of the poet, George Eliot. Their relationship did not materialise into marriage and Spencer never married anyone. He never suffered from poverty but he also did not become rich.

In 1850 he published his first book, *Social Statics*, which was well received in the intellectual world. In this book he presented the core ideas of his sociological theory. The terms social statics made some thinkers accuse Spencer of plagiarising Comte's ideas. But Spencer pointed out that the terms were his own as he had merely heard the name of Comte and not his ideas. Also, he stated that originally the title of his book was 'Demostatics'.

Besides others, Spencer was influenced by Charles Darwin's book, *The Origin of Species*, (1859). He desired a lot of his ideas regarding evolution

from Darwin. However, Spencer stated that he was the first one to discover the basic ideas of ‘natural selection’ and ‘survival of the fittest’.

Spencer also advocated the principle of laissez faire or free market, which was popularised by the English economists of his time. He reached the peak of his popularity in 1882, when he visited the United States of America. However, at the end of his life he died a sad man because he believed that his life work had not achieved its goal as much as he expected.

## 2.4.2 His Social Environment

The turmoils around Spencer and around Comte were the same. The issues confronting them were the same too. Important differences apart, a broad similarity of concern and focus marked the two thinkers.

Both believed in progress and also had deep faith in the unity and irreversibility of historical development. This faith can be perceived in other major thinkers of this period too, such as Karl Marx. The period to which these thinkers belonged was the Century of Great Hope. Belief, therefore, in the law of progressive development of society is central to their argument. Now let us discuss some of the central ideas of Herbert Spencer.

## 2.4.3 The Central Ideas

The sociological works of Herbert Spencer, such as, *Social Statics* (1850), *The Study of Sociology* (1873), *Principles of Sociology* (1876-96), are dominated by the idea of evolution. Spencer believed that throughout all times there actually has been social evolution from a simple, uniform or homogeneous structure to a complex, multiform or **heterogeneous** one. Spencer has been influenced deeply by Charles Darwin’s book, *The Origin of Species* (1859). It had brought a revolutionary change in the understanding of how life evolved on earth from a simple unicellular organism to multicellular complex organisms like, human beings themselves.

Although Spencer wrote several books on sociology, he did not give a formal definition of the discipline. According to him, the social process is unique and so sociology as a science must explain the present state of society by explaining the initial stages of evolution and applying to them the laws of evolution. Thus, the evolutionary doctrine is central to his thesis. After explaining this doctrine, we will explain the meaning and significance of organic analogy. You will also learn about Spencer’s classification of societies according to their place in social evolution.

### 2.4.3.1 The Evolutionary Doctrine

Spencer’s entire scheme of knowledge rested upon the belief that ‘evolution’ was the key concept for the understanding of the world as a whole and of human beings place within it. The concept of evolution in turn rested on the assumption that the various forms of nature – be it mountains or oceans, trees or grass, fish or reptiles, bird or humans are forms and transformations of the same basic material substance.

All knowledge will thus consist of a systematic and testable body of propositions about these several patterns of transformation, which constitute the world, as we experience it. And this basic process of transformation,

present in every element of nature, is the evolutionary principle. By the terms systematic and testable body of propositions we mean simply the set of ideas, which can always be proved right or wrong in terms of changes that occur in the world. In other words, we are talking about the process of evolution that takes place on earth.

If you are finding this a little complicated, think about our own bodies, our own selves. Our bodies consist mainly of water, blood, bones, flesh – and each one of these has been drawn from the nature around us. When we die, we go back into the natural substances around us.

All processes of change are thus similar, in that they emerge out of the physical stuff of the world, have their own patterns of transformation and change, and according to these patterns, in due course decline and dissolve. In this, they move from

- i) a condition of simplicity to a condition of organised complexity.
- ii) a condition of indefiniteness to a condition of definiteness.
- iii) a condition in which their parts are relatively undifferentiated to a condition of increasing specialisation, in which their parts are characterised by a complex differentiation of structure and function.
- iv) from an unstable condition consisting of a large multiplicity of very similar units, relatively incoherent and disconnected in their behaviour, to a stable condition consisting of relatively fewer parts. Human beings now are so intricately organised and articulated that their behavior is regular, coherent and predictable.

### 2.4.3.2 Organic Analogy

Herbert Spencer proceeded to apply in his investigation of all fields of knowledge his idea of social evolution. In comparing human society with an organism, which is essentially what organic analogy means, Herbert Spencer, however, noted the differences between the biological organism and society.

He maintained that ‘a society’, as an entity, is something more than, and other than, an ‘organism’, even though human ‘organisms’ (individuals) are members of it. It is a total system of elements of social organisation and their interdependent functions. It is a super-organic entity; an organisational entity over and above the level of the organism.

Following this, Spencer accepted the ideas that a society was more than a collective name for a number of individuals. That is, it is not just a collection of several individuals but is a distinct entity. The whole is more than its parts. Thus, a house is more than a mere collection of bricks, wood and stone. It involves a certain ordering of parts. However, being an individualist Spencer believed that unlike biological organisms, where the parts exist for the benefit of the whole, in society it is the whole which exists for the benefit of the parts i.e., the individuals in society (Timasheff 1967: 38).

Spencer sought to build two classificatory systems of society related to his thesis of social evolution. The first thesis states that in the process of social evolution societies move from simple to various levels of compound on the basis of their degree of composition (See Figure 2.3: The Process of Evolution of Societies as Explained by Herbert Spencer).

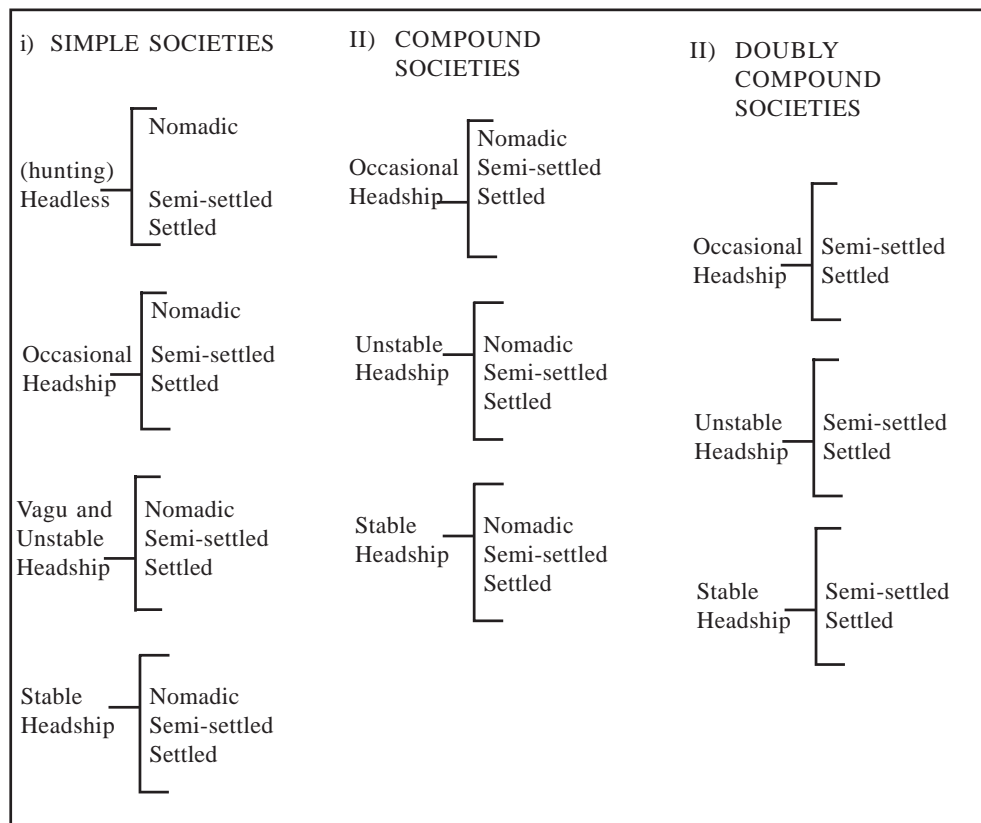


Figure 2.3: The Process of Evolution of Societies as Explained by Herbert Spencer

From the above diagrammatic representation, you would easily understand the process of evolution of societies’ as explained by Spencer. Let us explain it further. According to Spencer the aggregate of some simple societies gives rise to compound societies, the aggregate of some compound societies gives rise to doubly compound societies. The aggregate of some doubly compound societies gives rise to trebly compound societies (these have not been given in the above diagram). According to Spencer simple societies consist of families, a compound societies consist of families unified into clans, doubly compound societies consist of clans unified into tribes and the trebly compound societies, such as our own, have tribes brought together forming nations or states (Timesheff 1967: 40).

The second classificatory system is based on construction of types which may not exist in actual reality but which would help in analysing and comparing different societies. Here a different type of evolution is conceived of, from (i) military to, (ii) industrial societies.

i) **The Militant Society**

The Militant society is a type in which predominant organisation is offensive and defensive military action. Such society has the following characteristics.

- Human relationships in such societies are marked by **compulsory cooperation**.
- There exists a highly centralised pattern of authority and social control.
- A set of myths and beliefs reaffirm the hierarchical nature of society.
- Life is marked by rigorous discipline and a close identity between public and private life.

ii) **The Industrial Society**

The Industrial society is one in which military activity and organisation is peripheral to society. The greater part of society concentrates on human production and welfare.

The characteristics of such a society are that these societies are marked by

- voluntary cooperation,
- firm recognition of people's personal rights,
- separation of the economic realm from political control of the government and
- growth of free associations and institutions.

Herbert Spencer was aware that societies need not fit into either of the systems totally. They served the purpose of models to aid classification. These are some of the central ideas of Herbert Spencer. Now let us see in the next section (2.4.3) how relevant his sociology is for the contemporary period and what his influence is on contemporary sociologists. But, before going on to the next section, we need to complete Activity 2.

**Activity 2**

You have read the description of social evolution given by Herbert Spencer. Keeping this account in mind, discuss with three persons, one of your grandfather's generation, one your father's generation and one your own generation about the changes they have seen in any one of the major social institutions like marriage, family, economy or polity in India.

Write a note of about two pages comparing the details of social change observed in a social institution in each generation. Compare, if possible, your note with those of other students at your Study Centre.

**2.4.4 Significance of Herbert Spencer's Idea to Contemporary Sociology**

Unlike Auguste Comte, who is the first founding father of sociology, Spencer, known as the second founding father of sociology, had very different expectations from sociology. Auguste Comte wanted to guide men in the construction of a better society. Spencer, instead told people through sociology that human beings should not interfere with the natural processes in societies. Spencer had great faith in the innate instinct of freedom and believed any interference with this instinct to be harmful.



Herbert Spencer, under the influence of Darwin, believed in the notion of “the survival of the fittest”. He like Darwin said that nature had the power to get rid of the weak and unfit. The fittest people are those who are healthy and more intelligent. For him, the state was a “joint-stock company for the mutual protection of individuals” (Timasheff 1967: 41). According to him, nature is more intelligent than human beings and therefore, the government should stop interfering in the process of this evolution. He asked the Government to prohibit such activities as, education, sanitary measures, improvement of harbours, etc. Thus, for Spencer the Victorian laissez faire i.e. free market type society (where there was no government intervention and individuals were free to compete with each other) was the apex of all societies.

Herbert Spencer’s concept of society as a super-organic system had several problems. He was unable to see culture as part of an integrated whole. His explanation regarding the social evolution of societies from simple to compound, and so on, was also faulty. However, he formulated an integral theory of all reality. His law of evolution is a cosmic law and therefore, according to Timasheff (1946: 43) his theory is strictly speaking a philosophical theory rather than sociological.

In his own time, Herbert Spencer became very popular and it was considered a shame if an intellectual did not read his books. His popularity extended to England, the United States of America and Russia but he was not all that known in France and Germany. His ideas became popular because they served the need of his time, namely, the desire for unifying knowledge and the need to explain in a scientific manner the laissez faire principle. This principle was made popular by such economists as Adam Smith and Ricardo. It advocated the idea of a free market where prices will be determined on the basis of demand and supply. In such a market perfect competition could be the basis of demand and supply. In such a market perfect competition could be possible. This principle became popular during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries because it was considered by economists and social thinkers to be the best way to increase the wealth of a nation.

Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, both succeeded in raising the status of sociology to that of a science of society. In the next unit you will learn about some more pioneers of sociology.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Which of the following would you categorise as characteristics of Herbert Spencer’s thought?
  - a) Evolution is the key concept.
  - b) All knowledge will consist of a systematic and testable body of propositions.
  - c) All processes of change are markedly different.
  - d) Society is a super-organic entity.
  - e) Society is more than a collection of individuals.

**Early Sociology**

- f) A classificatory system was of society constructed.
  - g) The system built on the basis of composition comprised simple societies, compound societies, doubly compound societies and trebly compound societies.
  - h) The other system consisted of the industrial and military societies.
  - i) Scientific knowledge is unlimited.
- ii) Write in seven lines about the essence of Spencer’s arguments regarding social evolution.

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- iii) What is common in the ideas of Comte and Spencer? Write your answer in three lines.

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## **2.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit you learnt that the systematic study of human behaviour and human society is a relatively recent development. You read about the biographical sketch of Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and the social environment to which Auguste Comte belonged. He is the founding father of sociology. He coined the word sociology to describe the science of society. The central ideas of Comte are

- the law of the three stages: the theological state, the metaphysical stage, and the positive stage
- the hierarchy of the sciences
- the static and dynamic sociology.

You learnt also about the significance of Auguste Comte’s ideas to contemporary sociology.

In the second part of this unit, we outlined a sketch of Harbert Spencer the social environment to which he belonged. He is considered to be the second founding father of sociology. We explained the following central ideas of Spencer

- the evolutionary doctrine
- the organic analogy
- the evolution of societies, firstly in terms of composition from simple to compound and so on; and then in terms of transition from military to industrial societies.

Finally, we discussed the significance of Herbert Spencer's ideas to contemporary sociology.

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## 2.6 KEY WORDS

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<b>Compulsory Cooperation</b>	It is that kind of cooperation among people which is compulsorily imposed by the leaders who represent authority.
<b>Dynamic</b>	It is any mass or object or force which is in a state of motion. In society it corresponds to the notion of social change.
<b>Evolution</b>	The process of slow changes through a long period of time in which life forms have developed from simple unicellular beings, such as amoeba, to complex multicellular beings, such as human beings.
<b>Heterogeneous</b>	Composition of unlike elements. For example, India is considered to be a heterogeneous society since it has people of different languages, religions and cultures living in it.
<b>Metaphysical</b>	Metaphysics literally means that branch of philosophy which investigates the first principles of nature and thought. For Comte it is a stage of development of mind in which the mind explains phenomenon by invoking abstract entities or forces like "nature". In this stage human beings explain the meaning of the world in terms of "essences", "ideas", etc.
<b>Method</b>	The way of collecting data or facts about social phenomena, such as the method of observation, interview, survey, etc.
<b>Positive</b>	Positive literally means anything in the affirmative. For Comte it is the last stage of the development of mind. Here the search for 'original sources' 'final ends' about existence of human beings stops. Instead human beings start observing phenomena and establishing

regular links which exist between these phenomena. Thus, in the positive stage human beings search for social laws which link facts and which govern social life.

<b>Science</b>	Systematised knowledge derived from observation, study and experimentation. Scientific knowledge can be tested, verified or proved.
<b>Static</b>	Any mass or object or force which is at an equilibrium, i.e. which does not move. In society it corresponds to the notion of the structure of society.
<b>Theological</b>	According to the dictionary, theology is the study of religion. For Comte it is the first stage of development of mind. In this stage mind explains phenomenon by ascribing them to beings or forces comparable to human beings. Here explanations take the form of myths concerning spirits and supernatural beings.
<b>Unifying</b>	The comprehensive nature of a science which can explain all aspects of existence.
<b>Voluntary cooperation</b>	It is the kind of cooperation among people which is not imposed on them but is voluntarily accepted by them.

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## 2.7 FURTHER READING

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Coser, Lewis A. 1971. *Masters of Sociology Thought Ideas in Historical and Social Context*. Second Edition, Harcourt Brace Jovonovich, Inc.: New York.

Hubert, Rene, 1963. *Encyclopaedia of Social Sciences*. Vol. 1-IV, pp. 151-152. 15<sup>th</sup> printing. The MacMillan Co.: New York.

Timasheff, Nicholas S., 1967. *Sociological Theory. Its Nature and Growth*, Third Edition. Random House: New York.

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## 2.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) a, b, d, f, g, h
- ii) a) Comte wanted to build scientific laws of society.

- b) Comte focused on both statics and dynamics, i.e. the analysis of the social system and the study of the changing forms over time and space.
  - c) Comte built a hierarchy of sciences, at the apex of which stood sociology.
- iii) Auguste Comte saw division of labour in society as a powerful force in the process of social evolution. It is closely linked with the increase in population. The more division of labour that occurs in a society the more complex and evolved that society becomes.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) a, b, d, e, f, g, h.
- ii) Spencer's theory rested on the principle of 'evolution'. The concept of evolution in turn rested on the premise that every form of nature undergoes changes and in essence derives from the same substance. The task of science therefore would be to build a body of knowledge to study the way various patterns of transformation are taking place in the world around us.
- iii) Both Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer believed in
  - a) the task of scientific knowledge being the establishment of testable laws.
  - b) Scientific laws were statements of interconnection, i.e. they are 'uniformities of co-existence and succession'.
  - c) Scientific knowledge alone provided reliable basis for prediction.

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## UNIT 3 FOUNDING FATHERS-II

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### Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Georg Simmel (1858-1918)
  - 3.2.1 Biographical Sketch
  - 3.2.2 Socio-Historical Background
  - 3.2.3 Central Ideas
    - 3.2.3.1 Formal Sociology
    - 3.2.3.2 Social Types
    - 3.2.3.3 Role of Conflict in Georg Simmel's Sociology
    - 3.2.3.4 Georg Simmel's Views on Modern Culture
  - 3.2.4 Impact of Georg Simmel's Ideas on Contemporary Sociology
- 3.3 Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)
  - 3.3.1 Biographical Sketch
  - 3.3.2 Socio-Historical Background
  - 3.3.3 Central Ideas
    - 3.3.3.1 Logical and Non-logical Action
    - 3.3.3.2 Residues and Derivatives
    - 3.3.3.3 Theory of Elites and Circulation of Elites
  - 3.3.4 Impact of Vilfredo Pareto's Ideas on Contemporary Sociology
- 3.4 Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929)
  - 3.4.1 Biographical Sketch
  - 3.4.2 Socio-Historical Background
  - 3.4.3 Central Ideas
    - 3.4.3.1 Theory of Technological Evolutionism
    - 3.4.3.2 Theory of Leisure Class
    - 3.4.3.3 Leisure Class and Conspicuous Consumption
    - 3.4.3.4 Functional Analysis
    - 3.4.3.5 Concept of Social Change
  - 3.4.3 Impact of Thorstein Veblen's Ideas on Contemporary Sociology
- 3.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.6 Key Words
- 3.7 Further Reading
- 3.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit you should be able to

- outline the biographical details of the early sociologists, Georg Simmel, Vilfredo Pareto, and Thorstein Veblen



- describe the socio-historical background of these early sociologists
- explain their central ideas
- discuss the impact of their ideas on contemporary sociology

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## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit you learnt about the major ideas of the two founding fathers of sociology, Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. You learnt the reason why Comte developed the ideas of establishing a science of society, which he named sociology. You learnt about the seminal ideas of Herbert Spencer, who viewed society as a superorganic system. Of the founding fathers of sociology, the most crucial thinkers, such as, Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim will be discussed in Blocks 2, 3, 4 and 5 of ESO-13.

In this unit, we will explain to you the central ideas of three of the most important early sociologists, Georg Simmel (1858-1918), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929). There are several other sociologists whose contributions are very significant to the growth of the sociology as a scientific discipline but you will learn about them in your later studies. However, we chose these three thinkers because each of them has given a new perspective to the scientific study of society. Georg Simmel was one of the first sociologists to consider the positive aspects of conflict. Vilfredo Pareto's theory of elite and circulation of elites is still a guiding force to students of political sociology. Thorstein Veblen's books might not be read so much today but his highly critical analysis of modern culture and his use of terms to describe social phenomena in capitalist societies like "**conspicuous consumption**", "trained incapacity", "**predatory classes**" etc. are used again and again not only by sociologists but also other social scientists.

Section 3.2 of the unit explains the central ideas of Georg Simmel; 3.3 describes the views of Vilfredo Pareto, 3.4 outlines the basic ideas of Thorstein Veblen, and finally section 3.5 gives the summary of this unit.

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## 3.2 GEORG SIMMEL (1858-1918)

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Goerg Simmel (1858-1918), a German sociologist born of Jewish parentage, brought a new perspective to the understanding of society. He made an attempt to understand sociology from a different approach. He rejected the earlier existing organicist theories of Comte and Spencer about which you learnt in the previous unit. He also rejected the German historical tradition of his own country, which gave value to the historical description of unique events. Instead he developed the sociological theory, which conceived society as a web of patterned interactions. He believed that the task of sociology is to study the forms of these interactions as they take place and are repeated over time in different historical periods and cultural settings.

In the following sub-sections (3.2.0, 3.2.1, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3) we are going to describe to you the biographical sketch of Georg Simmel, the socio-historical period to which he belonged, his central ideas and the impact of his ideas on contemporary sociology.

### 3.2.1 Biographical Sketch

Georg Simmel was born on March 1, 1858, in the very heart of Berlin. He was born in a place in Berlin, which can be compared to our Connaught Place in New Delhi or Ameenabad in Lucknow. This curious birthplace is symbolically suited to a person who, according to Coser (1971: 194), throughout his life lived in intersections of many intellectual movements. He was a modern urban man with almost no roots in traditional folk culture.

Ferdinand Toennies, an eminent sociologist, wrote to his friend after reading Simmel's first book that, "the book is shrewed but it has the flavour of the metropolis" (Coser 1971: 194).

Georg Simmel's parents were Jews who later converted to Protestantism. In fact, Simmel, who was the youngest of seven children born to his parents, was baptized as a Protestant. His father died when Georg Simmel was very young. A family friend, who was the owner of a music publishing house, was appointed as his guardian. It was from his guardian that Simmel inherited a lot of wealth and thus he did not have to suffer economically throughout his life. His relations with his mother were distant since she was a very domineering person. As a result Simmel did not have a secure family environment. It was this sense of insecurity and marginality which characterised most of his writings.

In 1876 Georg Simmel joined the University of Berlin as an undergraduate student. Initially he joined history but later switched to philosophy. He received his doctorate from Berlin in 1881 for his dissertation on Kant's philosophy of nature. During this period he came in contact with such important academic figures of the day as, Mommsen, Treitschke, Sybel and Droysen, and so on.

He became a Privatdozent (an unpaid lecturer dependent on student fees) in Berlin in 1885. He lectured on such diverse and wide ranging topics as, logic, history of philosophy, ethics, social psychology, and sociology. He spoke about the ideas of Kant, Schopenhauer, Darwin and Nietzsche among many others. The range of topics that he used to cover was exceptional and he proved to be a very popular lecturer. His lectures became leading intellectual events not only for the students but for the cultural elite of Berlin.

But in spite of his immense popularity as a lecturer, Georg Simmel's academic career proved to be failure. One reason was the anti-Semitism i.e. feelings against the Jews were bad which adversely affected Simmel's career. He received shabby treatment from the academic powers in Germany in spite of receiving support and encouragement of eminent academics like Max Weber, Heinrich Rickert, Edmund Husserl and so on. He remained a Privatdozent for fifteen years. In 1901 when he was 43 years old, he was finally accepted as an Ausserordentlicher Professor, a purely honorary title

which did not give him any role in the permanent academic world of Berlin. He remained an outsider to the established academic world.

The second reason for being treated as a virtual pariah by the academic powers was due to his non-confirmity. Simmel, unlike the conventional professors, did not confine himself to the development of one discipline or to catering to the academic world alone. His originality and sparkling intellect allowed him to move effortlessly from one topic to another. He could talk in one semester about such serious topics, like Kant's epistemology, i.e. theory of knowledge, and also at the same time publish essays on such topics as sociology of smell, sociology of coquetry and fashion, and so on.

In spite of being an outsider to the academic field, he enjoyed the company of the great intellectuals of his time. His worth was recognised by all intellectuals. He was a co-founder, with Weber and Toennies, of the German Society for Sociology. He and his wife Gertrud, whom he married in 1890, lived a comfortable bourgeoisie life.

Georg Simmel's lectures fired the imagination of a variety of people, let alone academics. This was also one reason for the antagonism of the academic powers. However, Simmel finally attained his academic goal when he was given the full professorship at the University of Strasbourg in 1914, during the First World War. It was a quirk of fate that when he attained an academic position, he lost his most valued academic role of lecturer. When he came to Strasbourg all the lecture halls were converted into military hospitals. Georg Simmel died before the end of the war, on September 28, 1918, of cancer of the liver.

### 3.2.2 Socio-Historical Background

The period in which Simmel came of age in Germany were the early years of the unified German Reich. The reich was established by Bismarck after the successful war of 1870 against France. It was from this time onwards that Germany saw tremendous change. Berlin, the capital city, became a world city. The pace of industrialisation and economic development increased to a great extent. But in spite of changes in the economic field, the political field remained the same. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Germany had become a capitalist country run by a political system that was semi-feudal.

In the intellectual field, the university professors enjoyed a place of honour. But unlike the intellectuals in liberal societies of France and England whose ideas revolutionised the way of thinking of the people of their country, in Germany nothing of this sort happened. This led to the backwardness of this country in social and political areas. The middle classes of Germany remained weak and disheartened and were too much in awe of the disciplined, ordered and specialised learning of the university professors.

As a contrast to this intellectual field, there existed, especially in larger cities like Berlin, a class of unattached intelligentsia. This intelligentsia was highly active, innovative and irreverent of established conventions, unlike their counterparts in the universities. This class constituted the journalists, playwrights, writers, bohemian artists who all lived in partially



Fig. 3.1: Georg Simmel (1858-1918)

overlapping circles exchanging ideas with more daring than it ever occurred in the academy i.e. the universities (Coser 1971: 207). This class, which represented the “counterculture” of Germany, was more politically alive and had several adherents of socialist ideas, materialism, social Darwinism, etc., which were looked down upon or rejected by the university professors.

Georg Simmel, who remained an outsider to the academia due to persecution practiced in both the university culture as well as in the Berlin’s counter culture. But, in both cases he remained a marginal person i.e. person participating in a group without ever becoming a member of that group. Because of his marginal status Georg Simmel was able to acquire the intellectual distance that made it possible for him to study and analyse society objectively. In other words, he did not become biased by any set of ideas or opinions or values of any intellectual group as he did not belong to any of them completely.

This was an outline of the period to which Georg Simmel belonged. Now, let us examine his central ideas.

### 3.2.3 Central Ideas

Georg Simmel, as we have already mentioned, rejected the organicist theories of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer and German historical tradition. He did not believe that society can be viewed as a thing or organism as Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer did. For him society is “an intricate web of multiple relations between individuals who are in constant interaction with one another: society is merely the name for a number of individuals, connected by interactions” (Coser 1971: 178).

Simmel introduced the term *sociation*, which he believed to be the major field of study for the students of society. *Sociation* implies the particular patterns and forms in which human beings relate to each other and interact. According to him society is nothing more than all the individuals who constitute it. But here he has also drawn attention to the fact that people in groups of different sizes – dyads, i.e., two persons, triads i.e., three people, or groups with more than three persons, interact differently from each other. A qualitative change in terms of organisation takes place with the increase in number of persons in a group.

According to Georg Simmel there cannot be a totalistic social science, which studies all aspects of social phenomenon, for even in natural sciences there is no one “total” science of all matter. Therefore, he states that science must study dimensions or aspects of phenomena instead of global wholes or totalities. In this context he believes that the task of sociology is to describe and analyse particular forms of human interaction and their crystallisation in group characteristics, such as, the state, the clan, the family, the city etc. He says that all human behaviour is behaviour of individuals but a large part of this human behaviour can be understood if we understand the social group to which the individuals belong and the kind of constraints they face in particular forms of interaction. He emphasised the study of forms of interaction and this approach gave impetus to rise of formal sociology. Let us discuss this point further.

### 3.2.3.1 Formal Sociology

Georg Simmel, like Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, believed that we can discover the underlying uniformities in social life. In other words, one can discover social laws. These uniformities for Georg Simmel exist in the forms of interaction, such as the relation of superordination i.e., domination over others and subordination i.e., being dominated by others. It is this pre-occupation with the forms of interaction which underlie all social, political, economic, religious, sexual activities that characterise Georg Simmel's sociological approach. This approach is, therefore, known as formal sociology. According to Georg Simmel one can find in distinct and sometimes even contradictory phenomena a similar interactive form. For example, the interaction pattern between the leader of a criminal gang and its members and that between the leader of a scout group and its members will be similar. If we analyse the forms of interaction at the court of Akbar, in medieval India and the forms of interaction underlying a village panchayat today, we might find similarity between the two.

It is not the unique events in history or specific individuals who matter, but it is the underlying pattern of social interaction, such as subordination and superordination, centralisation and decentralisation, and so on that counts. Georg Simmel has made it very clear that it is the form of social interaction, which is the special domain of sociological inquiry. His insistence on studying the forms of social interaction was a response to the beliefs of historians and other representatives of humanities. They believed that a science of society could not explain unique historical, irreversible events in history. Simmel showed them that such unique historical events, such as, the murder of Caesar, the accession of Henry VIII of England, the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, may be events in history but will not happen again. If we examine these events from a sociologist's point of view, we can discover the underlying uniformities in these historically unique events (Coser 1971: 179).

According to Georg Simmel there are no "pure" forms existing in any social reality. All social phenomena consist of a number of formal elements. These formal elements are like those of cooperation and conflict, subordination and superordination etc. Thus, there is no "pure" conflict or "pure" cooperation found in society. The "pure" forms are only abstractions which are not found in real society but have been created by Georg Simmel to study the real, existing social life. There is, therefore, a similarity between Georg Simmel's "forms" and Max Weber's concept of "ideal types" about which you will learn later in this course. Complementary to the concept of social form, Georg Simmel discussed the concept of **social types**.

### 3.2.3.2 Social Types

In the study of society, Georg Simmel made an attempt to understand a whole range of social types such as "the stranger", "the mediator", "the poor", and so on. His social types were complementary to his concept of **social forms**. A social type becomes a type because of his/ her relations with others who assign a certain position to this person and have certain expectations of him/ her. The characteristics of the social type are, therefore, seen as the features of social structure.



To explain his social type, Georg Simmel gives the example of “the stranger” in his book, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (1950). The stranger has been described by Simmel as a “person who comes today and stays tomorrow”. This stranger is someone who has a particular place in the society within the social group which he has entered. The social position of this stranger is determined by the fact that he or she does not belong to this group from the beginning. It is this status of the stranger which determines his or her role in the new social group and also the interaction that takes place. As a stranger, a person is simultaneously both near to one as well as distant. Not being part of the social group the stranger can look at it objectively without being biased. Thus, the stranger can be an ideal intermediary in any kind of exchange of ideas or goods. In this way, the position of the stranger is fixed in a society and defined. This is only example of Georg Simmel’s social types. He has discussed several others too, such as, “the poor”, “the adventurer”, etc. (Cosser, 1971: 183).

### 3.2.3.3 Role of Conflict in Georg Simmel’s Sociology

Georg Simmel has, in all his works stressed both the connection as well as the tensions between the individual and society. In his opinion an individual is both a product of society as well as the link in all social processes that take place in society. The relationship between an individual and the society is, therefore, dual in nature. Individual is at one and the same time within the society and outside it. He/ she exists for society as well as for herself or himself.

Social individual, as Georg Simmel points out, cannot be partly social and partly individual. In fact, social individual is shaped by a fundamental unity in which we find a synthesis of two logically opposed elements. These elements are that an individual is both a being and social link in himself as well as a product of society (Cosser 1971: 184). In Georg Simmel’s sociology we find this dialectical approach, which brings out the dynamic-interlinkages as well as conflicts that exist between social units in society.

According to Simmel empirically i.e., in real life no society can exist with absolute harmony. Conflict is an essential and complementary aspect of consensus or harmony in society. He maintains that sociation or human interactions involve contradictory elements like harmony and conflict, attraction and repulsion, love and hatred, and so on. He also made a distinction between social appearances and social realities. There are certain relationships of conflict which give the appearance of being negative to both the participants, as well as the outsiders. But, if we analyse these conflictive relationships we may find that it has latent positive aspects. For example, take the institution of blood feuds in some tribes in Africa where if a person of tribe A murders a person of tribe B, all the members, especially the kinsmen of the person of tribe B try to take revenge by murdering a person of tribe A. In this relationship which appears to be totally negative we can, on analysis, discover that it leads to the further cohesion of members in tribe A against tribe B. Thus, a negative social relationship leads to social solidarity.



### 3.2.3.4 Georg Simmel's Views on Modern Culture

According to Georg Simmel, in the pre-modern societies the relationships of subordination and superordination between master and servant, between employer and employee involved the total personalities of individuals. As a contrast, to this in capitalist modern society, there is a progressive liberation of the individual. The concept of freedom emerges and the domination of employer on employee, master on servant, becomes partial. For example, a factory worker outside the factory does not remain the subordinate of the factory owner.

In modern societies segmentation of roles and relations occurs. An individual plays multifaceted roles and in this process escapes domination of the total kind found in pre-modern societies, such as the relationship between the lord of the manor and his serf in feudal European society. Thus, individualism emerges in societies which have an elaborate division of labour and a number of intersecting social circles. But along with individual freedom in modern societies human beings get surrounded by a world of objects which put constraint on them and dominate their individual needs and desires. Thus, according to Georg Simmel, modern individuals find themselves faced by another set of problems. In modern societies, Georg Simmel predicts, "individuals will be frozen into social functions and in which the price of the objective perfection of the world will be the atrophy of the human soul" (Coser 1971: 193).

These are some of the major ideas developed by Georg Simmel. Now in the next section (3.2.3) we will describe the impact of Georg Simmel's ideas on contemporary sociology. But before going on to the next section, let us complete Activity 1.

#### Activity 1

You have read in this unit about Georg Simmel's concept of social form, which refers to the uniformity underlying the pattern of individual interactions, for example, interaction amongst the members of a panchayat, or a corporation etc. has the underlying element of subordination and superordination, conflict and harmony and so on.

Now you, as a member of your family, or workgroup, find out at least one element of uniformity underlying the individual interaction in your family or workplace.

Write a note of about one page on the form of uniformity underlying the pattern of interactions among the members of the particular group (your family or workplace). Compare it, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

### 3.2.3 Impact of Georg Simmel's Ideas on Contemporary Sociology

Georg Simmel was so preoccupied with identifying and explaining the subject matter of sociology, and the concept of sociology itself that he never wrote a systematic treatise on sociology. Besides his preoccupation

with the subject matter, he also believed that it was premature or too early to write such a treatise. He believed that to be a science sociology must have a well-defined subject matter which can be studied by scientific methods (Tiansheff 1967: 102). He made an attempt to draw the boundary of the discipline of sociology and distinguish it from other social sciences like psychology, history, social philosophy, etc.

According to Coser (1971: 215), in terms of scholarly significance Georg Simmel’s sociological method and programme of study can be compared with that of Emile Durkheim. Durkheim focused his attention on the study of social structure, within which he studied larger institutional structures, religious and educational systems, and so on. Georg Simmel has focused his attention on forms of interaction which is quite similar to social structure. But in contrast to Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel engaged in mainly a “micro-sociological enterprise”. In other words, he did not believe in studying larger institutions but wanted to study the “interactions among the atoms of society”. Here atoms are the individuals in society. He basically studied fundamental patterns of interactions among individuals that underlie the larger social formations. In Gerog Simmel’s contribution to sociology, we therefore find a distinct attempt to outline the subject matter of sociology. This subject matter is distinct from the subject matter of all other disciplines like, history, political science, economics, etc.

Georg Simmel’s sociology may lack systematic foundation yet we cannot ignore his contributions. In fact, Coser has summed it up very well when he writes that whether we read him (Georg Simmel) directly or see his ideas filtered through the minds of Robert Park, Louis Wirth, Everett C. Hughes, T. Caplaw, Theodore Mills, and Robert K. Merton, he continues to stimulate the sociological imagination as powerfully as Durkheim or Max Weber (Coser 1971: 215).

In this section, you learnt about the contributions of Georg Simmel, a German sociologist who gave a new perspective to the study of society. In the next section (3.3), you will learn about another founding father of sociology, Vilfredo Pareto. It is now time to complete Check Your Progress 1.

**Check Your Progress 1**

i) Explain Georg Simmel’s concept of social forms.

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ii) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.

a) Forms found in social reality are ..... pure according to Georg Simmel.

- b) In his description of social ..... Gerog Simmel has talked about, “the stranger”, “the poor” etc.
  - c) There is no society, where ..... plays a positive role in society.
- iii) Write a short note about one aspect of modern culture described by Georg Simmel. Use about ten lines for your answer.

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### 3.3 VILFREDO PARETO (1848-1923)

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Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), a distinguished Italian sociologist was born in Paris. His approach to sociology is distinct from that of other sociologists of his time due to his insistence on its being scientific or empiric in nature. In his major sociological work, *The Treatise on General Sociology*, published in 1915 and which later appeared in English translation as *Mind and Society* in 1936, he criticised Comte and Spencer because they have not considered empirical social reality but rather given a grand secular “religion” of progress, humanity and democracy (Timasheff 1967: 161). Let us first describe the biographical sketch of Pareto and then discuss his socio-historical background.

#### 3.3.1 Biographical Sketch

Vilfredo Pareto was born in Paris on July 15, 1848. He was the son of an Italian aristocrat and his French wife. He had two sisters. He was trained as a civil engineer at the Turin Polytechnical School. He began his career as an engineer in the Italian Railways. After a few years he left state employment to become a managing director of an important group of iron mines, located in Florence.

Vilfredo Pareto, at this period of his life followed in his father’s footsteps and was a supporter of democratic, republican and pacifist ideals. These ideals he had imbued from his father. However, very soon due to certain political and personal reasons Pareto rejected these ideals and came to hate them fervently. He developed a cynical attitude towards such democratic values as humanitarianism, idea of progress etc.

Due to the inefficiencies and disorder created by the new regime after the fall of the rightist regime in 1876 in Italy, Pareto came to dislike this political system. He became an opponent of the new government and even contested for a post in the government in 1882 as an opposition candidate. But he was beaten by the government supported candidate. His failure in politics and inability to affect the state of affairs in Italy made him very bitter. The new ruling elites in Italy were in his opinion, a “band of corrupt contemptible and self-serving careerists who used the levers of government to enrich themselves...” (Coser 1971: 403). They were like the foxes whom he described in his theory of elites.

Vilfredo Pareto’s father died in 1882 leaving an inheritance of enough wealth which enabled him to leave business life and concentrate on his academic pursuits. In 1889 he married a young impoverished Russian girl, Alessandrina Bakunin and moved from Florence to a villa at Fiesole. Here he devoted himself to the study of economics. He also continued to attack the government.

His interest in pure economic theory arose due to his involvement in the controversies relating to free trade present during his time. As against the cause of protectionism, Pareto favoured free trade and took active part in public debates for this cause. In his study of economics he found that most of the economic thinking of his day was of an unscientific nature compared with the nature of the physical sciences. Thus, he devoted himself to the study of a new kind of economics based more securely on scientific methods that could provide more accurate and reliable guide to action.

By 1893 he had achieved enough recognition to be invited to the chair of economics in the University of Lausanne. He held this post till his retirement and established himself as an authority on theoretical economics. By this time Pareto had become a cynical, disillusioned loner who was at variance with all the tendencies of the age such as liberalism. He became a pathological hater of the left. All this affected his writings. Another factor which added fuel to his cynicism and lack of trust was the running away of his wife with his cook. Being an Italian citizen, he could not divorce his wife under Canon law.

It was around this time in 1898 that he inherited a considerable amount of wealth from the death of an uncle. This made him an independent person who did not depend on his academic salary alone. He started living a life of luxury and built a house for himself at Celigny, near Lausanne. With him lived his companion, Jane Regis who took care of him and his numerous Angora cats. Vilfredo Pareto retired from regular university teaching in 1907 but continued to give lectures on sociology on ad hoc basis. During the last period of his life he suffered from heart disease. Insomnia, i.e., sleeplessness made him read a lot. He lived a life of a recluse, surrounded by his cats and renowned wines, of which he used to boast a lot.

However, during the fascist regime of Mussolini, the dictator, Vilfredo Pareto again came to public life. He was made a Senator of the Kingdom of Italy, designated an Italian delegate to the Disarmament Conference at Geneva, and so on. To a certain extent Mussolini seems to have

implemented some of the programmes suggested by Vilfredo Pareto. However, Pareto saw only the beginning of Mussolini's rule. In 1923 he finally married Jane Regis by acquiring a divorce from his wife under a different law. On August 19, 1923, he died after a short illness at the age of seventy five.

### 3.3.2 Socio-Historical Background

Vilfredo Pareto, whose full name was Marquis Vilfredo Frederico Damaso Pareto, belonged to that period of European history when major changes were taking place in socio-political structure of Italian society. Initially he was influenced by the old fashioned liberal democratic views of his father and his friends but slowly with age he turned against these ideas, which represented the values and ideals of Mazzini, one of the great political leaders of Italy, who helped in the process of unification of Italy. Pareto rejected the values of humanitarianism, republicanism, and democracy of the kind found in France and Italy of his times and as Coser writes, "like a spurned lover he turned against the political system of Italy during this period, i.e. around the middle of the nineteenth century. The reason for his rejection of these ideals was that the government did not heed his advice and suggestions. In his book, *Treatise on General Sociology*, he has criticised democracy which later led Mussolini, the fascist ruler of Italy, to offer Pareto a seat in the Italian Senate. However, it goes to the credit of Pareto that he refused to accept this offer (Timasheff 1967: 161).

It was the disenchantment with the liberal democratic ideals, that perhaps led Pareto to say that the task of a social analyst is to unmask the real nature of values and theories like "equality", "progress", "liberty", etc. According to him these are vacuous or empty words which human beings use to rationalise or justify their actions. Now in the light of Vilfredo Pareto's socio-historical background let us examine some of his central ideas.

### 3.3.3 Central Ideas

Vilfredo Pareto, in order to avoid being non-scientific, stated that sociology should use a logico-experimental method. By experimental he actually meant something which could be empirically observed. This method was based solely on observation i.e., to study social reality which exists in real life, and then draw logical inference. By logical inference he meant to study several social phenomena and derive a conclusion in a logical, ordered manner. In his book, *The Treatise on General Sociology*, Vilfredo Pareto made it clear that he wanted to study social reality by applying to the social sciences the methods, which have been used in natural sciences, like physics, chemistry, astronomy etc.

Borrowing from the natural sciences, Vilfredo Pareto came to believe that society is a system in equilibrium and that any disturbance in one part of the system leads to adjustive changes in other parts of that system. Like the "molecules" in physical matter, the individuals in social system have interests, drives, and sentiments. Social system for him is a framework for analysing mutually dependent variations among a number of variables which determine human behaviour.



Fig. 3.2: Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)

But Pareto was not interested in all kinds of variables. He wanted to study the non-rational variables. His earlier study of economics revealed to him that the rational variables of human action studied by economics do not cover the whole gamut of human behaviour. There are many kinds of human behaviours which are non-rational and **non-logical**.

### 3.3.3.1 Logical and Non-logical Action

As mentioned earlier, society for Vilfredo Pareto is a system in equilibrium. This equilibrium implies that in all societies there are certain forces which maintain the form or structure of that society. Outward forces change society and inner forces push towards restoring its equilibrium. According to Pareto, the inner forces are mainly composed of the sentiment of revulsion against any disturbance that affects the equilibrium of society. The validity of the theory of restoration of equilibrium is in the fact that a society even after undergoing a revolution or war readjusts itself and attains an equilibrium (Timasheff 1967: 162).

Vilfredo Pareto's concept of logical and **non-logical** action is related to the analysis of the inner forces in society. He has drawn a distinction between the two types of action. **Logical actions** are those "which use means appropriate to ends and logically links means with ends". These actions are both subjectively (i.e., the person who performs it) and objectively (i.e., from the point of view of the other persons) logical. Non-logical actions (which do not mean illogical or contrary to logic) are simply all actions which do not fall into the category of logical actions. Thus, non-logical action is a residual category.

The study of non-logical actions is important since it explains the inner forces, such as sentiments of actors. Vilfredo Pareto says that non-logical actions originate in the mental or psychic states, sentiments and subconscious feelings of human beings. But unlike the psychologists our task as social analyst is to treat these sentiments, etc, as data of fact without going deeper than that (Cosser 1971: 389).

### 3.3.3.2 Residues and Derivatives

It is the non-logical actions which are related to his theory of residuals and **derivatives**. **Residues** and derivatives are both manifestations of sentiments which are according to Pareto instincts or innate human tendencies. The study of these residues and derivatives can be used to unmask non-scientific theories and belief systems. By derivatives he means the changing elements or variables accounting for these theories. Residues as a contrast are the relatively permanent elements.

To explain these concepts of residues (which are basically constant elements) and derivatives (which are changing variable elements) further, let us take an example. We find in all societies a great variety of religions – polytheistic (which believe in the worship of many Gods or more than one God), monotheistic (believing in the doctrine that there is only one God), atheistic religion (which do not believe in the concept of God, such as, Jainism, Buddhism). These religions may take any form. However, in all these religious doctrines there lies a residue which remains constant everywhere and in all times. Thus, here we find that the changing forms



of religion found in many societies at various times are the derivatives while the constant common factors in all religions is the residue.

Vilfredo Pareto has described six classes of residues which have remained almost constant throughout the long span of western history. Out of these six classes of residues, the first two are important to us since they are related to Vilfredo Pareto's theory of elites and circulation of elites. These two classes of residues are i) Instinct for combination, and ii) Group persistencies (Persistence of Aggregates). Pareto's theory of residues helped him to explain various theories and belief systems. It also enabled him to explain social movements, social change and the dynamics of history (Coser 1971: 392). Let us now discuss Vilfredo Pareto's theory of elites and circulation of elites.

### 3.3.3.3 Theory of Elites and Circulation of Elites

Vilfredo Pareto firmly believed that human beings are unequal physically, as well as mentally and morally. In all social groups there are some people who are far more intelligent and capable than others. It is these people who become the elite in any social group or society as a whole. Pareto defined elite as "a class of the people who have the highest indices (or scores) in their branch of activity" (Coser 1971: 397).

He distinguished between the governing elites and the non-governing elites. Both these belong to the class of elites. However, the governing elites are those individuals who directly or indirectly play an important part in the government, while the non-governing elites comprise the rest of the elite population. In his work, Vilfredo Pareto has focused his attention more on governing elites.

In spite of defining elites as the most intelligent and capable people in a society, Vilfredo Pareto has many times failed to distinguish between elites who inherit their status due to inheritance of wealth, good connections, etc. and those who achieve their elite status on the basis of their merits. However, Pareto is clear about the fact that in cases where the majority of the elites occupy their status not due to their own achievements but due to their ascribed status, the society becomes degenerate. It is replaced by elites who have the first kind of residue, that is, instinct for combination. The new elites have vitality and imaginativeness which is lacking in the elites who derive their elite status on the basis of ascription.

Thus, according to Vilfredo Pareto it is not only the intelligence and capability but also the residue of class I that affects society. The ideal governing elite must have a mixture of residues of class I and class II kinds (class II stands for group persistence) for its proper functioning. These two residues correspond to two different types of individuals – the lions and the foxes. In this way Vilfredo Pareto's concept of circulation of elites is also related to his distinction between two types of human beings, the lions and the foxes. Pareto borrowed these concepts from Machiavelli.

The lions have the class II type of residue. They are conservative in ideas and represent social inertia i.e., the element of stability, persistence in societies. Such type of individual harbour strong feelings of loyalty to family, tribe, city, nation etc. They reveal in their behaviour class solidarity,

patriotism, and religious zeal and are not scared of taking strong action when a need occurs.

The foxes are characterised by residue of the class I, of instinct for combination. These people are involved in system making, manipulating various elements found in experience, such as in large scale financial manipulations. In other words “foxes” are responsible for the changes, experiments, innovations in society. They are not conservative and faithful or stable.

In Paretos’s opinion, the governing elite must have the mixture of lions and foxes for it to form an ideal governing class. He described the political system but the same rule follows for the economic system as well. In the ideal economic system a mixture of “speculators” who are foxes in this situation and “rentiers” who are the lions, is required. In society both lions capable of decisive and forceful action, as well as, foxes imaginative, innovative, and unscrupulous are needed.

Thus, in his theory of circulation of elites, from lions to foxes and vice-versa, Vilfredo Pareto has given a theory of social change. His theory of change is cyclical in nature. It is not linear like Marx’s theory in which the process ends with the coming of a communist society. In Pareto’s views all societies move from one state to another in a cyclical manner, with no beginning or end.

These are some of the major ideas of Vilfredo Pareto that we have described to you. Now let us examine the impact of his ideas on contemporary sociology.

### **3.3.4 Impact of Pareto’s Ideas on Contemporary Sociology**

Pareto’s sociological theory has enduring significance. He was one of the first social scientists who gave a precise definition of the idea of a social system. A social system can be analysed in terms of the interrelations and mutual dependencies between the constituent parts. His contribution to the study of elites, his theory of elites and circulation of elites is of crucial significance. It continues to inspire political scientists and sociologists even today. Even today, investigations into the functioning of the upper strata of governing, as well as, non-governing elites are carried out with reference to Vilfredo Pareto’s ideas.

Like Durkheim, Pareto too has stressed the need to consider the requirements of the social system and had rejected utilitarian and individualistic notions. But unlike Durkheim, who stressed the objective nature of social facts, he emphasised the need to consider the desires, sentiments and propensities of human behaviour. In his works we find the influence of such thinkers as, Max Weber, Durkheim, Mosca and several others.

Impact of Vilfredo Pareto’s ideas can be seen in the works of political scientists like Harold Lasswell. Lasswell was one of the earliest proponents of followers of Pareto in America. He was inspired by Vilfredo Pareto’s theories of elite formation and circulation of elites. Other social scientists like C. Wright Mills, T.B. Bottomore, Suzanne Keller, Raymond Aron, all reflected the influence of Pareto’s ideas in their work.

You have learnt about the central ideas of Vilfredo Pareto and their impact on contemporary sociology. Now let us discuss the third founding father, Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), but first complete Check Your Progress 2.

**Check Your Progress 2**

i) Distinguish between logical and non-logical action given by Vilfredo Pareto.

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 .....  
 .....

ii) What are the two classes of residues mentioned in this unit? Describe.

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 .....  
 .....  
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iii) Distinguish between the “lions” and the “foxes”, discussed by Vilfredo Pareto.

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**3.4 THORSTEIN VEBLLEN (1857-1929)**

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Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) was born in the state of Wisconsin, United States of America. He studied at John Hopkins, Yale and Cornell Universities in America. His parents were Norwegian immigrants who settled down in the mid-West just ten years before his birth. In his sociology we find the reflection of the kind of changes that were taking place in America during his time as well as, the personal experiences and trait of personality of Thorstein Veblen himself.

Thorstein Veblen’s sociological theory deals with technological evolutionism. He was influenced by the evolutionary doctrine of Herbert Spencer which (as you have already learnt in unit 2 of this course) believed in the evolution of societies. Like Spencer, Thorstein Veblen believed that there is a process

of selective adaptation of societies. Like Spencer, he believed that there is a process of selective adaptation to the environment. But unlike Hegel and Marx, he did not believe that there is a goal or end to this process of historical evolution. Besides his technological evolutionism Veblen also gave a theory of **leisure** class for which he became very famous. He presented this theory in his book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). This was his first and the best known book. In this book he has presented his basic theoretical views on sociology. But before we begin to discuss these views let us first discuss the biographical details of Thorstein Veblen and then appreciate the socio-historical background of Veblen which shaped his ideas.

### 3.4.1 Biographical Sketch

Thorstein Veblen was born in the state of Wisconsin in U.S.A. on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1857. His parents were Norwegian immigrants, Thomas Anderson Veblen and Karl Bunde Veblen. Thorstein Veblen was the sixth of twelve children. His parents came to America from Norway just ten years before his birth. They were of old Norwegian peasant stock. They settled in Wisconsin first and then moved to Minnesota. They had a very hard time in their old country and in the new country too, they encountered many problems regarding land and its ownership.

Veblen's parents had developed a hatred for land speculators, tricksters, shyster (tricky) lawyers, etc. who had cheated them time and again. It is this hatred of tricksters and speculators, who were present in great numbers during Thorstein Veblen's time, that is reflected in his later writings. His parents were very hard working and due to their consistent hard work they managed to move to a larger farm in Minnesota. They lived in a community which was exclusively of Norwegian stock. Therefore, the culture to which Thorstein Veblen was exposed for at least seventeen years of his early life was mainly Norwegian. The only exception was that he attended an English school.

Thorstein Veblen's father was well respected in his community. He was a man of judgment and intelligence and minded his own business, unlike many other of this community. This characteristic was inherited by Thorstein Veblen who proved to be a very precocious (prematurely developed) and intelligent child. As a child, he used to pester his elders, beat up the other boys and tease young girls as a child. He grew up to become a sarcastic person who translated his early aggression into biting witticism and skepticism. He became a misfit in his traditional community and also remained a stranger to the wider American society.

He was sent to Carleton College where he was exposed to the American English culture for the first time. Here emphasis was given to the teaching of classics, moral philosophy, and religion. The established doctrine in this academic environment was of Scottish common sense.

Veblen did not take very kindly to the ethos of the Carleton College. He remained a sceptic. Although he graduated from this college in 1880 and remained its most famous alumnus, no honour was accorded to him i.e. no plaque commemorating him on the campus exists. When he graduated from

Carleton most of the knowledge he had acquired was due to his own voracious reading. It was here that he developed a long lasting love for a fellow student, Ellen Rolfe, the niece of the president of the college, whom he married later in 1888.

Veblen left Carleton to become a teacher at a Norwegian school in Madison, Wisconsin. Here, too, the atmosphere was not suitable to him. Therefore, he left this job and went to Baltimore to John Hopkins with his brother to study philosophy. Thus, he moved from the mid-West to the East of America. But in spite of the great opportunities he felt an alien in this leisurely culture of the South, found in Baltimore. He was basically an egalitarian and a radical while southern society was based on hierarchy of traditional classes not much different from our caste system.

Here Veblen got the chance to read such authors as Kant, Mill, Hume, Rousseau, Spencer, etc. But he was not impressed by his teachers and very soon became homesick and lonely. He could not receive his scholarship here, therefore, he went to Yale. He was an agnostic (one who does not believe in God) but here he found himself among the students of divinity. So his sarcastic and sardonic attitude and distance-creating mechanism, which were a self-defense method, increased here. However, he came into contact with such teachers as W.G. Sumner, an authority in sociology, who impressed him a lot. Although Veblen criticised Sumner, as Dorfman, one of his contemporaries, pointed out, Sumner was “the only man for whom he expressed ....a deep and unqualified admiration” (Coser 1971: 279).

Thorsteion Veblen specialised in his work on Kant and the post-Kantians. He was much admired by his teachers and academic colleagues. However, in spite of his completing his doctorate i.e. the research degree of Ph.D., he was not given any academic position. No one wanted a Norwegian and especially one who did not believe in God.

Thorstein Veblen started studying economics and become interested in the volatile agrarian scene of his time around 1888. He felt that economics might provide an answer to the agrarian crisis. Therefore, he went to Cornell and registered himself there. Here he managed to impress his teachers through his papers, such as, “Some Neglected Points in the Theory of Socialism” and several others. From here he went to the University of Chicago where he stayed from 1892-1906. Here he worked with such noted scholars and thinkers like John Dewey, William I. Thomas, and so on. He wrote profusely in several journals. Most of his writings are characterised by wit and sarcasm. In Chicago University he was promoted to the post of instructor at the age of 38 and his promotion to the post of assistant professor took place after five years.

Veblen died on August 3, 1929 of heart disease. Till the end of his life he remained a lonely and sad man whose defense mechanism to face life was to be critical and sarcastic or to remain silent. He remained a stranger to the life of his Norwegian community as well as to the American culture which he criticised in his works. He was a marginal man in true sense of the word.



Fig. 3.3: Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929)

His unorthodoxy and strange ways, as well as his origins, affected his career and his work. It is sad but true that people use Thorstein Veblen's concepts like, "conspicuous consumption", "trained incapacity" (i.e. a person becomes such an expert in one field that the wider knowledge of that subject declines), quite frequently even today; but very few people read his books, the most popular of which is *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). He was a poor teacher but a very critical author.

### 3.4.2 Socio-Historical Background

The period in which Thorstein Veblen grew up saw tremendous industrial development in America. Prior to this development America was basically an agrarian society. This period in America is, therefore, called the Gilded age (i.e. age of gold). It is, however, also known as the Age of Protest.

A class of capitalist buccaneers or adventurers emerged during this period in America. They were also known as the Robber Barons who became extremely rich at the expense of the industrial poor, who laboured in the factories doing back breaking jobs. These industrial capitalists were hard headed, determined, vulgar and nouveau rich, that is, they had acquired their wealth recently. They were as Vernon Parington, another American thinker of this period, describes, "primitive souls, ruthless, predatory, capable, single-minded men" (Coser 1971: 293).

The domination of this industrial class led to the uprising of Midwestern farmers. These farmers were the first to mobilise force to fight the predatory classes of capitalists.

Thorstein Veblen's ideas reflect some of these upheavals and conflicts that were taking place in his society. It was the class of Robber Barons who inspired him to develop the theory of the leisure class. The technological changes, which brought about such immense changes in the structure of American society and the emergence of the classes of capitalists, industrial poor, etc., appear to have shaped his theory of technological evolutionism.

The description of the socio-historical background to which Thorstein Veblen belonged is just an outline of the changes that took place in American society in his time. It has been discussed here to explain to you the context in which Thorstein Veblen presented his ideas. Let us now discuss the central ideas of Veblen.

### 3.4.3 Central Ideas

The central ideas of Thorstein Veblen, as developed in his sociological works, consist of basically his theory of technological evolutionism and his theory of leisure class. Related to his theory of the leisure class is his theory of socially induced motivation for competition. His search for latent functions of social activities outlines his functional analysis. He has also given a theory of the lag between technological and institutional development.

#### 3.4.3.1 Theory of Technological Evolutionism

As mentioned earlier, Thorstein Veblen was influenced by Herbert Spencer's ideas on social evolution. But, for him human evolution took place along



with the invention and use of new and increasingly more effective technologies. He said that social change in any society could be explained through the changes in the methods of doing things, such as methods of dealing with the material means of life. In other words, the “industrial arts” or the technologies of a society determined the nature of adaptation of human beings to their natural environment. It also determined their adjustment to the social environment (Coser 1971: 265).

According to Thorstein Veblen “man is what he does” or to explain it further human beings and their social organisations are dependent on their technological and economic spheres. Human thought in his view is a reflection of the way in which their community is organised. Social institutions embody the habits and customs of the people, their ways of acting and thinking in their struggle to survive in nature.

The process of social evolution according to Veblen reflects essentially the pattern of institutional changes. These institutional changes are themselves due to the changes in the technology of the society. In his writings Thorstein Veblen has described four main stages of evolution. However, Thorstein Veblen’s significant contribution to sociology is found in his study of the contemporary or near contemporary societies.

#### 3.4.3.2 Theory of Leisure Class

Thorstein Veblen has drawn a distinction between two opposed categories, such as between those who make goods and those who make money, between workmanship and salesmanship. In the capitalist world, he says, there is an unresolvable opposition between business and industry, ownership and technology, those who are employed in monetary employment such as the business classes, finances etc. and those who work in the industries, the industrial workers. This distinction helped Thorstein Veblen to explain the prevailing development in American society. It also helped him to attack the earlier conception of evolution.

Unlike his teacher W.G. Sumner, who influenced his work a great deal, Thorstein Veblen did not believe that the leading industrialists and financiers in America contributed much to the production system. They were no the “flowers of modern civilisation” as believed by Sumner. In fact, in Thorstein Veblen’s opinion these industrialists and men of finance were “parasites growing fat on the technological leadership and innovation of other men” (Coser 1971: 266). Veblen writes that the leisure class to which the industrialists, men of finance who are involved in **pecuniary** activities belong, lives by the labour of the industrial poor. They themselves make no industrial contribution and in this sense they have no progressive role to play in the process of evolution.

He states that the people involved in pecuniary are in their thought style or way of thinking “animistic” or “magical”. In evolutionary sense they are left-overs of an earlier period. The industrially employed people, as a contrast, have rational minds and are matter of fact. According to Thorstein Veblen this rational reasoning becomes a must for them because of the “machines” which they use. The machine technology acts as a disciplining agent to the people who use them. In Veblen’s opinion future evolution of

mankind depends on these minds which are disciplined and rational as against the “predatory life styles and magically oriented minds” of the people employed in money making.

### 3.4.3.3 Leisure Class and Conspicuous Consumption

Thorstein Veblen’s analysis of competitive behaviour in modern capitalist society is very significant. He has analysed the habits of thought and the ways in which social actors behave in modern industrial societies. He has provided a very sophisticated theory of the social sources that underlie competitive behaviour in human beings.

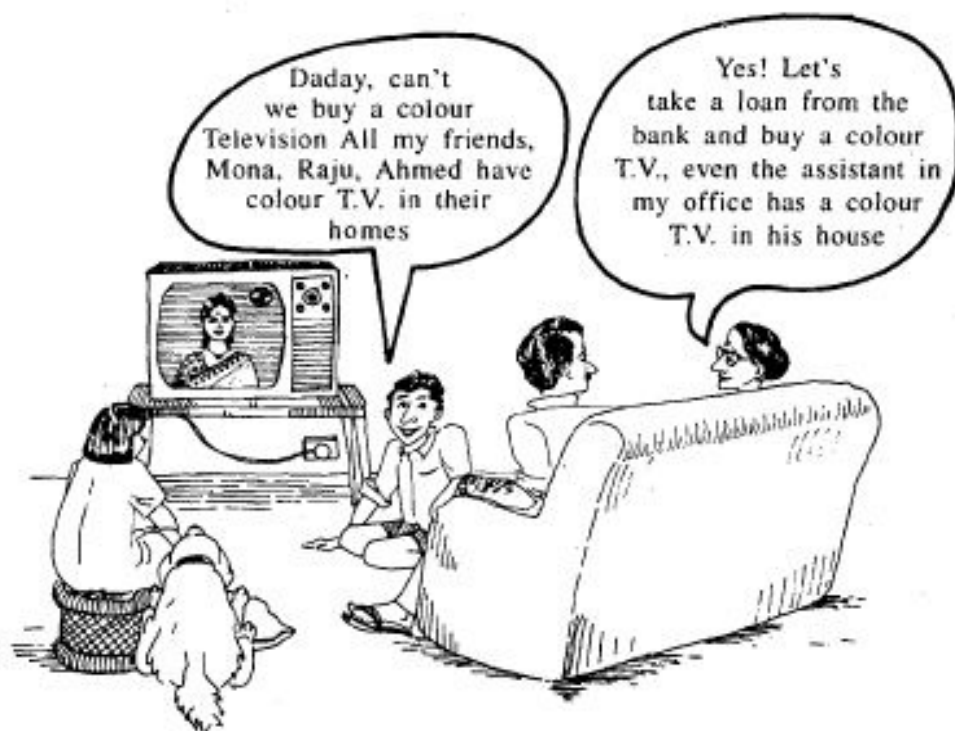
According to him, the self-esteem of people depends on the esteem accorded to them by others in the society. In a competitive materialistic culture such as American, the worth of a person is judged by the worth of others in the system. Thus, there develops a vicious circle of “one upmanship” that is, doing better than your neighbours or friends.

In his book, *The Theory of Leisure Class* Veblen (1899: 30-31) wrote, “As fast as a person makes new acquisitions and becomes accustomed to the new standard of wealth, the new standard forthwith ceases to afford appreciably greater satisfaction than the earlier standard did....the end sought by accumulation is to rank high in comparison with the rest of the community in point of pecuniary strength”.

It is in the context of this vicious circle of accumulation and competition with others that Veblen talks about the concept of conspicuous consumption. Related to conspicuous consumption is the notion of conspicuous leisure and conspicuous display of high standing or position in society. These are all a means to excel one’s neighbours and gain their esteem (See Figure 3.1: Competitive Behaviour in Modern Societies).

Conspicuous consumption is that behaviour of social actors in which they utilise goods and services not just for the sake of utilising these goods and services but for the sake of showing off to others and maintaining a distance between themselves and their neighbours. For example, in our own society we find that rich people own several cars, servants, pet dogs, etc. and flaunt their material possession to establish their higher social status. People show off their wealth through the dress they and their family members wear. The more rich a man is, the more gold and diamond jewellery will his wife wear. Wearing jewellery serves two purposes, one to make the person wearing it look nice and the other to show off to others one’s wealth and success in life.

Sometimes, conspicuous behaviour can have no utility at all except to show to others one’s high position. For example, in Chinese society the Chinese Mandarins (officials in any of nine grades or party leaders) used to sport long fingernails which was a custom for them. But a social analyst can quite easily work it out that a man who has long fingernails cannot work with his hands and must therefore occupy a high rank and prestigious place in his society.



**Figure 3.1: Competitive Behaviour in Modern Societies**

In American society the rich people go for holidays, a practice which is found in our society too. The trips to sea beaches or mountain resorts which only the rich can afford are some examples of conspicuous leisure.

As Thorstein Veblen points out, in the aristocratic age the “wasteful” life style was followed by only a small section of the population. But in modern capitalist countries the competitive display has permeated to the whole social structure. Each class copies the life style of the class above it to the extent possible. Veblen writes that it is this acquisitiveness which results in the perpetual sense of “deprivation” felt by the poor in modern societies. He says that the industrial system does not make the poor poorer in an absolute sense but it makes them relatively poor in their own eyes which is just as important. In this analysis Thorstein Veblen has come very near to describing the concept of “relative deprivation” later developed by R.K. Merton (Coser 1971: 269).

Before moving on to the next sub-section, complete Activity 2 and find out the nature of competitive behaviour in our own society.

**Activity 2**

Read the section on the competitive behaviour in modern capitalist societies given by Thorstein Veblen in this unit. Select five families in your neighbourhood and find out from their members

- i) the latest technology items, which they have bought within last five years, such as, radio, bicycle, car or T.V., refrigerator, washing machine, personal computer, mobile phone
- ii) why they have bought these items.
- iii) How many of these five families possess these items.

Now write a note of one page. Give your conclusion whether you find (or do not find) a sense of competition in these five families regarding the purchase of technology items. Keep Thorstein Veblen's description in mind. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

#### 3.4.3.4 Functional Analysis

Thorstein Veblen found that there is a latent function behind conspicuous consumption, which a social analyst can discover. Why do people prefer to buy a posh Rolls Royce car when they already have Ambassador cars, why do people (who have money) buy imported goods when these goods are produced in one's own country? The real reason or function of these activities lies in the honour that possession of such articles bestow on them. Even good manners, pronunciation, high bred behaviour, etc. are conspicuous styles of living, which in turn reflect the high standing of the people who have them. This idea too is further developed by Robert K. Merton in his functionalist theory. Thorstein Veblen's ideas helped R.K. Merton to formulate his concept of latent and manifest functions.

#### 3.4.3.5 Concept of Social Change

Thorstein Veblen's concept of social change is related to the technological evolutionism that he discussed in his writings. It is about the distinction he drew between the "predatory" class of people employed in pecuniary activities and the class of industrial workers.

For him the technology available to a society determines its culture. The social institutions found in a society represent the adaptation of that society to past technologies and are, therefore, never in full accord with the present needs. He says that the class which benefits from the persistence of the old order resists further technological changes. The former class believes in, "whatever is, is right", whereas the **law of natural selection** in the process of evolution rests on the notion of, "whatever is, is wrong" (Coser 1971: 272).

Thus, according to Thorstein Veblen, social change depends on the conflict that exists between the class which has vested interests in maintaining the old system and the class which brings about the new technological changes. But unlike Karl Marx, Thorstein Veblen did not believe that history of all societies is the history of class struggles. In his view, social change occurs due to the conflict that arises between advancing technology and the existing social institutions which tend to retard this change. Therefore, there is a lag between the social institutions found in a society and the technological developments that take place in that society (Coser 1971: 273).

Given above are some of the central ideas developed by Thorstein Veblen. Let us now discuss the impact of Veblen's ideas on contemporary sociology.

### 3.4.4 Impact of Thorstein Veblen's Ideas on Contemporary Sociology

Thorstein Veblen's contribution to sociological theory lies not so much in his own sociological works as it does in the kind of influence it had on

other social scientists. His caustic and critical comments about his society and his cynical outlook both made him a good judge of social reality, not just as it appeared but what it really was. His central ideas have continued to influence the minds of contemporary sociologists.

His attack on American culture, of the kind which was present during his time but does not exist now, has provided the perspective, which still remains valid to study society. His study of the social-psychological roots of competitive life styles can explain such behaviour as found in today's life styles. For example, the fashion of wearing torn, faded jeans but with a designer label revealed to a critical analyst the fact that wearing torn faded jeans did not mean that the wearers of such jeans were poor, but it meant that these people could afford to look poor. The faded jeans with designer labels were not cheap commodities but were available sometimes only in foreign countries and therefore not accessible to ordinary citizens of developing countries.

Thorstein Veblen's contribution to the theory of "relative deprivation" and analysis of the latent function (later developed by Robert K. Merton) are very significant contributions to sociology.

**Check Your Progress 3**

i) Describe Veblen's theory of technological evolutionism. Use five lines for your answer.

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ii) Fill in the blanks:

- a) Unlike W.G. Sumner, Thorstein Veblen believed that the industrialists and the men of finance were ..... growing fat on the efforts of the industrial workers
- b) In a competitive materialistic culture the worth of a person is judged by the ..... of the others in the system.
- c) In modern capitalist countries the competitive display of wealth and high rank has permeated the whole .....

iii) What is Veblen's view on social change? Describe it using five lines.

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### 3.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we have discussed the contributions of three founding fathers of sociology, Georg Simmel (1858-1918), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929).

We have first given a short description of his biography and details of the socio-historical background to which Georg Simmel belonged. Then we have presented to you some of the central ideas of Simmel, such as his formal sociology, his description of the social types, his ideas on the role of conflict in sociology, and finally his ideas about modern culture. We have also discussed the impact of his ideas on contemporary sociology.

Secondly, we have provided a short description of the biographical details of Vilfredo Pareto and the socio-historical background to which he belonged. We have discussed some of his seminal ideas, such as logical and non-logical actions, his concept of residues and derivatives, his theory of elites. We have described the role of the governing and the non-governing elites and about the Machiavellian concepts of the “Lions” and the “Foxes” borrowed by Vilfredo Pareto to explain two types of characters. Finally, we have discussed the impact of Vilfredo Pareto’s ideas on contemporary sociology.

Finally, we have described the biographical details of Thorstein Veblen and his socio-historical background. The central ideas of Thorstein Veblen have been discussed, such as his theory of technological evolutionism, theory of leisure class, leisure class and conspicuous consumption, functional analysis and his theory of social change in society. We have discussed in the end the impact of Veblen’s ideas on contemporary sociology.

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### 3.6 KEY WORDS

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<b>Conspicuous Consumption</b>	It is the use of goods and services which makes the person who used them noticeable by others and raises their esteem in the eyes of others in a materialistic culture, such as wearing diamond studded shoes.
<b>Derivatives</b>	A concept given by Vilfredo Pareto to explain the variable or changing aspects of a social system. For example, there are and there have been several systems of medicine in this world, such as Ayurvedic, Homoeopathic, Allopathic, etc. These various systems of medicine are in Pareto’s terms derivatives.
<b>Law of Natural Selection</b>	It is a part of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. Herbert Spencer too has talked about this law of natural selection in social



evolution. It means that in the struggle for survival in both the physical world, as well as, the social world there exists an automatic process of selection. Only those who are the fittest or best suited to their physical or social environment survive and those who are weak die.

**Leisure**

It is the time free from work when a person does what he or she wants to do, such as going for a holiday or on a trek, read novels or do painting.

**Logical Actions**

A concept given by Pareto which means that those actions which use means that are appropriate to ends and in which means and ends are logically related. For example, if it is raining a person carries an umbrella. Here means is the umbrella and the end is to protect oneself from getting wet in the rain. The means and the end are logically related.

**Non-logical**

Another concept given by Pareto to explain all other behaviours which do not fall into the category of logical action. It is these kinds of actions which are in his view subjects for sociological concern. For example, the act of burning valuable goods during the potlatch ceremony by the Indian tribes in America.

**Pecuniary**

It is any work or business related to money and money-making such as, finance, banking, profiteering etc.

**Predatory**

One who lives by plunder or on preys. For example, the tiger or lion who lives by hunting other animals. In the context of Thorstein Veblen's ideas, predatory refers to those people who do not contribute to the production system but live on the efforts of others.

**Residues**

A concept given by Pareto to explain the constant aspects of a social system. For example, there are several systems of medicine found in this world but behind all these various kinds of medicine there is a constant element of trying to cure a sick person. This element remains constant in all these kinds of medicine. This constant element is called residue by

Vilfredo Pareto and he has given six classes of residues out of which we have mentioned two in the unit. Class I residue relates to the instinct for combination, while the class II refers to the instinct for persistence.

### **Social Forms**

This is a concept given by Georg Simmel. It refers to the underlying uniformities of patterns of interaction of individuals, social actors in social, political economic fields. For example, if we analyse the form of the activities taking place in a corporation we will discover the underlying form of subordination and superordination in the structure of the organisation, besides other forms.

### **Social Types**

This concept too has been given by Georg Simmel and is related to his concept of social forms. He has described a whole range of types from “the stranger”, “the adventurer” to the “the renegade”. According to such concept as “the stranger”, a person is a stranger not because he/ she wanders from one place to another but because of the special status enjoyed by that person as one joins a social group in which he/ she is not originally a member. Thus, a stranger has a fixed social position in society and due to this position is not biased and can perform certain roles special to a stranger alone, like acting as an intermediary.

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## **3.7 FURTHER READING**

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Coser, L.A. 1971 *Masters of Sociological Thought, Ideas in Historical and Social Context*. Under the General Editorship of Robert K. Merton. Second Edition. Harcourt Brace Javonovich Inc: New York

Timasheff, Nicholas S, 1967. *Sociological Theory. Its Nature and Growth*. Third Edition, Random House: New York.

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## **3.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) According to Georg Simmel social forms are kinds of abstracts drawn from the pattern of individual interactions. However diverse the nature

of interactions in terms of interests and purposes might be, there is an underlying form which can be identical in both. Thus, the form of interaction between the leader of a criminal gang and his gang members can be identical to the form of interaction between the leader of a scout group and the other members of his group.

- ii) a) never
- b) types
- d) conflict, never
- iii) Georg Simmel talks about modern culture of industrial societies. He says that in today's world, as compared to the traditional feudal world, human beings have increasingly become more free. The concept of individual has developed due to the existence of intersecting circles of social existence. A factory owner does not have any authority over the factory worker outside the time for factory work, thus, in modern culture human beings enjoy more freedom.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Logical action, according to Vilfredo Pareto, are those actions which use means that are appropriate to ends and in which means are logically related to the ends. While non-logical actions are those which do not fall into the category of logical actions. It is these non-logical actions which are subjects for sociological inquiry.
- ii) The two classes of residues mentioned in the unit are Class I Instinct for combination; and Class II Group Persistence (Persistence of Aggregates).
- iii) "Lions" and the "Foxes" are types of personalities which Pareto has borrowed from Machivelli, the "Lions" belong to class II residue who are responsible, stable conservative, forceful in action. The "Foxes" belong to class I residue because they are imaginative, innovative and unscrupulous. According to Pareto, the governing elite of any society should have a mixture of these two types of people i.e., the "Lions" and the "Foxes" for its proper functioning.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) According to Thorstein Veblen the process of social evolution involves the invention and use of new and increasingly more efficient technologies. The social institutions of a society change along with the changes in technology. The technology or "industrial arts" of a society determines the nature of adaptation of human beings to their natural and social environment.
- ii) a) Parasites
- b) Worth
- c) Social structure
- iii) In Veblen's view social change takes place in society due to conflict. The conflict arises when technology of a society becomes advanced while social institutions of that society remain backward.

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## UNIT 4 HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY IN INDIA -I

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### Structure

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Introduction
- 4.2 Social Antecedents of Indian Sociological Thought
  - 4.2.1 Social Thought in Pre-British Period
  - 4.2.2 Impact of the British
  - 4.2.3 Emergence of the Middle Classes
- 4.3 Socio-religious and Other Movements for Reform
  - 4.3.1 The Reformist Movements
  - 4.3.2 The Revivalist Movements
  - 4.3.3 Other Movements
- 4.4 Political Movement for Freedom after Freedom in India
  - 4.4.1 Social Background of Freedom Struggle
  - 4.4.2 Complementary Nature of Religious and Political Movements
  - 4.4.3 Political Movements related to Women, Minorities, Scheduled Castes and Tribes
- 4.5 Intellectual Antecedents of Indian Sociological Thought in India
  - 4.5.1 Dilemma Between Tradition and Modernity
  - 4.5.2 Benoy Kumar Sarkar
  - 4.5.3 Ananda Coormaraswamy
  - 4.5.4 Some Other Intellectuals
  - 4.5.5 Structure of Modern Education in India
- 4.6 Emergence of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India
  - 4.6.1 Link Between Sociology and Social Anthropology
  - 4.6.2 Link Between Sociology and Indology
  - 4.6.3 Irawati Karve
- 4.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 4.8 Further Reading
- 4.9 Key Words
- 4.10 Specimen Answers To Check Your Progress

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit you will be able to

- describe the social antecedents of sociological thought in India
- discuss the socio-religious movements for reform
- explain the political movement for freedom

- describe the intellectual antecedents of sociological thought
- outline the emergence of sociology and social anthropology in India.

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## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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So far in this block you learnt about the emergence of sociology in Europe in Unit 1, the founding fathers of sociology Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer in Unit 2 and about the founding fathers Georg Simmel, Vilfredo Pareto and Thorstein Veblen in Unit 3.

In this unit we have discussed the social and intellectual antecedents of the history and development of sociology in India. We have also mentioned the impact of the British in bringing about the change in the way of thinking, style of living and behaviour of the upper strata of Indian people. The socio-religious movements were an attempt to rid society of its social evils and rigid values. Freedom struggle and the Indian leaders who participated in this struggle had a great influence on Indian society and culture. It is in the background of these social changes that sociology and social anthropology emerged and developed in India.

Section 4.2 describes the social antecedents of Indian sociological thought; section 4.3 discusses the socio-religious reform movements while section 4.4 gives the social background of the freedom struggle, as well as, the complementary nature of the religious and political movements. Section 4.5 describes the intellectual antecedents of Indian sociological thought and finally, section 4.6 outlines the emergence of sociology and social anthropology in India. In the next unit, Unit 5, you will learn more about three of the major pioneers of Indian sociology, namely, Radhakamal Mukherjee, D.P. Mukherji and G.S. Ghurye.

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## 4.2 SOCIAL ANTECEDENTS OF INDIAN SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT

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India has a history extending over nearly four millennia. Its cultural heritage consists of religious and philosophical works, which were composed in classical languages such as Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali. Besides, in the medieval period Bhakti literature was composed in regional languages such as Awadhi, Braj, Maithali, Bengali, Assamese, Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam. Then there are classical and folk forms of performing arts, architecture, sculpture that embody India's pluralistic tradition of socio-cultural formation, ranging from tribal groups to agriculturists and urban dwellers.

### 4.2.1 Social Thought in Pre-British Period

India is a complex civilisation especially where its literary tradition is concerned. The Indian philosophy consists of six schools of thought namely Yoga, Sankhya, Nyaya, Vaishesika, **Vedanta** and Mimamsa. This is an important source of Indian thought. The thirteen principal Upanishads consist of philosophical enquiries into inner life and ultimate destiny of

human beings. Besides these we have the Buddhist and Jain religions which have many philosophical works. Generally, these schools of thought concern the evolution of mankind towards certain ultimate goals. Salvation, which in India means freedom from the cycle of births and deaths, is the objective of enquiry and cogitation in many of these philosophies. Indian society has all the same been changing and adapting itself to new conditions.

Indian social thought in pre-modern times was the articulation of a **multi-ethnic** society. We have had the impact of Islamic tradition which gave rise to the Sufi cult and had a wide ranging influence on the life style and values, especially in the North. The Sikh religion is a very good example of the mixture of Hindu and Islamic thought. All through, the freedom of enquiry prevailed in India and there was hardly any **persecution** of a group on grounds of belief. Hence, a tolerant attitude towards each other characterised the Indian social groups. While Indian religions thrived among the common populace, Indian philosophy was mainly cultivated among the literate, urban-based classes.

### 4.2.2 Impact of the British

The coming of British into India was an event which had far-reaching consequences for Indian society. The age-old traditions began to decline due to new social and economic forces. The classical languages such as Sanskrit and Persian declined and English became the official language. The traditional handicrafts in Indian country-side fell into decay as they were unable to withstand the competition of machine-made textiles and other goods brought by the British to the Indian markets from Manchester, Lancashire, Sheffield and London. The Indian villages were not able to continue as viable economic units under the colonial rule.

The British brought important changes in India by the introduction of railways, posts and telegraphs which facilitated communication between groups. Further, administrative and judicial services were extended to many parts of the subcontinent. Thus, India entered the modern stage. The schools, colleges and universities were started by the British rulers. **Missionaries** and Indian voluntary organisations also took steps to spread modern education in India.

### 4.2.3 Emergence of the Middle Classes

The erstwhile feudal classes such as, the Rajas, the Zamindars, the Talukdars, etc. were no longer in the center of the stage. Indeed, the middle classes, which emerged during the British period, are now prominent in nearly all spheres of social life in Indian society. The social thinkers discussed in this unit are drawn from the **middle class** base. Although castes are important in ritualistic and domestic spheres, classes have become significant in occupational, professional and public life. The term “middle class” is used here not as a pure economic category. The middle class is the product of both economics and culture. The members of the middle class not only share a common economic life but also a socio-cultural life.



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## 4.3 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS FOR REFORM

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In the nineteenth century and the early parts of the twentieth century it is the members from middle classes who began to think in terms of reforming and modernising Indian society. The reformist attempts contained both religious and social components. Let us briefly discuss the reformist and revivalist movements of the nineteenth century India.

### 4.3.1 The Reformist Movements

One of the early nineteenth century reformers was Raja Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833) of Bengal who believed that Indians could become progressive if they shed the superstitions and evil practices such as Sati, infanticide, etc. He advocated a new kind of religion which combined Christian teachings with Vedanta. He founded the Brahmo Samaj which was meant to be a spiritual **forum**, where a monotheistic, non-**idolatrous** worship could be conducted by its members who had nothing to do with caste or superstition. Ram Mohun Roy's influence was mainly confined to urban, literate groups of Bengal. In the same century, Mahadev Govind Ranade, a jurist of Maharashtra, founded the Prarthana Samaj in Bombay. This was broadly modeled on the Brahmo Samaj of Bengal. The social reactions raised by the two movements were, however, quite different. The Brahmo Samaj by its insistence on Western-inspired liberalism gave rise to a stormy orthodox reaction. Ram Mohun's reforms were strongly opposed by orthodox Hindus led by Radha Kant Dev. Here was a confrontation between tradition and modernity. By contrast, the liberal trends initiated by Prarthana Samaj did not create a direct conflict between tradition and modernity. Unlike the members of Brahmo Samaj, its members did not lead a distinctive, anti-traditionalist life style. So, there was no sharp reaction from society.

### 4.3.2 The Revivalist Movements

Two revivalist movements may be also mentioned. The Arya Samaj launched by Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) was based on an appeal to people to shed the unhealthy features of Hinduism (such as narrowness of caste, superstition, ritualism, etc.) and go back to the pristine purity of Vedas. It sponsored a kind of education which had both traditional and modern components. The D.A.V. or Dayananda Anglo-Vedic Colleges spread education in North India on a wide scale. The Ramakrishna Mission founded by Vivekananda had a two fold purpose: one, to make educated people in India to realise their responsibility to the weaker sections and take steps to remove poverty and social backwardness; second, to propagate Indian Vedanta to the Westerners. In regard to first, many schools and hostels were founded in urban, rural and tribal areas to improve education and employment prospects of common people. In regard to second, Advaita centers were established in many Western countries to bring about spiritual awakening among Western people.

### 4.3.3 Other Movements

Just as reformist and revivalist movements were precursors for social reforms in India and they gave impetus to scholarly activities related to socio-cultural awakening in Indian society., we find that in post-Independence period, degradation of environment and misguided development related movements have also influenced intellectual activity among shows sociologists who focus on the study of .... and problems related to deforestation (Jain 1984) ....., 1994 and 1998-99, 2001 & 2001 6+ 2003 Sillitoc et al 2002 displacement B 1995 , Fernades.....) and unbalanced sex ratio in India (Patel.....). Most of these issues are products of movements taking place in different parts of the country.

Except this brief mention of such trends, we will not go into these details as these developments in Sociology will be included in the syllabus of course of master's degree in Sociology.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Name the six schools of thought found in Indian philosophy. Use about three lines to list them.

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- ii) Mention three of the important changes brought about in Indian society due to the impact of the British rule. Use about ten lines for your answer.

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- iii) Who founded Brahma Samaj? What did it stand for? Write your answer using about seven lines.

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## 4.4 POLITICAL MOVEMENT FOR FREEDOM IN INDIA

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Towards the end of nineteenth century, a political movement for the attainment of Independence arose in India. The National Congress, founded in 1885 by Octavius Hume, established a political forum for debates and discussions.

### 4.4.1 Social Background of Freedom Struggle

Most members of the National Congress were drawn from urban, literate groups. Its essentially middle class character persisted from 1885-1917. With the coming of M.K. Gandhi on the scene, the Congress became a mass based political party, in which urban professionals, peasants, artisans and industrial workers formed the bulk of primary members. Broadly speaking, intellectuals in India did not have to face the type of persecution faced elsewhere for holding independent political opinions or agitating for freedom. However, numerous congress leaders and followers went to prison under the charge of sedition during the Swadeshi Movement, Non-Cooperation Movement and Quit India Movement. Several people were also executed for their participation in anti-state and termed by the British as terrorist activities. However, the distinctive mark of the Indian struggle for Independence was its non-violent approach.

#### Activity 1

Read one novel by famous Indian authors like Tagore, Premchand, Mulkraj Anand, Raja Rao, Venkataramani, or any other author. The background of this novel should be the freedom struggle in India.

After reading this novel write an essay of about two pages about (i) the kind of social institutions, such as family, law, political associations mentioned in the novel; (ii) about the values and norms represented through the actions of different characters in the novel.

If possible, compare your note with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

### 4.4.2 Complementary Nature of Religious and Political Movements

While the religious movements indirectly contributed to political movements through education and reforms, the National Congress and other political parties directly participated in political activities. The former type of movement induced self-confidence, while the latter type created a political

consciousness. Thus, the two types may be viewed as complementary developments in Indian society. We have so far discussed the social and cultural scenario that provided a backdrop for development of sociology in India. However, before we go on to discuss the topic of development of sociology in India and its major pioneers, let us discuss the intellectual climate which gave rise to its emergence.

#### **4.4.3 Political Movements related to Peasants, Women, Minorities, Scheduled Castes and Tribes**

The interface of social institutions and political processes has often given impetus to collective action with some degree of organisation. We find that in India desire for social change beginning with lobbying or advocacy has led to political movements with fairly clear objectives, action-plan and organisation. You may discuss such movements arising in India in the context of rising expectation of the masses, which are not fulfilled by current political set-up (See Kothari 1960, Bayley 1962 and Desai 1965). Mukherjee (1977), Rao (1978) and Oommen (1977) have worked on theoretical and substraction aspects of such movements in India. For enumerating examples of political movement in India, we may look at the Telnagana peasant struggle movement between 1946 and 1951. It was led by the Communist Party of India (see Dhanagare 2002 (1983)). Similarly, various shades of communist parties have continued to organise the Naxal base movement of the 1960s today (see Bannerjee 2002 or 1980, 1996). Both the Telegana and Naxal bound movements have tried to change the existing agrarian relations.

The scheduled castes and tribes, being the most exploited and oppressed segments of Indian society, have quite a long history of protests, struggles and organised movements. Omvedt (2002 or 2001) has worked on the dalit movement after Ambedkar while Sinha (2002 or 1972) and Singh (2002 or 1983) have studied tribal movements. Women's movements in India and their links with the state are subject matter of studies by such scholars as Lingam (2002 or 1998), Jain (1984) and Desai (1988). Participation of youth in student movements has significance from the point of view of leadership formation that matures in the stage of later roels in regional or national politics (see Shah 2002 or 1979. The idea of mentioning these studies at this point is to take your attention to trends in current sociological pursuits. At the level of master's degree courses, such movements will be part of a full paper on sociology of social and political movements in India. (Please note that the year given after 2002 in the above references refer to first time publication of the articles which have been re-printed in the year 2002 publication, edited by G. Shah).

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### **4.5 INTELLECTUAL ANTECEDENTS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT IN INDIA**

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We may make here a reference to the British impact on Indian elites. India had a classical literary tradition which lasted for centuries. The hallmark of elitism was knowledge of Sanskrit. But during the Bhakti phase (approximately from ninth century A.D.) there was the development of a

high quality literature in regional languages. The Bhaktas, who inspired literary activity in regional languages, were either writers themselves or else their teachings inspired literary work. Mention may be made of Tulsidas and Surdas (Awadhi and Braj respectively), Kabir (variant of Hindu), Sankaradeva (Assamese), Chaitanya (Bengali), Namdev and Tukaram (Marathi), Narsi Mehta (Gujarati), Purandaradasa (Kannada), Nayanars and Alwars (Tamil) and many others.

While the Bhaktas remained pre-eminently folk-venerated figures in several regions of India, the elites continued to cling to Sanskrit as the ideal literary form. Prestige was attached to Sanskrit compositions. Even Rabindranath Tagore had to contend with the Bengali traditional elites who held that Sanskrit was much superior medium of instruction. There was a swift but partial change over to English among the Indian elites. According to Edward Shils, in spite of this shift to English there was a sub-conscious longing among the Indian elites for the older Brahminical tradition based on Sanskrit. In other words, the modern English educated elites were more inspired by literary, **humanistic** tradition than by science and technology. This persistence was due to the hold of Sanskrit on the elites.

#### 4.5.1 Dilemma Between Tradition and Modernity

In sum, the Indian intellectual of the twentieth century were caught in the dilemma between tradition and modernity. Tradition stood for the old customs, values, ideals etc. while modernity implied the impact of the Western ideals of rationality freedom, equality etc. Tradition and modernity should not be viewed as polar opposites, but some scholars (e.g. Edward Shills) have used them as a device to distinguish between the old and the new values. Coomaraswamy, a famous social thinker and curator of Indian art in U.S.A., almost veered to the rejection of practices. He meant by tradition the basic premises or core values which were common to both the East and the West. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, an eminent sociologist, took the other extreme of setting aside the traditions of India which were rooted in religion and spirituality. He tried to show the secular strength of India. Yet, he did not altogether reject tradition. He wanted to extract the secular component of Indian culture and use it for human progress.

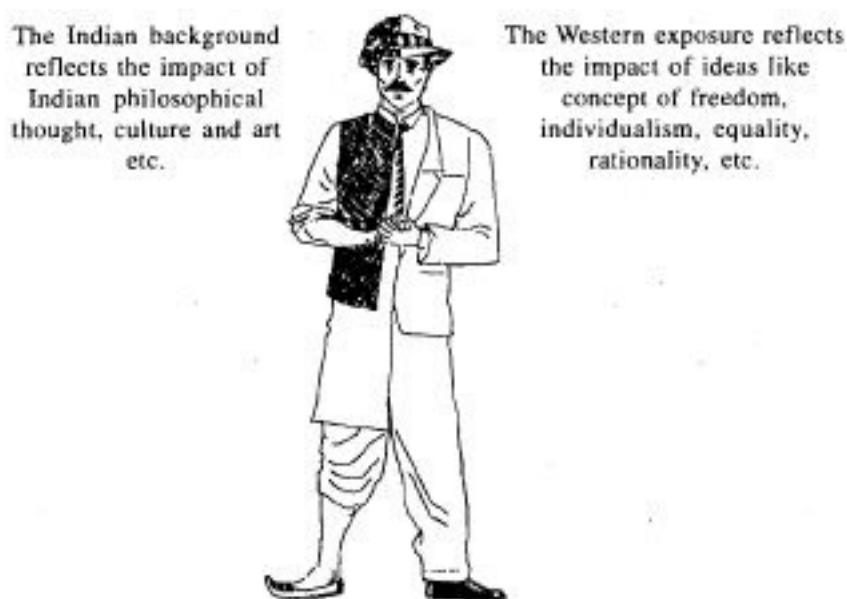


Figure 4.1: The Indian Intellectual

### 4.5.2 Benoy Kumar Sarkar

Benoy Kumar Sarkar was a rationalist. He did not agree with the view that the West was materialistic, while the East was spiritualistic. Sarkar argued that Indian society had materialistic as well as secular components. India's past could be described in terms of positive, materialistic terms. He did not subscribe to the view that India was mystical or otherworldly. Sarkar welcomed the transition of India from a feudal, agrarian past to a capitalistic present. The colonial rule had broken up the isolation of India and brought it into the global mainstream, capitalism or bourgeois culture was the dominant force of contemporary times. In his search for the rationalistic basis of India, B.K. Sarkar resembled Max Weber, who developed a sociology of capitalism. However, Sarkar focused on political aspects of capitalism, while Karl Marx discussed its economic aspects and Max Weber focused on bureaucracy.

In order to march along with the developed societies of the world, India needed self-confidence and poise. Sarkar was an atheist but he did not discard India's religious tradition. According to him, even India's religions had a secular basis. For example, the deities such as Shiva, Parvati or Ganesha were the creations of human mind rather than of divine origin. The Indian tradition with its undue emphasis on mysticism and renunciation could not help India's adaptation to changing times. It was appropriate, therefore, for educated Indians to reassert their rationalist, secular past and equip themselves for the challenges of an urban-industrial society. Sarkar, for example, was opposed to religious revivalism.

The bourgeoisie in the West had succeeded in setting aside their feudal past. The hegemony of the church with its mysticism and renunciation had receded to the background in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. The individuals were no longer mere cogs in the wheel of collectivity. Not only new productive patterns but also new social attitudes were emerging in the new epoch. Individualism gained prominence in the industrial society of Europe. The individuals needed to be aggressive and motivated for action and achievement. The old collective identities were, therefore, buried and new individualistic goals and aspirations began to thrive.

Sarkar was inspired by the two political philosophers of Europe: Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. Niccolo Machiavelli (fourteenth century) wrote his political philosophy in the early days of emerging modern capitalism. The capitalist individual was aggressive, self-confident, and more interested in material gains. His prescription for political rulers was that they should seize hold the opportunity and act ruthlessly to achieve the goals. Thomas Hobbes (seventeenth century) was a later political philosopher. He proposed the theory of social contract. The self-seeking individuals depicted by Niccolo Machiavelli were no longer suitable for the more advanced capitalist society which required order and balance. Therefore, individuals must give up their selfish pursuits, enter into a social contract and abide by norms. This way the individual aggression would



be kept under reasonable control. Sarkar stated that Indians should firstly give up their mystical attitude and secondly they should develop a social perspective suitable to the capitalist order. Important works of B.K. Sarkar are *Positive Background of Hindu Sociology*, 4 Volumes (published in 1914 and 1937); and *Political Institutions and Theories of Hindus* (1922). He taught economics at Calcutta University.

### 4.5.3 Ananda Coomaraswamy

Ananda Coomaraswamy was an early Indian social thinker whose works helped in the development of sociology in India. He was an **idealist**, i.e. a person believing in the abstract values of life like God, values of goodness, etc. In this he stood in contrast to B.K. Sarkar who wished to explore the material basis of Indian society. The first two or three decades of this century may be described as a period of Indian Renaissance. Notable personalities such as Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore were also trying to project an idealistic view of India. In essence all these men held that the greatness of India lay in its spirituality. Through the revival of her spirit, India could not only overcome its poverty and backwardness, but also bring solace to the West afflicted by materialistic greed and disrupted by war and violence.

Ananda Coomaraswamy extensively explored the evolution of art in India, especially architecture and sculpture. For him, Indian art in its myriad forms was not merely a decorative or aesthetic object, but it was the key to understand the Indian mind which recognises oneness of all in the universe or unity in diversity. It was an enduring testimony to a great civilisation and a culture. It embodied the ideals and values of the mankind. In a country where many people are not literate, the Indian art served as a visual medium of instruction; it depicted epics, puranas, and legends in stone, clay or marble for the instruction of folks. Further, it treasured India's religious values and summed up India's recognition of oneness in all forms of expression. Viewed thus, the harsh and the tender, the ugly and the beautiful, the rational and the expressive were all part and parcel of the total artistic experience.

Ananda Coomaraswamy wrote many books interpreting philosophy of Indian art. In the West, India's achievements in the past had been known mainly through the Sanskrit texts. The West had only a vague notion of Indian art which had developed over nearly four millennia. Coomaraswamy held that Indian images were not merely anthropomorphic forms (i.e. folk beliefs transformed in human forms) but also veritable treasure houses of Indian ideals. The Shiva-Nataraja not only denoted a peak achievement in sculpture but also symbolised liberation. Shiva's dance ended the mortal limitations and freed the human soul from its temporal trappings. He noted that there were many parallels between the Indian art and the European Gothic art. Although there were many interpretations of Indian art previously by W.B. Havell, Percy Brown etc., Coomaraswamy presented for the first time a comprehensive philosophy of Indian art.

Ananda Coomaraswamy made a unique distinction between tradition and modernity. He held that tradition was the epoch anchored in values of

collective life and qualitative achievement. As such it was common to all countries – East, Middle-East or West. This epoch was disrupted by the Industrial Revolution whose influence became world-wide. The competitiveness of the new age made human beings materialists and grasping. Ananda Coomaraswamy did not belittle science and technology. But he regretted that in modern times, the science and technology have been put to wrong uses; people became aggressive and selfish; the nations tried to dominate each other through violence and warfare.

In comparing East and West, he did not try to uphold India's superiority over the rest in spirituality and human values. He wrote extensively on the commonness of mysticism in European, Chinese and Arabic religious texts and documents. But he seemed to hold that the Western countries had smothered their mystical and spiritual traditions under the weight of materialistic achievements. Therefore, India could stimulate the spiritual regeneration of the West. India in a special sense stood for the whole of Asia. Although China was a great civilisation, much of its culture was moulded by Buddhism. The other Asian countries such as Japan, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Cambodia too have been moulded by India's culture. In the final analysis, what mattered was the activation of core values which were common heritage of all her mankind. Ananda Coomaraswamy wrote: "The chosen people of the future can be no nation, no race, but an aristocracy of the whole world, in whom the vigour of European action will be united to the serenity of Asiatic thought".

In a similar vein, he wanted the nationalists in India, who were then struggling for Independence, to nurture broad visions. He wanted the young Indians to aspire not only for independent India but for a better world free from strife and tension. Merely imitating the West in the name of progress was not going to help the emerging Indian nation. Indian women should redefine themselves in the Indian idiom; women should be true to themselves and exist on their own terms. If they merely compete with men, forgetting the core values, then they would not reach fulfillment. Ananda Coomaraswamy, in sum, did not advocate orientalising of the West nor did he desire a synthesis of the two. He stood for a return to "the first principles" by which he meant the moral values which were the basis of all humankind. His important works are: *The Dance of Shiva* (Indian edition, 1974); and *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (Indian edition, 1974).

### 4.5.4 Some Other Intellectuals

Radhakamal Mukerjee and G.S. Ghurye, two noted sociologists of Lucknow and Bombay Universities, respectively, were more directly influenced by India's Sanskrit heritage. They looked at modernity as an instrument of adapting traditions to contemporary conditions. In comparison to them, D.P. Mukerji, another eminent sociologist of Lucknow, started off as a Marxist. He viewed tradition and modernity as confronting each other and shaping each other, but he rejected the final Marxist solution of an Utopian state. In other words, he went back to Indian tradition for reconstructing modern India. You will learn more extensively about the contribution made by these three pioneers of sociology in India. But before doing that let us first understand the structure of education in India during the British period. This has had considerable influence on the nature and

type of sociology, besides other social sciences like economics, political science, etc. which developed in India. Sociology in India to a large extent became influenced by such developments primarily in Britain and then America and Europe. Therefore, to understand the structure of education in India is very important.

#### 4.5.5 Structure of Modern Education in India

A few words may be said about the structure of Indian education. In the three British Presidencies, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, universities were established during the nineteenth century. In the princely states of India such as Baroda, Mysore, Hyderabad etc., institutions were established for modern education. While higher institutions had English medium, the lower schools had vernacular (i.e. regional languages) medium. The purpose of education was to train Indians in arts and sciences so they would help in the smooth functioning of British rule in India. The educated Indians were usually absorbed into the lower rungs of administration and judiciary.

In the arts and sciences, a limited number of subjects were taught. These included English, history, philosophy, economics, physics, chemistry, botany and zoology. Sociology came to be taught as a major subject only after the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Sociology developed as a discipline primarily due to the need felt by the British rulers during the colonial period to understand the customs, manners and social institutions of the Indian people. For better administration they required to know the customs and practices of the people whom they were trying to govern. Thus initially it was the British administrators such as, Herbert Risley, J. H. Hutton, Wilson, Alfred Lyell, Baines, etc. who conducted extensive studies of Indian peoples, their cultures and races.

Sociology was introduced in 1914 in Bombay University. The Government of India gave a grant to the university for teaching of sociology and a course of lectures in sociology and economics was offered to the post-graduate students in the same year. In 1919, department of sociology and civics was founded under the leadership of Patrick Geddes who was a distinguished biologist and town-planner.

It was introduced in Calcutta University in 1917, in the Post-Graduate Councils of Arts and Sciences by Sir Brajendranath Seal. Seal was appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University at this time but he was a Professor of Philosophy at Calcutta earlier. It was his efforts and the efforts of A.R. Wadia of the Mysore University, which helped establish sociology as a discipline in the Indian universities. In Calcutta, sociology was taught by Radhakamal Mukerjee and Benoy Kumar Sarkar. Both these sociologists are the pioneers in their fields. Radhakamal Mukerjee later went to Lucknow, which became another center for sociological learning in India in 1921, besides Calcutta and Bombay. He along with D.P. Mukerji and D.N. Majumdar, one a Marxologist/ sociologist and the other a social anthropologist helped found Lucknow an influential centre of teaching and research in sociology and anthropology.

We will discuss the emergence of sociology and anthropology further in section 4.6. Before going on to it, why not first complete Check Your Progress 2?

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Fill in the blanks:
  - a) The National Congress was founded in 1885 by .....
  - b) The National Congress was meant to be a ..... forum for debates and discussions.
  - c) With the coming of Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress became a ..... political party.
  - d) The socio-religious movements induced ..... in the Indian people while the political movement created a ..... consciousness in her people.
- ii) Describe some of the basic ideas of Benoy Kumar Sarkar using about five lines.

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**4.6 EMERGENCE OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN INDIA**

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Sociology, as a discipline, came much after the contributions made by social thinkers, philosophers, administrators who worked at understanding the Indian society, in general, as well as studying some specific aspects of Indian society, such as law, family, religion, caste system and so on.

It is the contributions made by the Indologists, such as, Henry Maine, Alfred Lyell, etc. which helped the development of sociology in India. They emphasised the need to preserve the indigenous social institutions found in Indian society rather than destroying them and imposing an alien way of life on her people. They recognised the past glory of Indian cultural and literary tradition.

Besides Indologists, there were British administrators who made extensive study of Indian people, their races and cultures. Most of these studies helped generate a body of knowledge, preserved in the Census Reports, Imperial Gazatteers, District Gazetteers, etc. as well as in books and monographs, which are referred by social anthropologists and sociologists even today.

Sociology was better established on the continent i.e. in European countries like France, Germany, etc. than in England. It took even stronger roots in American universities where it has retained a dominant position till now. Alongside of sociology, anthropology was also developing in Indian

universities. In the Indian context, it is just not possible to distinguish between anthropology and sociology except in terms of methodology. Generally, sociology has studied urban-industrial groups, while anthropology has focused on tribes, castes and communities. But the sociologists have also been anthropologists and vice versa. In fact, it is better to use the term “ethno-sociologists” to describe those writing in the fields of sociology and anthropology. Ethno-sociologists combine documentary and literary data with oral traditions and field data. Thus, in the Indian academic studies, we find that tribe, caste and region have been linked with each other in a variety of ways. Both sociology and anthropology in India have one thing in common: they are mainly based on empirical data. Both of them deal with aggregates of people in a number of locales, village, town and city. During British rule, a number of ethnographic works were written by J.H. Hutton, Edward Thurston, H. Risley, L.S.S. O’ Malley and others. There were also the writings of Sir Henry Maine and W.H. Baden-Powell on the village community in India. Besides, the many district gazetteers produced by the British officials provided ethnographic and economic data pertaining to Indian society. The Indian sociological works (e.g. G.S. Ghurye’s works) have often drawn upon these early books and documents written by British officials or observers.

In these two units, namely History and Development of Sociology in India Part I and Part II, references will be made to Indian writers who may be regarded as pioneers in Indian sociology. It may be observed that there was a difference between Western and Indian intellectual developments. In the West, modern intellectuals strove to “secularise” the thought. They were reacting to the hegemony of church in doing so. By contrast, in India, the religions did not place a bar on free thinking. The stimulus to creative work in the Indian social sciences came from interaction with the West. Now let us examine briefly in the sub-section 4.6.1 the link between sociology and social anthropology, which as you already know are closely interlinked. Then we will discuss the link between sociology and Indology in sub-section 4.6.2

#### **4.6.1 Link Between Sociology and Social Anthropology**

As has been already mentioned, the link between sociology and social anthropology is very close in India. The emergence and development of both these disciplines was influenced by the growth of nationalism in India. The nationalist movement was itself a product of the impact of the West, especially British colonial rule in India. The repercussion of this impact was felt widely due to several reasons, such as great improvement in communications, transport facilities, printing press, etc.

Modern law and Western education generated a new self awareness in Indian people. The awareness of people along the lines of religion, sects, caste, tribe, region, etc. became more heightened on the one hand, while at a wider level a new sense of unity emerged. All these social changes gave rise to new problems (Srinivas and Panini 1986: 18).

The roots of sociology and social anthropology go back to the period when British officials realised that a knowledge of Indian culture and social life



was indispensable for them in their administration work. In 1769, Henry Verelst, the Governor of Bengal and Bihar, stressed in his directives to revenue supervisors the need for collecting information about the leading families and their customs. Besides the officials, the missionaries too, recorded valuable data about the society of that period. For example, Abbe Dubois, a French missionary in Mysore, wrote in 1816, a book entitled, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, which is very valuable even today. In this book he wrote about the life, customs and rituals of the people with whom he lived. He studied caste and interrelations between castes.

In 1817, the first all-India census was undertaken by the British government. In 1901, Sir Herbert Risley attempted to establish an ethnographic survey of India which was part of the census. The census data became an instrument of official policy. It became a method of creating barriers between Hindus and other groups like tribes, between the various castes, and so on. The British began recording the scheduled castes as distinct from the other Hindu castes as a policy (Srinivas and Panini 1986: 20).

We have already described the establishment of sociology and social anthropology in the Indian Universities. But even before this development, several Indian and foreign scholars such as Brajendranath Seal, Patrick Geddes, W.H.R. Rivers, L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer and S.C. Roy contributed to this field.

B.N. Seal, a Professor of Philosophy at Calcutta University was one of the first scholars to draw the attention of the university world towards sociology. He was actively involved in refuting the unilinear evolutionary doctrines, which believed that society like an organism has evolved from a simple primitive stage to a more complex industrial stage (a good example of this doctrine is the one developed by the second founding father of sociology, Herbert Spencer. For more details refer back to Unit 2 of this block).

According to the proponents of this doctrine Indian society, like several others, in its various aspects represented the lower rungs of a ladder. The twentieth century European civilisation represented the highest point of this ladder. This was an ethnocentric belief of European scholars who believed that their society was the best and most evolved while the rest of the world was in various stages of evolution.

Sir B.N. Seal rejected this view and wrote and lectured extensively, in defense of Indian culture throughout his *Comparative Sociology* (Becker & Barnes 1961: 1142). Seal was responsible for introducing sociology in Calcutta University and later Mysore University.

In Bombay, Patrick Geddes was responsible for the introduction of sociology. A department of sociology and civics opened in 1919 headed by Geddes. This was a landmark in the development of sociology in India. Geddes was influenced by Le Play, an eminent sociologist. Geddes was interested in human geography (i.e. in the relation between culture and environment) and town planning with specific interest in the problems of urban deterioration. He studied the town planning of such cities, as Calcutta, Indore, and temple cities of the South which are of great value. Many



Indian scholars were impressed by his work. G.S. Ghurye, Radhakamal Mukerjee show the influence of Geddes in their own sociological writings (Srinivas and Panini 1986: 25).

Besides these noted scholars who helped establish sociology in India, the ones who developed it and provided a firm foundation to this discipline are D.N. Majumdar and N.K. Bose. D.N. Majumdar of Lucknow university was trained in anthropology at Calcutta University. He worked extensively in both the anthropological field as well as, social anthropology. He studied the races, tribes and cultures in various regions of India. His specific interest was in the study of problems of culture changes and adaptation of tribes and their social problems. He conducted one of the first village studies in India of a village near Lucknow. He also conducted a survey of the city of Kanpur.

N.K. Bose, also a student of Calcutta University, made a very significant contribution to the development of sociology in India. He was a political and social activist who worked as a personal secretary of Mahatma Gandhi during his Noakhali (now in Bangladesh) travels in 1947. He was director of the Anthropological Survey of India from 1959-64 and from 1967-70 he held the office of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Government of India. His contributions were basically in the study of Indian civilisation and culture. He had a historical approach. He was influenced by the teachings of Gandhi and later wrote a critical analysis of Gandhism. His best work is believed to be the *Hindu Samajer Garhan*, which is in Bengali (Srinivas & Panini 1986: 31).

In this section we have described the links between sociology and social anthropology in the context of their growth and development in India. Let us now see the link between sociology and Indology in the same context. Both these aspects are not separate from each other. Many Indological writings are sociological or social anthropological in nature. It is only for the purpose of clarity that we are discussing them in different sub-sections. Before going on to the next sub-section, let us complete Activity 2.

### Activity 2

Select two persons in your neighbourhood. One should be a Pundit or Moulvi or any person who has knowledge of the religious scriptures of his/ her religion. Choose another person who has received formal education at least uptill B.A. in any of the social sciences, such as sociology, political science or economics.

Ask both these persons questions:

- i) Is Indian society materialistic or spiritualistic?
- ii) What are the guiding norms and values of our society?

Write a note of about a page on the opinions of these two persons in two parts, namely –

- i) similar points (ii) different points

Compare your note, if possible with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

### 4.6.2 Link Between Sociology and Indology

The development of sociology in India owes deeply to the contributions made by the Orientalists, such as Sir William Jones, Henry Maine, Alfred Lyell, Max Mueller and others. These scholars studied the rich ancient cultural and philosophical tradition of India. It is for these reasons that they are known as the Indologists. Indology is the study of India and its culture.

Sir William Jones established the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1787. Here he introduced the study of Sanskrit and Indology. One of the main tasks of this society was the publication of a journal devoted to anthropological and indological interests such as study of Sanskrit, comparative jurisprudence, comparative mythology, etc. Scholars like Max Muller learnt Sanskrit and helped in the translations of ancient epics and literature which had been long forgotten by the Indian people.

The knowledge of Sanskrit helped understand the great cultural and philosophical tradition of India. At a time when most educated Indians were facing ridicule at the hands of the British rulers, this knowledge helped revive the self-respect of the people. Ancient law and society came to be examined carefully by the Indologists. Henry Maine visited India and wrote *Village Communities in the East and the West* (1871),

Besides these scholars, there are other who used Indian material such as Karl Marx reports to study religion (Srinivas & Panini 1988: 22).

As already mentioned, the Indological writings dealing with the Indian philosophy, art and culture are reflected in the works of most of the Indian scholars. Ananda Coomarswamy, B.K. Sarkar, Radhakamal Mukerjee, G.S. Ghurye, D.P. Mukerji are some of the examples who have revealed this in their works. We discussed the first two thinkers in this unit but we will give you more details about the contributions of Radhakamal Mukerjee, D.P. Mukerji and G.S. Ghurye in the next units (5).

### 4.6.3 Irawati Karve

Besides these social thinkers there are others like Irawati Karve who has extensively used the Indological literature in her sociological writings. She was a student of G.S. Ghurye in Bombay. She came to head the combined department of sociology and anthropology which started in the late 1930s in Pune. She did extensive field-work in various regions of India. Her knowledge of Sanskrit helped her in understanding ancient literature like scriptures, law books and epics. She used this data to understand the kinship organisation in India. Her book *Kinship Organisation in India* (1952) is one of the best analysis of kinship system found in India (Srinivas and Panini 1986: 30). Irawati Karve belonged to an enlightened family and entered the family of Maharshi Karve as a daughter-in-law. That family had advocated reforms among the Brahmans to the extent of permitting widow remarriage. Her initial work was on the anthropometric measurements of various groups in Maharashtra: she distinguished social groups by their linguistic affiliations and was able to trace origins of different people following the same occupation (potters) and found how some of their groups were exogamous and formed 'castes'. On the other

hand their 'cluster' (or village community) of occupation based castes was joining together of such castes.

Her major work was *Kinship Organisation in India* (1953) in which she divided India into four zones and attempted their comparison. The work starts with the genealogies of the characters in the Hindu epic, Mahabharata and incorporates field notes from different parts of India. She read the Mahabharata intensively. She wrote on Hinduism and gave a new interpretation. In her work she combined her interest in the study of classics (called Indology by the Western writers) with field studies.

She was awarded a special prize for her work, *Yugantar*, based on Mahabharata. It was originally written in Marathi and later translated in several languages, including Hindi and English. Some of her literary pieces found a way into school books in Marathi. Those who have cleared their matriculation in Maharashtra know her as a litterateur and consider it an addition to their knowledge when they are told by their sociology teachers that she was also a sociologist. She laid the foundations of sociology and anthropology in Deccan College, Pune where great intellectuals in various fields were her contemporaries, for example, H.D. Sankhalia in Pre-History, D.R. Gadgil in Economics and so on. This academic climate led ultimately to the development of the University of Pune.

She was an engaging conversationalist and an eloquent speaker. She was also a brilliant teacher of the subject and of course, she was first in time and first in importance among the woman sociologists in India. She has been hailed as the first feminist sociologist of India (see Uberio 1993:96, and Jain .....).

Even today, the ancient Indian literature reveals a lot about the religion and society in India. Several sociologists are still making efforts to understand Indian society through its literature, art, etc.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Name the three British Presidencies in which universities were established during the nineteenth century. Use about 2 lines.

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- ii) Who introduced sociology in the Calcutta University? Describe in about 10 lines his contribution to sociology.

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iii) What is Indology? Name some of the Indologists. Use about 5 lines to write your answer.

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### 4.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you learnt about social antecedents of Indian sociological thought. We have described the socio-religious movements for reform in India and the political movement for independence. Both the religious as well as political movements are complementary in nature. The freedom struggle was led by leaders who primarily belonged to the middle classes. Middle class, as a category, emerged due to the impact of the British rule in India.

We have described the intellectual antecedents of Indian sociological thought and provided in Unit 4 an outline of the emergence of sociology and social anthropology in India.

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### 4.8 KEY WORDS

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<b>Advaita</b>	The vedantic philosophy of Sankaracharya, which believes in the existence of one God
<b>Forum</b>	An assembly or programme for discussion of public matters related to either social-political or economic matters
<b>Humanistic</b>	It is that system of thought or action which is based on the nature, dignity and ideals of human beings
<b>Idealist</b>	A person, whose behaviour or thought is based on ideals such as, those of a visionary or impractical dreamer, or those of an adherent or practitioner of idealism in art, philosophy or literature
<b>Idolatrous</b>	Worship of a statue or image of God
<b>Middle Class</b>	In this unit it is not used as a purely economic category and refers to that category of Indians who belong to the educated class

<b>Missionaries</b>	Those concerned with religious missions, in the context of this unit, the term refers to persons sent by religious (Christian) community to convert heather (non-Christians).
<b>Multi-ethnic</b>	A society having many races and cultures, like India is a multi-ethnic society
<b>Orientalists</b>	Those scholars who study the Eastern cultures like China, India, Pakistan etc.
<b>Persecution</b>	To discriminate against some people or a social group on the basis of religion, caste or class, for example, the persecution of the Jews in Europe on religious grounds
<b>Rationalist</b>	A person who believes in accepting reason as the only source of knowledge and as the only basis for forming one's opinions, beliefs or course of action
<b>Vedanta</b>	A system of Hindu monistic (belief in one God) or pantheistic (belief in many Gods) philosophy based on the Vedas

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## 4.9 FURTHER READING

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Oommen T.K. and P.N. Mukerji, (Eds.) 1986. *Indian Sociology*. Popular Prakashan: Bombay.

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## 4.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) The six schools of thought of Indian philosophy are Yoga, Sankhya, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Vedanta and Mimamasa.
- ii) Three important changes brought about in Indian society due to the impact of the British rule are
  - a) the old traditions and customs based on religion began to decline and new social and economic forces emerged.
  - b) The classical languages, like Sanskrit and Persian, declined and English became the official language.
  - c) Traditional handicrafts declined and were replaced by machine made goods produced in England.
- iii) Raja Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1835) of Bengal founded Brahma Samaj in the nineteenth century. It was a spiritual forum where a monotheistic (i.e. belief in one God), non-idolatrous (i.e. without worshipping a statue or image of God) worship could take place. It stood for a combination of Christian teachings with Vedanta.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i)
  - a) Octavius Hume
  - b) Political
  - c) Mass
  - d) Self-confidence, political
- ii) Benoy Kumar Sarkar was a rationalist who tried to show the secular strength of India. He attempted to bring out the secular component of Indian culture in order to use it for human progress. He did not believe that Indian and western cultures were polar opposites, one being spiritualistic and other materialistic. According to him India had both materialistic and secular elements and it was not other worldly or mystical as popularly believed.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) The three British Presidencies where universities were established in the nineteenth century were Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.
- ii) Sociology was introduced by Sir Brajendranath Seal in Calcutta University in 1917 in the Post-Graduate Councils of Arts and Sciences. He was a Professor of Philosophy at this university and later went to Mysore University as its Vice-Chancellor. He was opposed to the unilinear evolutionary doctrine advocated by the European scholars who believed their society to be the most evolved while societies like India were at a lower rung. Seal conducted studies in what he called “Comparative Sociology”.
- iii) Indology is the study of Indian society, its culture, art philosophy, etc. Some of the noted Indologists are Sir William Jones, Henry Maine and Max Mueller.



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# UNIT 5 HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY IN INDIA - II

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## Structure

- 5.0 Objectives
- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 The Pioneers of Indian Sociology
- 5.3 Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889-1968)
  - 5.3.1 Biographical Sketch
  - 5.3.2 Central Ideas
    - 5.3.2.1 Relationship between Economic and Social Behaviour
    - 5.3.2.2 Social Ecology
    - 5.3.2.3 Plea for Conservation of Forests
    - 5.3.2.4 An Ameliorative Approach to Urban Social Problems
    - 5.3.2.5 Theory of Values
    - 5.3.2.6 Indian Culture and Civilisation
    - 5.3.2.7 Mukerjee's concept of universal civilisation
  - 5.3.3 Important Works
- 5.4 Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji (1894-1962)
  - 5.4.1 Biographical Sketch
  - 5.4.2 Central Ideas
    - 5.4.2.1 Role of Tradition in Indian Society
    - 5.4.2.2 Integrated Development of Personality
    - 5.4.2.3 D.P. Mukerji's Views on Unity in Diversity
    - 5.4.2.4 D.P. Mukerji as an Economist
  - 5.4.3 Important Works
- 5.5 Govind Sadashiv Ghurye (1893-1984)
  - 5.5.1 Biographical Sketch
  - 5.5.2 Central Ideas
    - 5.5.2.1 Caste and Kinship in India
    - 5.5.2.2 New Roles of Caste in India
    - 5.5.2.3 Study of Tribes in India
    - 5.5.2.4 Rural-urbanisation in India
    - 5.5.2.5 Religious Beliefs and Practices in India
    - 5.5.2.6 Role of the Sadhu in Indian Tradition
    - 5.5.2.7 Indian Art and Architecture
    - 5.5.2.8 Hindu-Muslim Relationships
  - 5.5.3 Important Works
- 5.6 Let us Sum Up
- 5.7 Key Words
- 5.8 Further Reading
- 5.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 5.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you will be able to

- describe the contributions of the three pioneers of Indian sociology
- outline the biographical details of Radhakamal Mukerjee, D.P. Mukerji and G.S. Ghurye
- explain some of their central ideas in sociology
- list some of their important works.

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## 5.1 INTRODUCTON

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In Unit 4 **History and Development of Sociology India – I** of this block, you learnt about the emergence of sociology in India. We gave you a broad outline of how sociology came to be established as a discipline in Indian universities. You learnt about the role played by several Indian and foreign scholars in the development of sociology and its link with social anthropology and Indology. You have thus obtained a broad idea of the background in which sociology developed in India.

In this unit, we will deal with the contributions of three of the major pioneers of Indian sociology, namely Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889-1968), D.P. Mukerji (1894-1962), and G.S. Ghurye (1893-1984). We mentioned their names in the previous unit also but here we are going to discuss their central ideas. They worked during a time when the spirit of freedom was alive in the soul of every Indian. The National Movement was part of the background of these scholars and critically shaped their writings.

In this unit, section 5.2 gives a general picture of the three pioneers, Radhakamal Mukerjee, D.P. Mukerji and G.S. Ghurye. Section 5.3 describes the biographical sketch, central ideas and important works of Radhakamal Mukerjee. Section 5.4 provides the biographical sketch, central ideas and important works of D.P. Mukerji and finally, section 5.5 gives the biographical sketch, central ideas and important works of G.S. Ghurye.

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## 5.2 THE PIONEERS OF INDIAN SOCIOLOGY

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In this unit, some detailed references will be made to the contributions of Radhakamal Mukerje, D.P. Mukerji, and G.S. Ghurye to Indian sociology. They were contemporary figures in the Indian academic works. Radhakamal Mukerjee taught in Lucknow Unviersity's department of economics and sociology along with D.P. Mukerji, while G.S. Ghurye taught in the department of sociology, Bombay University. Their works as teachers, research guides and writers left a deep imprint on Indian sociology, especially in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century. They shared a common approach to sociology. Their works covered a number of social sciences in addition to sociology. Radhakamal Mukerjee criticised the **compartmentalisation** in social sciences. In his writings he combined economics, sociology and

history. He was always in search of linkages or common grounds between social sciences. D.P. Mukerji was a Marxist who wrote on Indian society in terms of the dialectical relationship between tradition and modernity. He was in search of an Indian personality whose modernity was based on Indianness. In his views, an Indian uprooted from his or her cultural heritage could not be called a balanced person. G.S. Ghurye was an ethnographer of tribes and castes but he also wrote extensively on other topics. In his writings, Ghurye emphasised integration. According to him, the guiding force in Indian society was the Hindu ideology. Even the Indian secularism was a product of the tolerant spirit of Hinduism. He used history and statistical data to supplement his sociological writings. However, there was a difference between D.P. Mukerji and Radhakamal Mukerjee. Radhakamal Mukerjee remained an economist in a broad sense throughout his career. Even D.P. Mukerji was an economist. He taught economics and sociology at Lucknow University. But Ghurye did not discuss economic topics in his works.

Neither Radhakamal Mukerjee nor Ghurye employed rigorous research methods to conduct their studies. They did not also employ hypotheses to test Indian social reality. They wrote articles and books partly in response to personal preferences and partly in response to pressures of public life. Hence, in their academic careers there was no consciously laid out plan. They wrote on a variety of topical themes such as family system in India, castes and classes, urban centres and agrarian or rural life. In their works, there were many references to Indian scriptures, **canonical** works, epics and Puranas. Radhakamal Mukerjee translated some important Sanskrit works into English during the later phase of his career. Ghurye was a Sanskritist by training before he entered the discipline of sociology. His work on Vedic India, written in the later years, was an example of his interest in Sanskrit works. Now, let us examine one by one the biographical details, central ideas and important works of each of the three thinkers.

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## 5.3 RADHAKAMAL MUKERJEE (1889-1968)

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Radhakamal Mukerjee was pioneer in the areas such as social ecology, interdisciplinary research and the social structure of values. We will first describe the biographical sketch and then discuss his central ideas.

### 5.3.1 Biographical Sketch

Radhakamal Mukerjee was born in 1889 in a large Bengali Brahmin family, in a small country town of West Bengal called Berhampur. He spent the first sixteen years of his life in this town. His father was the leader of the bar, that is a lawyer and was an accomplished scholar with a great interest in history.

Mukerjee, while describing his early years, says that his home was full of books on history, literature, law and Sanskrit (Singh 1956: 3). The general atmosphere in which he grew up was scholarly. His elder brothers were always reading books from which he, being a child, was kept at a distance. His father used to have long meetings with clients throughout the day and long intellectual and religious discussions during the evening. The interior

of the house, where the ladies of the house presided, there were rituals, ceremonies and devotional songs. Mukerjee remembered that his house used to be full of pet animals, especially a golden-hued cow which yielded milk throughout the year. He wrote that these early years were marked by “peaceful tenor of life with its play and schooling, piety and devotion punctuated by the periodic celebration of fasts and feasts, rituals and sacraments, story telling from the Epics and Puranas and visits of ascetics and saints and guest of the household” (Singh 1956: 3).

Mukerjee’s early memories, which left an imprint on his mind, consisted of the picture of sorrow and misery of a large population devastated by famine in Madras and Orissa during the early years of the twentieth century. He was deeply moved by the pictures of human skeletons on the verge of starvation and death published in the newspapers. This was further deepened by the Bengal famine of 1942-43 which he had witnessed in Calcutta. He also vividly recalled the childhood experiences of Muharram processions, Durgapuja festivals, and so on.

It was during the same period of his life that Bengal saw its socio-cultural and intellectual **renaissance**. In 1905 every city in Bengal was in a state of intellectual and political fervent. The partition of Bengal into East and West Bengal, introduced by Lord Curzon, led to a mass uprising against this event. Political meetings, street processions and singing parties, boycott of British goods and propagating swadeshi products introduced him to the mass movement of time.

Mukerjee had his early education in Berhampur. He went to the Krishnath College in Berhampur. He got an academic scholarship in the leading educational institution in India, the Presidency College in Calcutta. He took his honours course in English and History in this college. Here he came in contact with such scholars as H.M. Percival, M.Ghosh , brother of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh and the linguist Harinath De. He admired these scholars very much. It was here that he read books by Comte, Herbert Spencer, Lester Ward, Hobhouse and Giddings, besides many others, from cover to cover. As you must be aware by now many of these scholars are the leading men of sociology in Europe and America.

During this period of his life, Mukerjee launched himself into the area of adult education which remained his interest till the end. The country was going through a political and cultural upheaval during this period which, according to Mukerjee, completely changed the scale of values. This change was seen far more outside the Governmental institutions, taking the form of a literary and artistic renaissance. This renaissance slowly took the form of a mass movement. It was in order to help the process that Mukerjee started an Adult Evening School in 1906 in the slums of Mechaubazar of Calcutta. He wrote simple texts for adult education which sold in thousands. This school became a Community Centre and even the local physicians started taking interest in this movement of social education. They treated without charging any fee the adults and children of the slums (Singh 1956: 5).

Mukerjee valued his early training in the discipline of History very much but “the face-to-face contact with misery, squalor and degradation in the

slums of Calcutta” turned the focus of his interests towards the disciplines of Sociology and Economics. He wrote that there was a definite call in the country for the tasks and responsibilities of education of the masses, and that call could be answered by an Indian student best through the knowledge of the social sciences (Singh 1956: 5). Social sciences during Mukerjee’s time in Calcutta University included the disciplines of Economics, Politics and Sociology at M.A. level.

It was during this period that Mukerjee came in close association with Benoy Kumar Sarkar (We have mentioned Benoy Kumar Sarkar’s contributions to sociology in the previous unit.) Mukerjee and Sarkar shared the same flat and B.K. Sarkar was at that time Professor at Bengal National College, an institution which had given support to such leading thinkers of Bengal as Tagore and Aurobindo Ghosh.

Mukerjee, like many other Indians of his time, was impressed by the fiery political speeches of Bipin Chandra Pal, one of the Congress extremists. But the main interest of Mukerjee was at that time educational rather than political. He and his friends called themselves “Ministers of the Poor” and dressed poorly, giving up western dresses like shirts, coats and shoes (Singh 1956: 6).

In 1910 Mukerjee went back to his old college in Berhampur as a teacher in Economics. He says that this was the busiest period of his life and it was during this period that he wrote his early works in Economics, such as the *Foundations of Indian Economics*. His interest in social ecology and the study of regions also originated during this period. The Principal of his College, Rev. E.M. Wheeler, was deeply interested in the sciences, especially Botany. Therefore, the teachers, including Mukerjee, spent a lot of time collecting specimens of plants and insects of all kinds and studying them. This experience developed Mukerjee’s interest in ecology and he became aware of its link with human community.

At this time Mukerjee also became the editor of the renowned Bengali monthly, *Upasana*. He wrote for this monthly regularly and kept in touch with the literary development in Bengali literature. He was a voracious reader and his interest in literature was very deep.

During 1915 when there were persecutions by the British Government, Mukerjee was once arrested for a day and all his adult schools were liquidated. The charges against him were that he was a “terrorist” or had sympathy with terrorism under the disguise of adult education. Thanks to his lawyer brother he was released very soon. He was offered a position in Lahore College in Punjab and he went there thus, nipping in bud any interest in politics.

He went back to the University of Calcutta where Asutosh Mookerji had established in 1917 the Post-Graduate Council of Arts and Science. He stayed here for five years and taught Economics, Sociology and Political Philosophy. In 1921 he went to the University of Lucknow as Professor and Head of the Department of Economics and Sociology on the very day when the university started functioning (Singh 1956: 10). He introduced an integrated approach in Economics, Sociology and Anthropology in both research and teaching in Lucknow university.

According to Mukerjee, using comparative methods in the study of social sciences in India, we must aim at the scientific study of the race and culture origins. In his intellectual career he was deeply influenced by three social thinkers. First was Professor Brajendra Nath Seal; second was Professor Patrick Geddes; and the third one was an old, intimate colleague who died early, Narendra Nath Sen Gupta. The first two, Prof. Seal and Prof. Geddes contributed to the establishment and development of sociology as a discipline in the Indian Universities. Mukerjee always consulted Seal in all his works. His stress on comparative method in cultural sciences was due to Seal's influence on his work. Patrick Geddes too, influenced Mukerjee's work on study of regions, ecology and population while Narendra Nath Sen Gupta helped generate Mukerjee's interest in Social Psychology.

Besides these Indian thinkers there were many Western social thinkers with whom Mukerjee worked and who influenced his writings. Some of these were sociologists like, Edward Allsworth Ross, Robert Ezra Park of Chicago, Mckenzie and P. Sorokin. Most of these Americans sociologists were interested in the study of region, urban disorganisation, human ecology, social change and so on. The friendship and intellectual interaction with these sociologists stimulated Mukerjee's own efforts in social sciences to which he gives due credit (Singh 1956: 3-20).

Mukerjee taught economics and sociology in Lucknow University for nearly thirty years. He also became the Vice-Chancellor and Director of the J.K. Institute of Sociology and Human Relation of the University. He wrote erudite volumes on several issues. The basic nature of his writings is the integration of the social sciences and he has been a path-finder in many fields. Many of his students and associates reflect this approach in their writings (Singh 1956: 3-20). He died in the year 1968 but his contributions have left a deep imprint on the students of sociology.

### **5.3.2 Central Ideas**

In the Indian universities, the compartmentalisation of disciplines has dominated the scene. Disciplines such as sociology, psychology and statistics have existed side by side in the same college or university but there has been very little interaction between them. In his teachings and writings, Mukerjee emphasised the need for mutual interaction between social sciences on the one hand and between social sciences and physical sciences on the other. For example, Indian economics, modeled on British economics, mostly neglected the traditional caste networks in indigenous business, handicrafts and banking. Economic development was mainly viewed as an extension of monetary economics or market phenomenon. The Western model in economics focused on the urban-industrial centres.

#### **5.3.2.1 Relationship between economic and social behaviour**

In a country like India where many economic transactions take place within the framework of caste or tribe, the "market model" has a limited relevance. Mukerjee tried to show the relationship between traditional networks and economic exchange. The guilds and castes of India were operating in a non-competitive system. The rules of economic exchange were derived from the normative Hinduism, in other words, according to the norms of



Hindu religion wherein interdependence between groups was emphasised. Hence, to understand rural India, the economic values should be analysed with reference to social norms. Religious and/ or ethical constraints have always lent a direction to economic exchange. Values enter into the daily life of people and compel them to act in collectively sanctioned ways. For example, a hungry upper caste Hindu would not eat beef; likewise, an orthodox Muslim or Jew would not eat pork, however urgent may be the need for food. Therefore, it is wrong to always treat economic behaviour as separate from social life or collectivity.

### 5.3.2.2 Social Ecology

Social Ecology was another theme which preoccupied Mukerjee. He wrote a number of books on the theme. For him social ecology was a complex formulation in which a number of social sciences interacted. The geological, geographical and biological factors worked together to produce an **ecological** zone. In its turn, ecology is conditioned by social, economic or political factors. For example, in the past many Indian ecological regions were opened up for human settlement and agrarian development through political conquests. As there is a definite link between ecology and society the development of ecological zones must be seen in terms of a dynamic process: that is, challenge of the environment and response of the people who establish a settlement.

Ecological balance is not a mechanical carving out of a territory and settling people thereon. Such an attempt weakens or destroys social fabric. For example, in building irrigation dams in India, very often people of the concerned locations are moved to new settlements. The lack of a proper perspective on involuntary resettlement and rehabilitation has often caused damage to social life of these people. In many parts of India, there is a traditional system of interdependence known as *jajmani* in the north or by its equivalents in other regions. If people are moved into other locations such arrangements abruptly come to an end. Only by planning suitable alternatives in advance, can this disruption be overcome. For example, the cooperatives can help people, in the absence of old social patterns of interdependence. Hence, social perspective is necessary for orderly and systematic transformation of India into an urban-industrial economy.

In his works on social ecology, Mukerjee took a point of departure from the Western social scientists. In the USA, the Chicago School of Sociology gave importance to empirical studies of such social problems as social disorganisation, urban deterioration, etc. To this school belonged sociologists like Park and Burgess, Louis Wirth, Giddings and so on. This school emphasised the study of human ecology. Here, the focus was on social engineering involving transfer of slum dwellers to new settlements, improvements in living conditions, better prospects of employment, etc. But, according to Mukerjee, social ecology was the better alternative to the havoc caused by rapid industrialisation. India, with its long history, was a storehouse of values. Therefore, in building a new India the planning must not be confined to immediate and concrete problems but must be directed towards value-based developments.

As part of his interest in social ecology, Mukerjee developed the regional sociology. He argued for a better understanding of regional dimensions of national development. If the regions in modern India were developed so as to make them self-sufficient, then the nation as a whole would stand to benefit. Otherwise, some regions would dominate the rest resulting in a lopsided development. As India was a country of diverse regions, each with a distinctive ethno-history i.e. the history of its various ethnic groups, it was imperative to coordinate the developments schemes for maintaining ecological balance. In sum, he stood for a balance between economic growth and ecological fitness. In achieving this end, many skills, such as weaving, engraving etc., were inherited by caste groups in India. These crafts could be well incorporated into the modern cooperatives. In other words, the modernisation of Indian society should not neglect its traditional economic networks. Incidentally, in the post-Independent India, the traditional crafts have been organised into handloom cooperatives, etc. in Tamil Nadu and other states. Likewise, the Khadi Gramodyog has also used the traditional skills for modern production.

### 5.3.2.3 Plea for conservartion of forests

Mukerjee wrote extensively on the danger of deforestation. The cutting of trees subjects the soil to the fury of floods and reduces the fertility of soil. The topsoil which is washed away by floods or excess rainfall cannot be replenished. Therefore, the forest and woods of India were an ecological asset. His plea for conservation has been taken up at present by a number of activists, voluntary organisations such as Chipko and Apko, which focus on halting the destruction of trees. Mukerjee also referred to the danger of mono-cultivation, that is, raising a single cash crop (such as cotton or sugarcane) to the detriment of rotation of crops. Such practices as deforestation and **mono-cultivation** disturbed the fragile ecosystem and gave rise to severe environmental problems. Every year some parts of India especially in the north suffer either from floods or from droughts. Of course, cyclones of the coastal regions are beyond human control, but the man-made disasters, such as the depletion of natural resources through deforestation can be slowed down or prevented.

Mukerjee advocated the integration of village, town and nation into a single, broad-based developmental process. Urban development at the expense of the village should be kept in check. Agriculture should be diversified and industries decentralised. A more equitable distribution of wealth and resources, not only between sections of people but also between regions, would bring about a more balanced development.

### 5.3.2.4 An Ameliorative Approach to Urban Social Problems

Mukerjee was also interested in the **ameliorative** approach to the problems of working class. The industrialisation in India, which has been taking place during the last several decades, succeeded in bringing together people from diverse regions and languages. But the living conditions of workers in the urban centres such as Mumbai, Kanpur, Kolkata and Chennai were adversely affected by slum life. In the early days of industrialisation, urban slums gave rise to vices such as prostitution, gambling and crime. It was, therefore, necessary to bring about drastic changes in the lives of workers to improve their economic and moral conditions.

Today, many private industries and the public section units have provided facilities for the social welfare of a number of workers. Besides, the central and state governments have promulgated legislative acts which are binding on the employers. However, unorganised workers (i.e. who are underemployed, or temporarily employed) continue to live in slums. The rampant problems in the Indian slums at present are consumption of illicit liquor and drugs, crimes, and worsening housing conditions and civic facilities. Therefore, Mukerjee's analysis of the working class is relevant even for the present industrial organisation in India.

### 5.3.2.5 Theory of Values

As noted previously, Radhakamal Mukerjee had a sustained interest in the impact of values on human society. In the middle of the twentieth century, the notion of a value-free social science became dominant in academic circles both in the West and in India. Mukerjee held that a separation between "fact" and "value" was arbitrary. The facts and values could not be separated from each other in human interactions. Even a simple transaction like taking food, wearing dress or greeting others was a value-based or normatively conditioned behaviour. Each society has a distinctive culture and its values and norms guide the behaviour. Therefore, the positivistic tradition of the West which (on the analogy of sciences) wanted to separate facts from values, was not tenable to R.K. Mukerjee, especially in the study of a society like India. In the West, there was a compelling need to free scientific enquiry from the hold of church theology. Hence, it was perhaps necessary to hold that facts and values were separate.

#### Activity I

Note down at least five types of social behaviour that you perform in your daily life and state the values related with them. Some examples of social behaviour are wearing a sacred thread, going to the mosque, temple or church, touching the feet of elders, and so on.

Do you agree or disagree with Radhakamal Mukerjee's opinion that we cannot separate facts of social behaviour from the values which are associated with them? Write a note of one page about this and compare your note, if possible with those of other students at your Study Centres.

Mukerjee underlined two basic points in relation to values. Firstly, values are not limited only to religion or ethics. Economics, politics and law also give rise to values. In other words, human needs are transformed into social values and are internalised in the minds of members of society. Older civilisations such as India and China were stable. Hence, values were formed and organised into a hierarchy of higher and lower levels. Secondly, values are not a product of subjective or individualistic aspirations. They are objectively grounded in humankind's social aspirations and desires. In other words, values are both general and objective i.e., measurable by empirical methods. In general, the great civilisations of the world have subordinated instrumental or materialistic goals to intrinsic or spiritual goals.

To sum up, there are three salient points in Mukerjee's theory of values. Firstly, values satisfy the basic impulses of men and women in an orderly

fashion. This means that the selfish desires and interests are modified by collective living, wherein people give and take from each other. Secondly, values are generic in scope and include both individual and social responses and attitudes. This means that the values are shared by all through their symbolisation. The national flag, for example, is a common symbol for all individuals and groups who constitute a nation. Thirdly, in spite of diversities of human society, some universal values are discernible. The major religions of humankind are repositories of these universal values and norms. A dynamic approach to society will aim at an adaptation of inherited values to the needs of contemporary times.

### **5.3.2.5 Indian culture and civilisation**

Mukerjee also wrote extensively on Indian art and architecture, history and culture. Mukerjee (1964) believed that Asiatic art aimed at collective developments and wrote, “Art in Asia became the torch-bearer of social and spiritual upheavals for millions .....Oriental art is most intensely charged with community feeling and is thus chiefly responsible for the historical continuity of Oriental Cultures”. In contrast, such artistic endeavour in the West had been dominated either by individualism or the feeling that art was an end in itself. This was just not conducive to either social solidarity or spiritual development.

Indian art was embedded in social or ethical sphere. R.K. Mukerjee wrote “The myriad temples, stupas and viharas of India bear witness to the link between art and ethics, religious and social values. Art in India is an enduring component of people’s interaction with each other which shows in concrete forms the active relationship between people’s aspirations and their artistic creativity”.

Indian art was constantly associated with religion. In his historical study of India Mukerjee was impressed by the non-aggressive nature of Indian religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism. The remarkable quality of Indian religions was their insistence on ultimate truth rather than on a particular set of beliefs or rituals. The Indian influences spread to many countries not through war or conquest but through friendship and goodwill. Right from the time of Ashoka, the peaceful “colonisation” of Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Tibet, and other countries of Outer India took place. Indian art and religion enriched the local cultures and by doing so gave rise to a new culture. For example, even today, different styles of Ramayana, the Hindu religious epic, are performed in these countries and several others like Indonesia, Sumatra, Trinidad. Thus, there was the harmony between foreign and indigenous elements. In India itself, the Hindu legal texts such as Dharmasastra are flexible codes to accommodate the ethnic diversities of India. Correctly interpreted, these texts provide a framework of values and norms for the orderly living of diverse groups. Thus, art and religion in India have been tolerant of diverse forms and styles.

### **5.3.2.6 Mukerjee’s concept of universal civilisation**

Mukerjee’s general theory of society sought to explain the values of a universal civilisation. He used the term “civilisation” in an inclusive sense; culture was part of it. He proposed that human civilisation should be studied on three inter-related levels. These are:

i) **Biological evolution**

The biological evolution of human beings has facilitated the rise and development of civilisation. They have the capacity to change the environment as an active agent. The animals can only adapt to an environment; but human beings can mould it in different ways. The human beings, as a biological species, are capable of overcoming competition and conflict and attain cooperation (symbiosis).

ii) **Psycho-social dimension**

There is a psycho-social dimension. In social psychology the people are often depicted within the framework of race, ethnicity or nationhood. Human beings are seen as prisoners of little selves or egos, whose attitude is parochial or ethnocentric. On the contrary, human beings have the potentiality to overcome the narrow feelings and attain **universalisation** that is, to identify oneself with the larger collectivity such as one's nation or even as a member of the universe itself. In the process, common values help to subordinate the particularistic values to universal values. According to Mukerjee, **ethical relativism** which means that values vary from society to society) is not helpful in the present times; there is need for ethical universalism which affirms the unity of the humankind. In the new perspective, men and women become free moral agents who are capable of recognising the common strands binding the humanity. They are no longer dictated by divisiveness or relativity.

iii) **Spiritual dimension**

In Mukerjee's views, the civilisation has a spiritual dimension. Human beings are gradually scaling transcendental heights. That is, they are moving up to the ladder of spirituality by overcoming the constraints of biogenic and existential levels i.e. the physical and material limitations. In this endeavour, art, myth and religion provide the "impulsion" or the force to move upward. As the social sciences have hitherto ignored these cultural elements, they are incapable of providing a spiritual perspective. Incidentally, a similar observation was made by Karl Mannheim, a German sociologist, who wrote on sociology of culture. Mannheim noted that the Western social sciences had neglected cultural dimensions (arts, myths, symbols, etc.) under the rigid code of positivism or structural functionalism. This resulted in a lopsided view of social reality. According to Mukerjee, humankind's search for unity, wholeness and transcendence highlight the spirituality of civilisation. In this respect, he commended the Indian and Chinese civilisations which had endured as stable entities since sixth century B.C. Their strength is derived from their universal myths and values which foster spiritual quest.

Mukerjee noted with satisfaction that the search for universality was embodied in the Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations Organisation (U.N.O.) in the twentieth century. These rights upheld liberty and dignity of people, in whichever country they might be living. Mukerjee's emphasis on spirituality was not an escapist dream. He stated that human progress (in the ultimate sense) was possible only if glaring

disparities of wealth and power between countries were reduced. So long as poverty persisted or political oppression continued, further integral evolution of mankind was not a practical proposition. The persisting human awareness of misery in the world had stimulated the search for universal values and norms.

### 5.3.3 Important Works

Some of Radhakamal Mukerjee's important works in sociology are

- i) *The Regional Balance of Man* (1938)
- ii) *Indian Working Class* (1940)
- iii) *The Social Structure of Values* (1955)
- iv) *Philosophy of Social Sciences* (1960)
- v) *Flowering of Indian Art* (1964)

#### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences:
  - a) Radhakamal Mukerjee was a pioneer in the areas such as social ..... interdisciplinary research and the social structure of values.
  - b) He was against the ..... of social sciences.
  - c) In his writings he combined ..... sociology and history.

ii) Describe in about two lines what is meant by an ecological zone.  
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iii) What is the regional sociology, according to Radhakamal Mukerjee? Describe in about ten lines.  
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- iv) Discuss in about five lines Radhakamal Mukerjee's opinion about "facts" and "values".

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## 5.4 DHURJATI PRASAD MUKERJI (1894-1962)

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D.P. Mukerji (1894-1962) was a Marxist who analysed Indian history in terms of a dialectical process. Tradition and modernity, colonialism and nationalism, individualism and collectivism could be seen as dialectically interacting with each other. In the next sub-section (5.4.0) we will give you a biographical sketch of D.P. Mukerji. This will help you to understand his central ideas in their proper perspective.

### 5.4.1 Biographical Sketch

Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji was popularly known as "D.P.". He was born in 1894 in a middle class Brahmin family of Bengal. It was during this period that the literary influence of Rabindranath Tagore, Bankim Chandra and Sarat Chandra Chatterjee was at its peak. There was renaissance of Bengali literature at this time.

D.P. Mukerji did his graduation from Bangbasi College, Bengal. First he was a student of history which included economics at that time, then he took a degree in economics. He was a man of letters in Bengali and wrote some fiction also but he did not pursue this line for long. He did not confine to the boundaries of a particular discipline. It was perhaps for this reason that he became a sociologist, as Sociology is the most comprehensive social science. He attained not only national but international fame as a sociologist.

In 1922 he joined the Lucknow University as a lecturer in Economics and Sociology. He was in his own words a Marxologist. His roots in middle class Brahmin family led him instinctively to blend Marxism with Indian tradition. D.P. Mukerji always thought that ideas of Karl Marx were relevant in India when adapted to conditions of Indian history and tradition. He, therefore, always emphasised the study of social processes and social movements.

He was born in the golden age of criticism and reflected this age in true senses in his own work. To every subject he brought critical criteria from as many fields as possible. He had the faculty of looking at every problem from a new angle. He was an art critic, music critic, a drama critic and a critic of life. In him we find a blend of Anglo-Bengalee culture.

D.P. Mukerji was a man of aesthetic sensibilities. He was interested in style, even in the style of his dress. He was a slim man who disliked gaining even an extra pound of weight. In thinking also he hated padding or writing

anything superfluous or irrelevant. His style of writing was sharp, spare and incisive. He was a sophisticated man who rarely revealed his emotions. For him, emotions should not be exhibited but should be fused with the intellectual process.

He loved to be a teacher and was very popular amongst his students. He encouraged dialogue and interchange of ideas with his students. Thus, he was co-student, a co-enquirer who never stopped learning. He was such an influence on his students that he lived in the minds of his students even after his death.

For sometimes D.P. Mukerji became the Director of Information when the Congress assumed office in U.P. His influence brought the spirit of an intellectual approach to public relations. He was also part of the foundation of the Bureau of Economics and Statistics. He returned in 1939 to the Lucknow University when Congress relinquished office on the war issue at the beginning of the Second World War. In 1947 he was appointed as a member of U.P. Labour Inquiry Committee. It was in 1951 that he was made a professor. This was a late recognition but D.P. never felt bitter about it.

A year before his retirement at Lucknow, in 1953, he was invited to head the Department of Economics at Aligarh. He stayed there for five years. He went to the Hague as a visiting professor of sociology at the International Institute of Social Studies. He was a founder member of the Indian Sociological Association and one of the members of its Managing Committee and its Editorial Board. He also represented the association at the International Sociological Association of which he became the Vice President.

He wrote several books and articles in diverse fields. After Independence he watched political movements with great interest but was not a politician in any sense. He was influenced by two national leaders, Rafi Ahmad Kidwai and Jawaharlal Nehru. He used to correspond with Nehru. As an intellectual he did not have a cloistered mind. He brought refinement to his subject. He was influenced by many but till the end he remained a scholar who influenced many others. He died of throat cancer in 1962. But as stated earlier, he survives through his students.

### **5.4.2 Central Ideas**

Marxism, according to D.P. Mukerji, helped one to understand the historical developments well but it could not offer a satisfactory solution to human problems. That solution was to be found in the regeneration and reinterpretation of India's national culture. He was opposed to the positivism of modern social sciences which reduced individuals into biological or psychological units. The industrial culture of the West had turned individuals into self-seeking agents; the society in the West had become ethnocentric. By emphasising individuation (i.e., recognition of the roles and rights of the individual) positivism had uprooted the social anchors of humanity.

#### **5.4.2.1 Role of tradition in Indian society**

Mukerji held that tradition was the mainspring of culture. The individuals drew their nourishment from the tradition. They did not lose a sense of

purposes or direction. But tradition often became a deadweight, as in India. Also, people made fetish of it, that is, they idealised it and worshipped it. Cultural stagnation was bound to result on account of the people's uncritical attitude towards it. Therefore, individuation must also be encouraged. The individuals can recreate culture by infusing it with new vigour. The individual is to be neither totally free nor unfree. For the evolution of a healthy personality, there must be a balance between individuation and sociation. Sociation is the bond of the individual with society. Individual's freedom must not be anarchy but a creative expression of the tradition.

#### **5.4.2.2 Integrated development of personality**

Mukerji did not commend to Indians the positivistic construction of personality. The Western personality made a fetish of achievement. Science and technology had been harnessed to great improvements in the living conditions of masses. The capacity of human beings to control nature and use it to their advantage were the notable achievements of the modern age. However, the Western approach could not lead to an integrated development. For an integrated development of personality there was need for a balance between technological development and human freedom. Even a socialist society such as Soviet Russia had failed to evolve a balanced personality. There, the individuals had been dominated by the state or the political party.

D.P. Mukerji's dialecticism was rooted in humanism which cut across narrow ethnic or national consideration. In the West, the individuals had become either aggressive or docile. The Western progress was devoid of humanism. The Renaissance and Industrial Revolution had freed individuals from the grip of stagnant medieval tradition but at the same time reduced the humanist content of progress. The modern nationalism is essentially nurtured in the positivistic aspects of the West. It could not be an appropriate model for India. Besides, India's middle classes were a product of Western impact on India. They were uprooted from their own indigenous tradition. They had lost contact with the masses. India could become a modern nation if the middle classes reestablished their links with the masses. Only then a genuine development was possible. For D.P. Mukerji growth was a mere quantitative achievement, development was a qualitative term denoting value-based progress.

#### **5.4.2.3 D.P. Mukerji's views on Unity in Diversity**

D.P. Mukerji was involved in depicting Hindu-Muslim relations. His search for truth led him to discover humanistic and spiritual unity in the diversities of Indian culture. He was examining many of the areas within the broad framework of Hindu-Muslim interaction. There were three areas of interaction which were worthy of note. i) Politically, the Islamic kings ruled over the Hindu subjects from eleventh to seventeenth centuries A.D. in North India. At the same time, there were established alliances between Muslim rulers and Hindu rajas. Hence, there was a sense of partnership between Muslim rulers and Hindu subjects; this was more evident during the Mughal rule. ii) In economic relations, during the Islamic rule while the jagirdars (military chiefs) were Muslims, most of the zamindars were Hindus. These two groups shared many interests in common. Thus, together

these two classes formed an alliance. iii) Culturally, in literature, music, costumes, cultivation of fine arts, etc., there were reciprocal influences. Both Sufism and Bhaktism in the north encouraged mutual interactions. However, the Muslims and Hindus differed in their world view.

Mukerji noted that the Hindu mind thought in terms of cycles: the good and the bad succeeded each other. The Hindus had a fatalistic view. Further, the Hindu world view was the product of a distinctive territory, a subcontinent. Islam by contrast was a multi-ethnic, multi-national religion. Hindu approach to nationhood was idealistic, Islamic approach was pragmatic. For the Hindu freedom was a “birth right”; for the Muslim it was an opportunity. The Muslim view was non-cyclic and non-fatalistic. Hence the Muslim view favoured direct action to make the best use of a political crisis or opportunity.

#### **5.4.2.4 D.P. Mukerji as an economist**

D.P. Mukerji was by training an economist. His approach to economics was, however, distinct from that of other economists. He viewed the economic development in India in terms of historical and cultural specificities. The economic forces in India were influenced by social values. During ancient times, the king and the members of royal court did not own the lands. The powers conferred on the king were limited to fiscal obligations; that is to say, the tillers of land had to give a portion of their produce to the treasury as tax or revenue in return for the royal protection. The ownership of the land was mainly vested in the village councils. During the heyday of Buddhism, the Sangha (monastic organisation) often managed extensive lands, which were granted to them by kings. Although the individual monks (Bhikshus) could not possess or own property, the Sangha owned properties. One-sixth of the agricultural produce called as tax by the Sangha was utilised for the cultivation of learning and pursuit of ethical and spiritual goals.

Just as village lands were controlled by kin and caste groups, which were internally autonomous, even trade and banking in India were managed by kinship and caste networks in pre-modern times. The guilds which carried on regional trade were usually based on castes. Commercial banking was also controlled by castes. There were important money-lending Hindu families on the West coast whose influence was widespread especially during Mughal rule. Mukerji did not treat the merchants as mere parasites; on the contrary, he regarded them as those who established trade networks between urban centres and rural hinterland. But during the colonial rule they began exploiting as they shed their earlier cultural constraints. The Indian merchant princes often travelled to foreign countries to display their wares; thereby they linked India to the outside world not only through trade but through the spread of culture.

The British rule in India brought about widespread changes in Indian economy. The urban-industrial economy introduced by the British set aside not only the older institutional networks but also the traditional classes. This called for a new social adaptation. In the new set-up the educated middle classes of India's urban centres became the focal point of society. However, these middle classes were dominated by Western life styles and

thinking. The future of India would be secure if the middle classes reached out to the masses and established an active partnership with them in nation-building.

### 5.4.3 Important Works

Some of the important sociological works of D.P. Mukerji are:

- i) *Basic Concepts in Sociology* (1932)
- ii) *Personality and the Social Sciences* (1924)
- iii) *Modern Indian Culture* (1942)
- iv) *Problems of Indian Youths* (1946)
- v) *Diversities* (1958)

Out of these books, *Modern Indian Culture* (1942) and *Diversities* (1958) are his best known works. His versatility can be seen from his other contributions too, such as, his books,

- i) *Tagore: A Study* (1943)
- ii) *On Indian History* (1943)
- iii) *Introduction to Indian Music* (1943)

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Describe D.P. Mukerji's sociology in about six lines.

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- ii) Give the names of the two of D.P. Mukerji's major works in sociology.

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## 5.5 GOVIND SADASHIV GHURYE (1893-1984)

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G.S. Ghurye, as you know, taught in the Department of Sociology, Bombay University. He was an ethnographer who studied tribes and castes of India using historical, Indological and statistical data. Let us first learn the biographical details about him. Then we will examine his central ideas and important works in sociology.

### 5.5.1 Biographical Sketch

In this sub-section we have described the biography of G.S. Ghurye based on his own book (1973) *I and Other Explorations*. Govind Sadashiv Ghurye was born on 12<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1893 in a small town called Malvan on the west coast of India. Malvan is some two-hundred miles away from Mumbai. He belonged to a fairly prosperous Brahmin family, which owned shops and other property. He was named after his grandfather who died the same year when he was born. His family was very religious and well known in that region for piety.

Due to loss in business and the death of his grandfather G.S. Ghurye's father had to take up a job. His job proved to be very lucky for the family. Ghurye was one of four children of his parents. He had an elder brother whom he admired very much, another brother and a sister.

He joined school in Malvan. In 1905 his "thread ceremony" was performed. At this time he had completed his fifth standard examination and joined an English school. His mother tongue was Marathi and his early schooling was also in Marathi. But knowledge of Sanskrit was there in the family. His grandfather knew Sanskrit. He too, started learning Sanskrit. The religious atmosphere of the family and its reputation for piety and learning had a deep influence on G.S. Ghurye. He grew up learning English and received modern education but his roots in Hindu culture and tradition were very deep.

He was sent by his mother to complete his matriculation from Junagad in Gujarat. Here his eldest brother was already studying. He became a student of the Bahauddin College in 1912. Here he became very proficient in Sanskrit. He joined Bombay university which used to have an entrance exam then. He cleared this examination with twenty other boys. There were no girls at that time but later a Christian girl joined their class. He had obtained first position in his college. In the university he secured fourth position. His brother was teaching physics at the university when Sadashiva joined it. G.S. Ghurye was a very hard working student and in spite of the short phases of illness he managed to do very well in his studies.

In 1916 when G.S. Ghurye had completed his B.A. examination and stood first in it, he was married to a girl of a fairly rich family of Vengurla (Maharashtra), of his own sub-caste. His parents named his wife Rukmini after the marriage as per the practice amongst the Maharashtrians. But Ghurye reverted back to calling her Sajubai, which was her original name when they established their own household in 1923. He was against the practice of changing the personal name of a girl after marriage. He was also against the traditional practice of tattooing the skin because he considered it barbaric. For his B.A. result he received the Bhau Daji Prize, named after the great Indologist Bhau Daji Lad who was one of the first physicians of Mumbai, trained in the western system of medicine. G.S. Ghurye had secured seventy four per cent marks in Sanskrit in his college.

Sadashiv was appointed a Fellow of the college and completed his M.A. degree. The languages he chose in his M.A. course were English, Sanskrit and later he took Pali. He also did a course which was newly introduced in the university on comparative philology. He got first class in M.A. also.



He was awarded the Chancellor's Gold Medal, a top most honour in the whole university. His success was unique in the history of the university because nobody before him had ever got first class in M.A. with Sanskrit.

He later applied for a scholarship to go abroad for studies in sociology, which the Bombay university had advertised earlier. He was asked to meet Prof. Patrick Geddes of sociology in Bombay university. During his interactions with Prof. Geddes he wrote an essay on "Bombay as an Urban Centre" which was highly appreciated by Geddes. This enabled Ghurye to get the foreign study scholarship.

Ghurye went to England by ship. He became a student of L.T. Hobhouse. Besides many other people, he met Dr. A.C. Haddon who was the world famous ethnologist studying preliterate cultures. It was Haddon who introduced Ghurye to Dr. W.H.R. Rivers whose influence on Ghurye was considerable. Rivers was at the pinnacle of his intellectual glory and was founder of the Cambridge School of Psychology. Rivers later came to India and studied a polyandrous tribe called the Todas of the Nilgiri Hills.

Ghurye wrote several articles in sociology at this time and got them published in the *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* and in the journal, *Anthropos*. He wrote his most important work, *Caste and Race in India*, during the 1930s. He was awarded the degree of Ph.D. from Cambridge university. He came back to India after W.H.R. Rivers' death.

He worked in Calcutta for 7 months on a scholarship which he received from Bombay University. Then he and K.P. Chattopadhyaya of Calcutta University got appointments as Readers in Sociology at Bombay university, in 1924. He got this appointment due to the great respect and recognition given to him by the late Dr. W.H.R. Rivers. G.S. Ghurye joined the Bombay Asiatic Society as a member in the same year. He guided several students under him. Some of his students are now famous sociologists. They made significant contributions to the growth of sociology and social anthropology in India.

G.S. Ghurye was made a Professor of Sociology in 1934, ten years after he joined the Bombay university as a Reader and the Head of the Department of Sociology. He was elected the President of the anthropological section of the Indian Science Congress in 1934. In the same year he was elected as the nominee of the Royal Asiatic Society by the Managing Committee of its Bombay branch. In 1942 he became the President of the Bombay Anthropological Society and continued to hold this position till 1948. He wrote several books and articles and his knowledge of Sanskrit enabled him to study the religious scriptures in the context of Indian society. He studied castes and tribes, rural-urbanisation, about the Indian Sadhus, about Indian costumes and so on. During his life time he won several top honours accorded to any intellectual in India. He became not only a nationally but internationally known sociologist of India. He died in the year 1984.

### 5.5.2 Central Ideas

G.S. Ghurye's contributions to Indian sociology were mainly in the areas of ethnography of castes and tribes, rural-urbanisation, religious phenomena,

social tensions and Indian art. Let discuss his ideas in the following sub-sub-section.

### **5.5.2.1 Caste and Kinship in India**

In the early 1930s, G.S. Ghurye published a book, *Caste and Race in India* which still is an important source book on Indian castes. In this work, he examined the caste system from historical, comparative and integrative perspectives. Later, he made a comparative study of kinship in Indo-European cultures. In his studies of kinship and caste, Ghurye emphasised two points: (a) the kin and caste networks of India had parallels in some other countries also; and (b) the kinship and caste in India served as integrative framework. The evolution of Indian society was based on the integration of diverse racial or ethnic groups through these networks.

The gotra and charana were kin-categories of Indo-European languages which systematised the rank and status of the people. These categories were derived from names of the sages of the past. These sages were the real or eponymous founders of the gotra and charana. In India descent has not always been traced to the blood tie; the lineages were often based on spiritual descent from sages of the past. Outside the kinship we might notice the guru-shishya relationship, which is also based on spiritual descent; the disciple is proud to trace his descent from a master. Likewise, caste and sub-caste integrated people into a ranked order based on norms of purity-pollution. The rules of endogamy and commensality which marked off castes from each other, were in fact integrative instruments to organise them into a totality or collectivity. The Hindu religion provided the conceptual and ritualistic guidelines for this integration. The Brahmins in India played a key role in legitimising the caste ranks and orders through their interpretation of Dharmashastras, which were the compendia of sacred codes.

### **5.5.2.2 New Roles of Caste in India**

Ghurye's work on caste contained some interesting speculations, which have been proved to be correct. Firstly, he noted that the Indian castes had fostered voluntary association for furtherance of education and reformist aims. The Nadars, Reddys and Kammas of South India, Saraswat Brahmins of Maharashtra and Vaisyas, and Kayasthas of North India, to mention only a few, founded caste associations. Ghurye presumed that in the future they would give rise to a political consciousness based on caste ties. In the post-Independent India, the caste associations have been quite vocal about getting political concessions to their members. In the later decades of twentieth century, Rajni Kothari, a political analyst, extensively analysed the caste associations. Unlike Ghurye, Kothari recognised the positive roles of these caste associations such as taking up welfare activities, etc. According to Ghurye, they have served to mainly articulate the people's political aspirations in a democratic framework. Secondly, Ghurye referred to the various agitations of the backward classes for better privileges. These struggles seemed to be undermining the integrity of the Indian society. Thus, the caste system was becoming "pluralist" in the sense that each caste was in competition or conflict with the other for bigger share of the nation's wealth. Hence, according to Ghurye this scramble for privileges was damaging the unity of society.

### 5.5.2.3 Study of tribes in India

Ghurye's works on the tribes were general as well as specific. He wrote a general work on scheduled tribes in which he dwelt with the historical, administrative and social dimensions of Indian tribes. He also wrote on specific tribes such as the Kolis of Maharashtra. Ghurye was of the view that the Indian tribes were like "backward Hindus". Their backwardness was due to their imperfect integration into Hindu society. The Santhals, Bhils, Gonds, etc. who live in South-Central India are examples of it. Ghurye (1963) wrote, "While sections of these tribes are properly integrated in the Hindu society, very large sections, in fact the bulk of them are rather loosely integrated..... Under the circumstances, the only proper description of these peoples is that they are the imperfectly integrated classes of Hindu society".

For Ghurye, the incorporation of Hindu values and norms into tribal life was a positive development. With increasing contact with the Hindu social groups the tribes had slowly absorbed certain Hindu values and style of life and came to be considered part of the Hindu caste society. The tribes gave up liquor-drinking, received education and improved their agriculture under Hindu influence. In this respect, Hindu voluntary organisations such as Ramakrishna Mission and Arya Samaj played a constructive role. In his later works on north-eastern tribes, Ghurye documented secessionist trends. He felt that unless these were held in check, the political unity of the country would be damaged.

### 5.5.2.4 Rural-urbanisation in India

Ghurye was interested in the process of rural-urbanisation. He held the view that the urbanisation in India was not a simple function of industrial growth. In India, the process of urbanisation, at least till 1980s, started from within the rural area itself. Ghurye quoted Sanskrit texts and documents to illustrate the growth of urban centres from the need for markets felt in rural hinterland. In other words, owing to the expansion of agriculture, more and more markets were needed to exchange the surplus in food grains. Hence, in many rural regions, one part of a big village was converted into a market; in turn, this led to a township which developed administrative, judicial and other institutions. We may add here that urban centres were also based on feudal **patronage**. In the past, demand of royal courts for silk cloth, weapons, jewellery, metal artifacts led to the growth of urban centres such as Varanasi, Kanchipuram, Jaipur, Moradabad etc.

In sum, Ghurye's approach to "rural-urbanisation" showed the indigenous source of urbanism. The growth of metropolitan centres during colonial times altered the Indian urban life. The towns and cities were no longer the outlets for agricultural produce and handicrafts; but they became the major manufacturing centres, which used rural hinterland for producing raw-materials and turned it into a market for selling industrial products. Thus, metropolis came to dominate the village economy. In contrast to previous pattern, now the urbanisation has started making inroads into the rural hinterland.

Ghurye made the study of a village in Pune district of Maharashtra to highlight the continuity of the social structure. This village named Lonikand

had been studied by a British officer in 1819. He described its general layout, economic infrastructure, caste composition, market transactions and political and religious dispositions. The re-survey of the village made by Ghurye in 1957 did not reveal any far-reaching differences in the demographic, economic and social dimensions of the village. Besides, he found that the layout of the village corresponded to the pattern laid down in a text of antiquity. He also noted that the village did not have a very well-knit social structure; there were loose strands in its social fabric. In spite of it the village had survived as a viable unit.

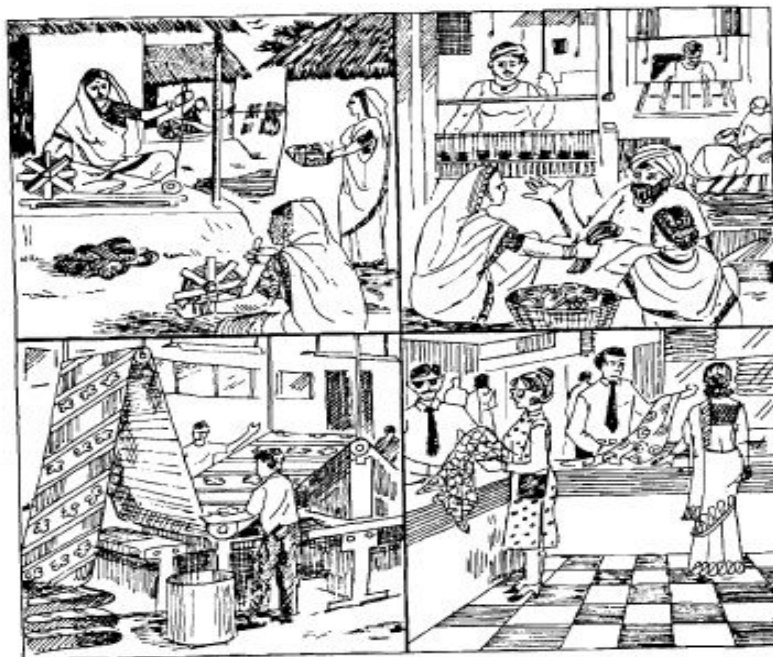


Figure 5.1: RURAL - URBANISATION

### Activity 2

Read carefully the paragraphs in sub-section 5.5.2 on central ideas of G.S. Ghurye on rural-urbanisation in India. Discuss with two elders about the kind of changes they have seen taking place in their city, town or village after the colonial period. Ask them about the changes in the layout of the village, that is, how it has been planned, where the market is situated, where the residential areas are situated and so on.

Write a note of about a page on the – “Rural-Urban growth in My City or Town or Village”. Compare your note, if possible, with notes of other students at your Study Centre.

### 5.5.2.4 Religious Beliefs and Practices in India

Ghurye made original contributions to the study of Indian religious beliefs and practices. He wrote three books on this in the period between 1950 and 1965. He argued that the religious consciousness in ancient India, Egypt and Babylonia was centered around the temples. There were also similarities between Indian and Egyptian patterns of worship and temple architecture. In his work on the role of Gods in Indian religion, Ghurye traced the rise of major deities such as Shiva, Vishnu and Durga to the need to integrate local or sub-regional beliefs into a macro-level system of worship. The diverse ethnic groups in India were integrated into a religious complex around these deities. Political or public patronage was often the basis for the spread of popular cults in India. The Ganesha festival in



Maharashtra and Durga festival in Bengal gained popularity due to the efforts of nationalists such as B.G. Tilak and Bipin Chandra Pal who were using religious idiom for the propagations of political ideas during the freedom struggle. Even in the beginning of the twenty first century, these festivals have retained some political overtones.

#### 5.5.2.5 Role of the Sadhu in Indian tradition

In his work, *Indian Sadhus*, Ghurye (1953) examined the paradoxical nature of renunciation in India. In Indian culture, the Sadhu or Sannyasin is supposed to be detached from all caste norms, social conventions, etc. In fact, he is outside “the pale of society”. It is the usual practice among Shaivites to conduct a “mock funeral” of one who is entering the path of renunciation. It means that he is “dead” to society but is “reborn” in spiritual terms. Yet, interestingly enough since the time of Shankara, the eighth century reformer, Hindu society has been more or less guided by the Sadhus. These Sadhus are not individual hermits. Most of them are organised into monastic orders which have distinctive traditions. The monastic organisation in India was a product of Buddhism and Jainism. Shankara introduced it into Hinduism.

Indian renouncers have acted as the arbiters of religious disputes, patronised learning of scriptures and even defended religion against external attacks. So, renunciation has been a constructive force in Hindu society. Ghurye considered in detail the different groups of Sadhus. Important among them were the Shaivite Dashnamis (literal meaning: ten orders) and Vaishnavite Bairagis. Both these groups had the Naga (militant naked ascetics) contingents which were ready to fight off those who threatened the Hindu religion. Incidentally, Bankim Chandra Chatterjee’s Bengali novel, *Anand Math* recounts the story of a group of Shaivite monks who put up an armed struggle against the British forces in the nineteenth century. They were no doubt defeated by the British but they thereby revealed their staunch commitment to Hinduism. These Sadhus who assembled on a large scale at Kumbh Mela were the very microcosm of India; they came from diverse regions, spoke different languages but belonged to common religious orders. Asceticism, according to Ghurye, was not a relic of the past but a vital aspect of the current practices of Hinduism. The well-known ascetics of the recent times, Vivekanand, Dayanand Saraswati and Sri Aurobindo worked for the betterment of Hinduism.

#### 5.5.2.6 Indian art and architecture

Ghurye was also keenly interested in Indian art. According to him, the Hindu, Jain and Buddhist artistic monuments shared common elements. By contrast, Hindu and Muslim monuments were grounded in diverse value systems. The Indian temples were indigenous in inspiration. The Veda, epics and Purana provided them with popular themes. But Muslim art was Persian or Arabic and had no roots in this soil. He did not agree with the view that the Muslim monuments in India represented a synthesis. The Hindu elements remained decorative in Muslim buildings. By contrast, the Rajput architecture retained its commitment to Hindu ideals, in spite of political control of Rajasthan by Muslim rulers. Ghurye traced the costumes in India from the ancient to the present time. He drew upon Hindu, Buddhist

and Jain artistic works (architecture and sculpture) to illustrate the variations in costume over the ages.

Radhakamal Mukerjee, as noted earlier, wrote on Indian art. There was, however, a difference in his approach to art. Mukerjee viewed it as a vehicle of values, norms and ideals of a civilisation which had thrived through centuries. Ghurye, by contrast, was looking at art as a specifically Hindu configuration. Ghurye wrote that Rajput architecture was the assertion of Hindu faith in its own destiny. Mukerjee looked at the same phenomenon of artistic activity somewhat differently. He held that the Rajputs were fervently engaged in building monuments which they believed would outlast them as their artistic heritage. Thus, in spite of their continuous battles with Muslim overlords, they used their resources to patronise art.

### 5.5.2.7 Hindu-Muslim relationships

Ghurye's works often discussed Hindu-Muslim relationships. He regarded Hindus and Muslims as separate groups, with little possibility of mutual give and take.

The pro-Hindu stance of Ghurye was based on the conflicts engendered by nearly seven centuries of Islamic rule in India. The forced conversions, destruction of places of worship, etc. no doubt damaged the Hindu psyche. Looking critically at Ghurye's views, it is necessary to add here that the predatory acts of Muslim rulers find no sanction in Koran. Islam does not advocate violence. What happened was that political expediency rather than commitment to faith made the Muslim rulers use force against their subjects. Besides, Hindu-Muslim interactions have been culturally productive and socially beneficial. Sufism stimulated Bhakti movement in India; the growth of Urdu literature, Hindustani classical music and shared patterns of life style showed that Islamic rule had a positive side. Communal tensions were in fact mainly a product of colonial rule. It was a political strategy of the British to divide the Indian society, especially the Hindus and the Muslims, after the 1857 Mutiny so that they could not fight them as a united force. Communalism also received a fillip by the expansion of urbanism due to conflict of interest. Mostly, the communal riots have almost always taken place in India's urban centres due to political and economic reasons under the garb of religion. Ghurye's works have focused on the disturbances during his life-time. In reality, in pre-British times there was good cooperation between the two communities.

### 5.5.3 Important Works

Some of the important works of Ghurye in sociology are

- i) *Indian Sadhus* (1953)
- ii) *Family and Kin in Indo-European Culture* (1961)
- iii) *Gods and Men* (1962)
- iv) *Anatomy of a Rururban Community* (1962)
- v) *Scheduled Tribes* (1963)
- vi) *Caste and Race in India* (1969, Fifth Edition)



Some of his other works which show us the range of his interests are

- i) *Bharatnatyam and its Costume* (1958)
- ii) *Cities and civilisation* (1962)
- iii) *Indian costume* (1962, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edn.)

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Name the British anthropologist who influenced G.S. Ghurye very much. Use about one line.

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- ii) What was the approach of Ghurye in studying caste in Indian society? Describe using about two lines.

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- iii) Give in about three lines the opinion of Ghurye regarding tribes in India.

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- iv) Describe Ghurye's approach to the study of urban growth in India. Use about six lines.

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## 5.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you have learnt about the three pioneers of Indian Sociology, namely Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889-1968), Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji (1894-1962), and Govind Sadashiv Ghurye (1893-1984).

You learnt about the biographical details of the three thinkers. We have described some of their major ideas in the field of sociology. All three thinkers have dealt with the study of society in their own ways. These thinkers have also studied Indian cultural tradition, art and civilisation. Finally, we have listed some of the important works of the three thinkers.

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## 5.7 KEY WORDS

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<b>Ameliorative</b>	A measure which leads to the welfare or betterment of a social group
<b>Canonical</b>	The laws, rules or general principles of a religion
<b>Compartmentalisation</b>	To divide anything into separate sections. In the unit, it refers to the limits put to the boundary of a social science like history, economics, political science or sociology.
<b>Ecological</b>	The study of plants, animals people or institutions related with the environment
<b>Ethical Relativism</b>	Variation of values from one culture to another is called ethical relativism.
<b>Mono-cultivation</b>	The cultivation of one cash crop year after year which depletes the soil of its nutrients making it infertile
<b>Patronage</b>	The protection and encouragement given to certain arts, crafts and architecture by a ruler, landlord or a rich and powerful person
<b>Renaissance</b>	It means a rebirth or revival in a literal sense but it also refers to the great revival of art, literature and learning in Europe in the fourteenth, fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries.
<b>Universalisation</b>	The process in which culture specific values become part of the value system of a larger society, such as a nation or the universe.

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## 5.8 FURTHER READING

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## 5.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

i) a) ecology

- b) compartmentalisation
  - c) economics
- ii) An ecological zone is a result of the combination of a certain kind of geological, geographical and biological factors.
- iii) Radhakamal Mukerjee's interest in social ecology led him to the study of regions in India. He call this study regional sociology. According to Mukerjee, if the regions in modern India were developed to the extent that they became self-sufficient then India will benefit as a whole. But if some regions lag behind they will be dominated by the developed regions and this will result in a lop-sided development of India.
- iv) Radhakamal Mukerjee was against the Western trend of separating "facts" from "values" as done by the positivists in sociology. According to him "facts" and "values" are inseparable elements of human interaction and such behaviour as taking or giving food, wearing a dress, etc. are value-based and normatively determined by the society.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) D.P. Mukerji was keenly interested in social processes taking place in a rapidly changing society like India. He was a Professor of sociology at Lucknow University which he had joined in 1922. He was trained in both economics and history and he too like Radhakamal Mukerjee combined sociology with economics and history. He called himself a Marxologist due to his belief that Marx's ideas were very relevant when adapted to Indian history and civilisation.
- ii) Two of his important works are
- a) *Modern Indian Culture* (1942)
  - b) *Diversities* (1958)
- iii) a) uprooted
- b) Marxist
  - c) spiritual

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) The British anthropologist, who influenced G.S. Ghurye deeply, was Dr. W.H.R. Rivers.
- ii) Ghurye studied the historical, comparative and integrative aspects of caste system in India. His approach was ethnographic, using historical, Indological and statistical data.
- iii) According to G.S. Ghurye, the various tribes such as Bhils, Gonds, Santhals, etc. in India are like "backward Hindus". The backwardness of these tribes is a result of their imperfect integration in the Hindu society.

## Early Sociology

- iv) The process of urbanisation in India, according to Ghurye, is unique since it is not as a result of industrial growth. In India urbanisation process began from the rural areas because of the need for exchanging surplus food grains. Markets developed in the rural areas slowly and became centres of small towns with their own administrative, judicial machinery and other institutions. These urban centres were also sometimes dependent on feudal patronage, some examples of such towns are Varanasi, Kanchipuram, Jaipur, Moradabad, etc.

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## Structure

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## 6.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit deals with Historical Materialism. After studying it you should be able to

- discuss the theory of historical materialism
- describe Marx's view of society and social change
- outline the contribution of historical materialism to sociology.

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## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

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You have already studied the context in which sociology emerged in Europe and learnt about the impact of the Industrial Revolution on its founders.

Here we will deal with one of the founders, namely, Karl Marx. His ideas were full of sociological insights. Historical materialism, the subject matter of this unit, is the scientific core of Marx's sociological thought. Therefore, it is necessary to situate historical materialism within the overall context of Marx's work and his contributions to sociological theory. For this purpose the unit deals first with the brief background of the philosophical and theoretical origins of historical materialism in the context of its intellectual and social milieu. Then we go on to a discussion of certain basic assumptions upon which the theory of historical materialism is built. This is followed by an exposition of the theory of historical materialism and Marx's reasons for refuting economic determinism. Finally, the unit lists certain important contributions of historical materialism to sociological theory. A proper understanding of the above sections will help you to study the coming units related to other aspects of Marx's thought.

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## 6.2 HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

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Marx's general ideas about society are known as his theory of historical materialism. Materialism is the basis of his sociological thought because, for Marx, material conditions or economic factors affect the structure and development of society. His theory is that material conditions essentially comprise technological means of production and human society is formed by the forces and relations of **production**. Later in this unit, and in the next unit you will learn about the meaning of the forces and relations of production. Here, let us tell you why Marx's theory of society, i.e., historical materialism is historical. It is historical because Marx has traced the evolution of human societies from one stage to another. It is called materialistic because Marx has interpreted the evolution of societies in terms of their material or economic bases. Materialism simply means that it is matter or material reality, which is the basis for any change. The earlier view, that of Hegel, was that ideas were the cause of change. Marx opposed this view and instead argued that ideas were a result of objective reality, i.e., matter and not vice versa.

In his efforts to understand society in its entirety, he has not confined himself to examining the structure of human societies at a given point of time. He has explained the societies in terms of the future of humankind. For him it is not enough to describe the world. He has a plan for changing it. Thus, his sociological thinking largely concerns the mechanism of change. To understand social change, he has derived its phases from the philosophical ideas of Hegel, the German philosopher. About these phases also, we will learn later in the last unit of this block.

At this point, let us clarify that we are here concerned with Marx's sociological ideas only. We are not dealing with various brands of Marxism and the interpretations of Marx's ideas which became the official ideology of Communist regimes.

To turn back to Marx's theory of historical materialism, you need to look at it as Marx's general theory of society, which deals extensively with the contradictions found in the capitalist societies of his times. According to Friedrich Engels the theory of historical materialism was discovered by

Karl Marx, but Marx thought it was Friedrich Engels who had conceived the materialist formulation of history independently. We shall say that both of them used this theory, to quote Marx, as the ‘guiding thread’ of all their works.

In Engels’ view the theory of historical materialism takes a special view of history. In this view Engels seeks the final cause and the spirit behind historical events. Both Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels stress the scientific nature of their views of history. In the *German Ideology* (1845-6) Marx and Engels assert that their views of history are based on observation and an exact description of actual conditions. For discussing all parts of this theory you will need to follow the background which has provided a framework to his ideas about society.

### 6.2.0 Background

Marx’s childhood and youth fell in that period of European history when the reactionary powers (favouring monarchical political order) were attempting to eradicate from post Napoleonic Europe all traces of the French Revolution. There was, at the same time, a **liberal** movement (favouring autonomy of the individual and standing for the protection of political and civil liberties) in Germany that was making itself felt. The movement was given impetus by the Revolution in France. In the late 1830s a further step toward radical criticism for extreme changes in existing socio-political conditions was made by the young Hegelians (a group of people following the philosophy of Hegel). To learn about Hegel and his philosophy see Box 6.1 and 6.2. This was the group with which Marx became formally associated when he was studying law and philosophy at the University of Berlin.

Although he was the youngest member of the young Hegelians, Karl Marx inspired their confidence, respect and even admiration. They saw in him a ‘new Hegel’ or rather a powerful anti-Hegelian.

#### Box 6.1: G.W.F. Hegel

Georg Wilhelm Hegel was born in Stuttgart on August 27, 1770 and died in Berlin on November 14, 1831. He was the son of a revenue officer. He studied classics, theology and philosophy at the University of Tubingen and became in 1805, at the age of 35, a professor at the University of Jena. His main works are *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807), *The Science of Logic* (1812), *The Philosophy of Right* (1821), and *The Philosophy of History* (1830-31).

In the context of Hegel’s influence on Marx, you need to note that Marx was influenced by (i) Hegel’s philosophy of history and (ii) his science of logic. Both these aspects of Hegel’s theories are given in Box 6.2.

Among other influences the intensive study of **B. de Spinoza** (1632-1677) and **A. Hume** (1711-1776) helped Marx to develop a positive conception of democracy. It went far beyond the notions held at the time by radicals

in Germany. The radicals consisted of a political group associated with views, practices and policies of extreme change.

### 6.2.0.0 Marx's Faith in Democracy

The intellectual heritage from which Marx drew his insights, attitudes and concepts was a synthesis of many ideological currents in Europe of the early and middle nineteenth century. These included the basic assumptions of democratic faith and slogans of the French Revolution.

### 6.2.0.1 Democracy and Communism

Marx's adherence to a radical view of democracy was also based on the study of such historical events as the revolutions in England, France and America. From these historical studies he concluded that a transitory stage of **Proletarian** democracy must normally and inevitably culminate in communism. According to Marx, communism is a system in which goods are owned in common and are accessible to all. After his conversion to communism Marx began his prolonged studies of economics. While he was still developing from a liberal into a communist, he learned a great deal from European thinkers, such as B. de Spinoza, L. Feuerbach and Alexis de Tocqueville.

#### Activity 1

Do you think that Karl Marx's ideas are useful for studying Indian society? Give at least two reasons for your negative/positive answer.

### 6.2.0.2 Conception of History

The epoch to which Marx belonged had its beginnings in the French Revolution. But its historical dimensions coincided with those of the whole era of industrial and social revolutions and extended into modern era. This is the reason for the lasting appeal of a body of thought that is by no means free from history.

Before the age of thirty, Marx produced a number of works which together provide a relatively adequate outline of his "materialist conception of history". Though Marx never wrote explicitly on historical materialism, his writings during the years 1843-8 refer to it in a fragmentary fashion. For him, it was not a new philosophical system. Rather it was a practical method of socio-historical studies. It was also a basis for political action. The framework for this theory was obviously derived from Hegel. Like Hegel, Marx recognised that the history of mankind was simply a single and non-repetitive process. Likewise he also believed that the laws of the historical process could be discovered. You will soon see in Box 6.2 how Marx deviated from Hegelian philosophy. Many others among the Young Hegelians found defects in Hegel's ideas and they proceeded to build a new system of thought. But only Marx could consistently develop a new set of ideas which in fact superseded Hegelian theories about society.

**Box 6.2: Hegel's Philosophy of History**

Hegel was a liberal in the sense that he accepted the rule of law rather than the rule of individual persons. In this way, he accepted the authority of the Prussian **state** (former kingdom and state of Germany). His philosophy belonged to the idealist tradition. This tradition began with Immanuel Kant and reached its zenith with Hegel. According to the idealist tradition, reason is the essence of reality and the spirit of Reason expresses itself during the course of history. Hegel also argued that history comprises the growth of Reason to awareness of itself. He considered the constitutional state to be the summit or highest point of history. Hegel views history as 'progress in the consciousness of freedom'. This consciousness of freedom, according to Hegel, is best expressed in religion, and development in religious concepts and ideas shows the degree of the consciousness of freedom in particular forms of social organisation. In other words, advances in religious and philosophical ideas correspond with socio-political progress. For Hegel, human history was progressing in the direction of Christianity, the Reformarian, the French Revolution and constitutional monarchy. He also held that only educated state officials, administering a constitutional monarchy, understood the ideas of human progress. Followers of Hegel's ideas came to be known as the Young Hegelians. Marx was also one of them. The Young Hegelians went further and asserted that not only the educated officials but all citizens could acquire the ability to understand the ideas of human progress. Karl Marx also developed his ideas of human history initially on the basis of Hegel's views. But in course of time he too joined hands with the Young Hegelians and eventually evolved his own ideas on the history of human society i.e., historical materialism. In doing so, he is said to have put Hegel on his head, i.e., Marx criticised Hegel's conservative ideas on religion, politics and law.

**Hegel's Science of Logic**

Marx rejected Hegel's faith in Idealism but adopted and adapted Hegel's use of the dialectical methodology. We will discuss this topic in Unit 9 of this Block, but let us here mention Hegel's basic position regarding dialectics.

According to Hegel, each thesis has its antithesis. The thesis represents the positive view and the antithesis represents the opposite or negative view. It means that each statement of truth has its opposite statement. The antithesis or the opposite statement is also true. In course of time, the thesis and antithesis are reconciled in the form of synthesis. The synthesis is the composite view. As history progresses, the synthesis becomes a new thesis. The new thesis then has an antithesis, with eventual prospect of turning into a synthesis. And thus goes on the process of dialectics.

While Hegel applied this understanding of the process of dialectics to the progress of ideas in history, Marx accepted the concept of dialectics but did not, like Hegel, perceive truth in the progress of ideas. He said that matter is the realm of truth and tried to reach the truth via materialism. This is why Marx's theory is known as historical materialism while Hegel's system is called dialectical idealism.



You may ask what is materialism? Materialism seeks the scientific explanations of things, including even religion. The idea of materialism may be opposed to the concept of idealism. Idealism refers to a theory that ultimate reality lies in a realm of transcending phenomena. Materialism, on the other hand, contends that everything, that exists, depends upon matter. We can speak of three kinds of materialism, namely, philosophical materialism, scientific materialism and historical materialism. Without going into terminological details of the first two kinds, we clarify that historical materialism emphasises the fundamental and causal role of production of material conditions in the development of human history.

Marx traced historical events in the light of materialistic understanding of reality. You may also be interested in learning about Marx's approach to history.

### **6.2.0.3 Sociological Approach to History**

In sketching out his theory of society and history, Marx repudiated Hegelian and Post-Hegelian speculative philosophy. He built on Feuerbach's anthropological naturalism and developed instead a humanist ethics based on a strictly sociological approach to historical phenomena. Drawing also on French materialism and on British empiricism and classical economics, Marx's theory sought to explain all social phenomena in terms of their place and function in the complex systems of society and nature. This was without recourse to what may be considered metaphysical explanations clearly outlined in those early writings of Hegel and his followers. This eventually became a mature sociological conception of the making and development of human societies. Before turning to basic assumption of the theory of historical materialism, let us learn in Box 6.3 about Feuerbach whose ideas influenced Karl Marx in a tangential manner only.

#### **Box 6.3**

L. Feuerbach was born on July 28, 1804 at Landshut, Bavaria and died on September 13, 1872 at Nuremberg. He was a materialist philosopher. His criticism of Hegel's ideas on religion had influenced the writings of the young Marx. Feuerbach was a student of theology and later became interested in philosophy. In 1824, he attended Hegel's lectures and as a result he gave up his religious faith and turned to Hegelian philosophy. In his book, *Thoughts on Death and Immortality* (1830), he denied the immortality of the soul. This idea caused a great deal of stir among the intellectuals of his day. Because of his anti-religious views he was denied the professorship of philosophy. As a protest he stopped teaching and became a private scholar. He published many critical articles on Hegel's idealism and developed his ideas on materialism. In 1850, Feuerbach became fully convinced of medical materialism and held that humans are determined by the nature and quality of their food. We find that interest in Feuerbach's ideas was only a passing phase in Karl Marx's intellectual growth.

## 6.2.1 Basic Assumptions

Historical materialism is based upon a philosophy of human history. But it is not, strictly speaking, a philosophy of history. It is best understood as sociological theory of human progress. As a theory it provides a scientific and systematic research programme for empirical investigations. At the same time, it also claims to contain within it a revolutionary programme of intervention into society. It is this unique combination of scientific and revolutionary feature which is the hallmark of Marx's original formulation. The complex and at times uneasy relationship between the scientific and revolutionary commitments of this theory of society (historical materialism) has been one of the principal grounds of debate among Marxist sociologists. However, here we will be primarily concerned with only the scientific aspect of historical materialism. Before proceeding to discuss the theory of historical materialism, let us also tell you briefly about Marx's views on human society and human nature.

### 6.2.1.0 Society as an Interrelated Whole

Marx views human society as an interrelated whole. The social groups, institutions, beliefs and doctrines within it are integrally related. Therefore, he has studied their interrelations rather than treating them separately or in isolation. Such aspects as history, politics, law, religion or for that matter education cannot be treated as separate spheres.

### 6.2.1.1 Changeable Nature of Society

Marx views society as inherently mutable, in which changes are produced largely by internal contradictions and conflicts. Such changes, if observed in a large number of instances, according to Marx, show a sufficient degree of regularity to allow the formulation of general statements about their causes and consequences. Both these assumptions relate to the nature of human society.

### 6.2.1.2 Human Nature and Social Relationships

There is one other assumption behind historical materialism without which the theory cannot be held together. This relates to the concept of human being in general. According to Marx there is no permanent persistence of human nature. Human nature is neither originally evil nor originally good, it is, in origin, potential. If human nature is what human beings make history with, then at the same time it is human nature which they make. And human nature is potentially revolutionary. Human will is not a passive reflection of events, but contains the power to rebel against circumstances in the prevailing limitations of 'human nature'.

It is not that people produce out of material greed or the greed to accumulate wealth. But the act of producing the essentials of life engages people into social relationships that may be independent of their will. In most of human history, according to Marx, these relationships are **class** relationships that create **class struggle**.

### Check Your Progress 1

Tick the correct answer in the following questions.

- i) Who among the following scholars did Marx draw his philosophical inspiration from ?
  - a) Comte
  - b) Spencer
  - c) Hegel
  - d) Aristotle
  - e) Confucius
- ii) Which of the following statements are not acceptable to historical materialism?
  - a) Humans are the most biologically determined species of all.
  - b) Human nature is basically evil.
  - c) Humans are forever happy to live in a class society.
- iii) Which of the following is an essential feature of historical materialism?
  - a) Society takes birth, grows and changes like an organism.
  - b) Society is inherently mutable in which changes are produced by internal contradictions.
  - c) Society starts as a small aggregate and with the passage of time grows in size.
  - d) Society develops with the development of its scientific personnel.

### 6.2.2 The Theory

Here, we will put in simple words Marx's views about the happenings within the society. His thought is essentially confined to interpreting the capitalist society of his times. He shows contradictory or antagonistic nature of capitalist society. Let us see how he goes about this task. This exercise will lay threadbare Marx's theory of historical materialism.

Clearer exposition of the theory of historical materialism is contained in Marx's 'Preface' to *A contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859). Here, he says that the actual basis of society is its economic structure. For Marx economic structure of society is made of its relations of production. The legal and political **superstructure** of society is based on relations of production. Marx says that relations of production reflect the stage of society's force of means of production.

Here, you have come across terms, such as, relations of production, **forces of means of production** and superstructure. Let us tell you that these terms carry special connotations in Marxist thought. You will learn in detail about each of them as you read further units of this block (also see Key Words in this unit). At present, you need to focus on the thrust of Marx's argument.

His contention is that the process of socio-political and intellectual life in general is conditioned by the mode of production of material life. On the basis of this logic, Marx tries to construct his entire view of history.

He says that new developments of productive forces of society come in conflict with existing relations of production. When people become conscious of the state of conflict, they wish to bring an end to it. This period of history is called by Marx the period of social revolution. The revolution brings about resolution of conflict. It means that new forces of production take roots and give rise to new relations of production. Thus, you can see that for Marx, it is the growth of new productive forces which outlines the course of human history. The productive forces are the powers society uses to produce material conditions of life. For Marx, human history is an account of development and consequences of new forces of material production. This is the reason why his view of history is given the name of historical materialism. In a nutshell, this is the theory of historical materialism.

In brief, we can say that Marx's theory of historical materialism states that all objects, whether living or inanimate, are subject to continuous change. The rate of this change is determined by the laws of dialectics (see Box 6.2 and Unit 9). In other words, there are forces which bring about the change. You can call it the stage of antithesis. The actual nature of change, i.e., the stage of synthesis, will be, according to Marx, determined by the interaction of these two types of forces. Before explaining in some detail further connections which Marx makes to elaborate this theory, it is necessary to point out that different schools of Marxism provide differing explanations of this theory. We are here confined to a kind of standard version in our rendering of historical materialism. We should keep in mind that materialistic conception of history is not a rough and ready formulation for explaining different forms of social organisation. Let us now, once again explain Marx's theory of historical materialism by explaining, in brief, the terms mentioned above.

#### **6.2.2.0 Social Relations, Over and Above Individuals**

Marx says that as a general principle, the production of material requirements of life, which is a very basic necessity of all societies, compels individuals to enter into definite social relations that are independent of their will. This is the basic idea of Marx's theory of society. He stresses that there are social relations which impinge upon individuals irrespective of their preferences. He further elaborates that an understanding of the historical process depends on our awareness of these objective social relations.

#### **6.2.2.1 Infrastructure and Superstructure**

Secondly, according to Marx, every society has its infrastructure and superstructure. Social relations are defined in terms of material conditions which he calls infrastructure. The economic base of a society forms its infrastructure. Any changes in material conditions also imply corresponding changes in social relations. Forces and relations of production come in the category of infrastructure. Within the superstructure figure the legal,

educational and political institutions as well as values, cultural ways of thinking, religion, ideologies and philosophies.

#### **6.2.2.2 Forces and Relations of Production**

The forces of production, according to Marx, appear to be the capacity of a society to produce. This capacity to produce is essentially a function of scientific and technical knowledge, technological equipment, and the organisation of labour. The relations of production arise out of the production process but essentially overlap with the relations in ownership of means of production. Relations of production should not be entirely identified with relations of property. At certain points in time, Marx speaks in terms of transformation of society from one stage to another. In explaining the process of transformation, Marx has given us a scheme of historical movement.

#### **6.2.2.3 Social Change in Terms of Social Classes**

Marx elaborates the significance of the infrastructure of society by tracing the formation of the principal social classes. He develops the idea of social change resulting from internal conflicts in a theory of class struggles. For Marx, social change displays a regular pattern. Marx constructs, in broad terms, a historical sequence of the main types of society, proceeding from the simple, undifferentiated society of 'primitive communism' to the complex class society of modern capitalism. He provides an explanation of the great historical transformations which demolish old forms of society and create new ones in terms of infrastructural changes which he regards as general and constant in their operation. Each period of contradiction between the forces and the relations of production is seen by Marx as a period of revolution.

#### **6.2.2.4 Dialectical Relationship between the Forces and Relations of Production**

In revolutionary periods, one class is attached to the old relations of production. These relations hinder the development of the forces of production. Another class, on the other hand, is forward looking. It strives for new relations of production. The new relations of production do not create obstacles in the way of the development of the forces of production. They encourage the maximum growth of those forces. This is the abstract formulation of Marx's ideas of class struggle.

#### **Revolutions and History of Societies**

The dialectical relationship between the forces of production and relations of production provides a theory of revolution. In Marx's reading of history, revolutions are not political accidents. They are treated as social expression of the historical movement. Revolutions are necessary manifestations of the historical progress of societies. Revolutions occur when the conditions for them mature. Marx (1859: Preface) wrote, 'No social order ever disappears before all the productive forces, for which there is room in it, have been developed; and the new higher relations of production never appear before the material conditions of their existence have matured in the womb of the old society'.

Let us take an example. Feudal society developed capitalist relations of production. The French revolution occurred when the capitalist relations of production reached a degree of maturity in Europe. Marx here spoke of another process of transformation from capitalism to socialism. Now capitalist societies became the arena for development of socialist relations of production. This is how Marx interpreted historical movement of societies.

#### 6.2.2.5 Social Reality and Consciousness

We have said before that Marx has made a distinction between infrastructure and superstructure. At the same time he has also distinguished social reality and consciousness. For Marx, reality is not determined by human consciousness. According to him, social reality determines human consciousness. This results in an overall conception of the ways of human thinking that must be explained in terms of social relations of which they are a part.

Besides the forces and relations of production Marx has spoken about the modes of production. Accordingly, he has described stages of human history in terms of the four modes of production, namely, the Asiatic, Ancient, Feudal and Capitalist. The history of the West according to him, tells us about the ancient, feudal and capitalist (bourgeois) modes of production. The ancient mode of production is characterised by slavery, the feudal mode of production by serfdom, and the capitalist mode of production by wage earning. They constitute three distinct modes of exploitation of human labour in Western societies. Asiatic mode of production which does not constitute a stage in Western history is distinguished by the subordination of all people to the state or the state bureaucracy.

The above discussion of the theory of historical materialism should not lead you to consider it a case of economic determinism. Next section (6.3) will explain why we should not look at the theory of historical materialism in mere economic terms. Let us complete Activity 2 before going on to the next section.

#### Activity 2

What are the words for materialism, production, revolution and consciousness in your mother tongue? To explain these terms, give examples from your own social life.

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## 6.3 HISTORICAL MATERIALISM IS NOT ECONOMIC DETERMINISM

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It is possible that you may consider Marx as a proponent of economic determinism or the view that economic conditions determine the development of society. But you will here see how historical materialism is different from economic determinism. Marx recognised that without culture there can be no production possible. For him, mode of production includes social relations of production which are relations of domination



and subordination into which men and women are born or involuntarily enter. The reproduction both of life and of the material means of life cannot be understood without turning to the culture, norms and the rituals of the working people over whom the rulers rule. An understanding of working class culture contributes to an understanding of the mode of production.

Class is a category that describes people in relationships over time, and the ways in which they become conscious of these relationships. It also describes the ways in which they separate, unite, enter into struggle, form institutions and transmit values in class ways. Class is an 'economic' and also a 'cultural' formation. It is impossible to reduce class into a pure economic category.

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## **6.4 CONTRIBUTION OF HISTORICAL MATERIALISM TO SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY**

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The theory of historical materialism played an essential part in the formation of modern sociology. Marx's ideas had been foreshadowed in the works of earlier thinkers as diverse in other respects as Hegel, Saint-Simon and Adam Ferguson. All of them greatly influenced Marx. He elaborated his conception of the nature of society, and of the appropriate means to study it. He did so in a more precise, and above all more empirical fashion than did his predecessors. He introduced an entirely new element to understand the structure of each society. It was derived from the relations between social classes. These relations were determined by the mode of production. It was this feature of historical materialism which was widely accepted by later sociologists as offering a more promising starting point for exact and realistic investigations of the causes of social change.

Secondly, historical materialism introduced into sociology a new method of inquiry, new concepts, and a number of bold hypotheses to explain the rise, development, and decline of particular forms of society. All of these came to exercise, in the later decades of the nineteenth century, a profound and extensive influence upon the writings of sociologists.

Thirdly, originality of historical materialism was in its immense effort to synthesise in a critical way, the entire legacy of social knowledge since Aristotle. Marx's purpose was to achieve a better understanding of the conditions of human development. With this understanding he tried to accelerate the actual process by which mankind was moving toward an association, in which the free development of each was the condition for the free development of all. The desired system would be based upon rational planning, cooperative production, and equality of distribution and most important, liberated from all forms of political and social exploitation.

Lastly, historical materialism not only provides a method to understand the existing social reality; it is a method to understand the existence of other methods. It is a persistent critique of the aims and methods of social sciences.

**Check Your Progress 2**

i) Define, in three lines, relations of production and forces of production.

.....  
.....  
.....

ii) List, in three lines, the various components of the superstructure.

.....  
.....  
.....

iii) Define state. Does it belong to

- a) infrastructure or
- b) superstructure?

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**6.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In summing up what you learnt in Unit 6 of Block 2, you may state the following three points.

- 1) Historical materialism is a materialist interpretation of social, cultural and political phenomena. It propounds that social institutions and related values are determined by the mode of production processes rather than ideas in the explanation of history. However, the word ‘determined’, in the Marxian sense, refers to determination in the last analysis and should not be taken in an absolute sense.
- 2) Historical materialism is a dialectical theory of human progress. It regards history as the development of human beings’ efforts to master the forces of nature and, hence, of production. Since all production is carried out within social organisation, history is the succession of changes in social system, the development of human relations geared to productive activity (mode of production) in which the economic system forms the base and all other relationships, institutions, activities, and idea systems are “superstructural”.
- 3) History is progress because human beings’ ability to produce their “forces of production” continually increases. It is regression because in perfecting the forces of production they create more and more complex and oppressive social organisation.

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**6.6 KEY WORDS**

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**Class** A fundamental social group or a tangible collectivity which has the capacity to act as a real social force. It

	is positioned in relation to the (non) ownership of the means of material production.
<b>Class Struggle</b>	Conflict between two antagonistic social classes which is the motive force of history.
<b>Class Interest</b>	The aims, aspirations and assumptions of a social class which are collectively shared by the members.
Class Consciousness	Awareness of the objective class position vis-à-vis others and an awareness of its historic role in the transformation of society.
<b>Forces of Means of Production</b>	Both the materials worked on and the tools and techniques employed in production of material goods. These material-technical aspects should not be confused with social relations of production.
<b>Hume</b>	A. Hume was an agnostic philosopher and believed that any ultimate reality is unknown.
<b>Infrastructure</b>	Metaphor to express the basic theoretical priority of the mode of production in relation to the rest of society. It includes the means of production and relations of production.
<b>Liberal</b>	One who believes in progress, the essential goodness of human beings and autonomy of the individual.
<b>Mode of Production</b>	The actual relationship between the relations of production and the forces of production.
<b>Proletarian</b>	Representative of the lowest socio-economic class of a community
<b>Relations of Production</b>	Social relationships that directly or indirectly arise out of the production of material conditions of life.
<b>Superstructure</b>	Metaphor to represent the social conditions of the existence of the infrastructure. It includes <i>state</i> , schools, religions, institutions, culture, ideas, values and philosophy, etc.

<b>State</b>	A set of institutions and apparatuses that serve as an outpost of the dominant class and further its interests. It enjoys a relative autonomy from the infrastructure and belongs to the superstructure.	<b>Historical Materialism</b>
<b>Spinoza</b>	B. de Spinoza taught that reality is one substance with many attributes of which only thought and extension are understood by the human mind.	
<b>Tocqueville</b>	Alexis de Tocqueville is regarded as a great political thinker of the nineteenth century France. He wrote two major books – (i) <i>Democracy in America</i> and (ii) <i>The Old Regime and the French Revolution</i> . In the first book he gave a portrait of a particular society, American society and in the second book he gave his analysis of a historical event, the French Revolution. Marx was quite influenced by Tocqueville’s ideas of democracy.	

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## 6.7 FURTHER READING

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Aron, Raymond. 1965. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Vol. 1, Penguin: Harmondsworth. P. 111-82

Bukharin, N.I. 1926. *Historical Materialism: A System of Sociology*. Allen and Unwin: London

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## 6.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) (c)
- ii) (a), (b) & (c)
- iii) (b)

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) See Key Words
- ii) State, education, religion, values, ideas and philosophies, etc.
- iii) See Key Words.

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## **UNIT 7 FORCES, RELATIONS AND MODES OF PRODUCTION**

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### **Structure**

- 7.0 Objectives
- 7.1 Introduction
- 7.2 Production
- 7.3 Forces of Production
- 7.4 Relations of Production
- 7.5 Mode of Production
- 7.6 Four Modes of Production
  - 7.6.1 Asiatic Mode of production
  - 7.6.2 Ancient Mode of Production
  - 7.6.3 Feudal Mode of Production
  - 7.6.4 Capitalist Mode of Production
- 7.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 7.8 Keywords
- 7.9 Further Reading
- 7.10 Specimen Answer to Check Your Progress

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### **7.0 OBJECTIVES**

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This unit deals with forces, relations and modes of production. After studying it you should be able to

- explain each of the three concepts: force, relation and mode
- distinguish the concepts from one another
- locate the concepts in the overall Marxian view of society.

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### **7.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In Unit 6 on Historical Materialism, we discussed the Marxian social theory of human progress. Here in Unit 7, we focus on three major concepts which constitute the core of that theory. These concepts, namely, forces, relations and modes of production have been introduced to you in Unit 6. The same concepts are now explained in greater detail so that you can appreciate how Marx used these ideas. The unit addresses itself to the concepts with which Marx constructed the theory of historical materialism. The core concepts and related concepts which this unit attempts to explain are more or less like tools with which Marx explained the laws of motion of capitalist society in particular and that of society in general. Using these concepts, Marx developed a theory aimed at understanding contemporary society. He also formulated a programme of action to change society.

In order to expose you to the Marxian concepts in a systematic manner, this unit is broadly divided into four sections in the following order:

Firstly, section 7.2 provides a general understanding of the concept of production.

Secondly, you learn in section 7.3 about the concept of **forces of production**. This section attempts to provide the meaning and significance of the concept.

Thirdly, you will learn in section 7.4 about the concept of **relations of production**. The explanation emphasises the fact that these are social relations and must not be confused with the material, technical aspects of production.

Fourthly, you will learn in section 7.5 about the concept of **mode of production**. In the last section that is section 7.6 we will discuss the four modes of production.

The unit ends with separate sections on summary of the contents of the unit, key words, further reading and specimen answers to check your progress exercises.

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## **7.2 PRODUCTION**

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People need food, clothing, shelter and other necessities of life in order to survive. They cannot get all these things ready-made from nature. To survive, they produce material goods from objects found in nature. Material production has always been and still is the basis of human existence.

For Karl Marx, the history of human societies is the story of how people relate to one another in their efforts to make a living. He said, “The first historical act is...the production of material life. This is indeed a historical act, a fundamental condition of all history” (see Bottomore 1964: 60). According to Marx, economic production or production of material life is the starting point from which society as an inter-related whole is structured. He speaks of a reciprocity between economic factors and other aspects of historical development of mankind. The factor of economic production is all the same a key concept in explaining the changes that occur in society. He considers that forces of production along with relations of production form the basis of economic and social history of every society. In his Introduction to the *Grundrisse* (1857-58), Marx says that although the three processes of production, distribution and consumption are not one and the same, they represent a totality. It is so because after completion, each of the three processes creates the other process. In this way, one mediates the other. For example, production, once complete, becomes an object of consumption. Similarly, distribution and production are closely related processes. In this way, these economic categories carry definite relations between them. For Marx, a certain type of production creates a certain type of distribution, exchange and consumption. On the basis of all these economic categories are formed certain types of relations of production. Marx argues that production itself is based on other economic categories



and clear-cut relation between production and other economic processes. What is evident is that material production is basic to human societies.

For Marx, production is at once both a general and a historical category. In *Capital* (1861-1879) Marx has made use of the term 'production' as a general category to highlight specific forms of production in capitalist societies. On the other hand, speaking about production with definite social and historical characteristics, Marx discusses the concept of mode of production. About this you will read in the last section of this unit.

Here, we need to remember that the role of production in human history became a guiding thread in Marx's writings. Let us follow this thread in order to understand his thought. We begin with a consideration of forces of production.

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### 7.3 FORCES OF PRODUCTION

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The forces of production express the degree to which human beings control nature. The more advanced the productive forces are, greater is their control over the nature and vice versa. You can say the forces of production are the ways in which material goods are produced. They include the technological know-how, the types of equipment in use and goods being produced for example, tools, machinery, labour and the levels of technology are all considered to be the forces of production.

The forces of production, according to Marx, include means of production and labour power (see Box 7.1). The development of machinery, changes in the labour process, the opening up of new sources of energy and the education of the **workers** are included in the forces of production. In this sense science and the related skills can be seen as part of the productive forces. Some Marxists have even included geographical or ecological space as a productive force.

Involuntary changes in technology, demography, ecology in 'material life' affect the mode of production itself and perceptibly alter the balance of productive relations. But involuntary changes do not spontaneously restructure or reorganise a mode of production. Any restructuring of relations of power, forms of domination and of social organisation has been mostly the outcome of struggles. The condition and character of the struggle are determined by changes in material life.

In every social order there is a continuous change in the material forces of production. Sometimes, as in tribal societies, this change is produced by some natural and ecological phenomena, such as the drying up of rivers, deforestation in or exhaustion of the soil etc. Usually, however, this change is produced by a development in the instruments of production. Human beings have always attempted to better their lives and overcome scarcity. The development of forces of production reflects the constant struggle of human beings to master nature through their labour.

The development of the forces of production is primary because it results from a factor, which is, in a sense, exogenous. The motive force lies outside the forces and relations of production and acts first upon the former. The

motive force is the rational and ever-present impulse of human beings to try to better their situation and overcome scarcity by developing the productive forces. Human beings are, above all, like animals producing society by acting upon nature through their labour.

Productive forces transform nature into use values and exchange values. The productive forces compel the creation and destruction of successive systems of production relations between human beings.

Productive forces have an intrinsic tendency to develop, as human beings' knowledge and mastery over nature increase. As these forces develop, successive social relations of production develop and consequently give way. At a particular point of development the productive forces and the production relations enter into conflict: the latter being unstable to contain the former. Society then enters a period of revolution. People become conscious of this by recognising the existence of class struggle, between those whose activity fits them for the new economic structure, and those who are guardians of the old.

Different socio-economic organisations of production, which have characterised human history, arise or fall as they enable or impede the expansion of society's productive capacity. The growth of the productive forces thus explains the general course of human history. The productive forces, however, include, as we have already noted, not just the means of production (tools, machines, factories and so on), but labour power, the skills, knowledge, experience, and other human faculties used in work. The productive forces represent the powers society has at its command in material production.

### **Box 7.1: Labour Power**

According to Marx, labour power is the capacity to do such useful work which increases the value of products. Workers sell their labour power i.e. their capacity to do work which adds value to commodities. They sell their labour power to capitalists for a wage paid in cash.

We should distinguish labour power from labour. Labour is the actual exercise of one's power to add value to commodities. The category of labour power is used by Marx to explain the source of surplus value. Let us say that the capitalists invest money to buy goods and later sell them for more money than they invested. This is possible only if some value is added to those goods. Labour power, according to Marx, is precisely that capacity which adds value to a commodity. In buying and using labour power the capitalist is able to extract labour and labour is the source of value.

The source of surplus value in capitalist system of production is located in the process whereby the value paid by capitalists for labour power is smaller than the value which labour power adds to a commodity.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Which of the following cannot be conducted as a force of production?
- a) Tractor
  - b) Labour power
  - c) Steam engine
  - d) Windmill
  - e) Computer
  - f) Missile
- ii) Tick mark the correct statement.
- With the increase of productive forces,
- a) our mastery over nature increases.
  - b) we become enslaved to nature.
  - c) we becomes more conscious of nature.
  - d) we turn into a guardian of nature.
- iii) Tick mark the correct statement.
- Material forces of production are
- a) more or less stagnant.
  - b) continuously expanding.
  - c) moving towards scarcity.
  - d) potentially destructive.

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## 7.4 RELATIONS OF PRODUCTION

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The forces of production are not the only factors in material production. People are able to produce jointly by organising in a society. In this sense, labour is and always has been social in character. According to Marx, in order to produce, people enter into definite relations with one another. Only within these social relations does production take place. You can easily say that the relations of production are the social relations found among the people involved in the process of production. These social relations are determined by the level and character of the development of productive forces.

‘Forces’ and ‘relations’ of production are strongly interrelated. The development of one leads to a growing incompatibility or contradiction with the other. In fact, the contradictions between the two aspects of production ‘act as the motor of history’ (Bottomore 1983: 178). The chain of causation in historical development runs like this. The forces of production determine the superstructure. There is, however, quite a good

deal of controversy regarding the primacy of the forces of production over the relations of production. As we said earlier we shall not go into the detail of these interpretations of Marxism. In Marx's own writings, you may like to remember, there is ambiguity on this matter. In places, he gives primacy to the relations of production while in other places he describes forces of production as the prime mover of social change.

The relations of production, which are said to correspond to society's productive level, link the productive forces and human beings in the process of production. These relations are of two broad types. The first refers to those technical relations that are necessary for the actual production process of products. The second refers to the relations of economic control, which are legally manifested as property ownership. They govern access to the forces of production and products.

Relations of production are the social relations of production. As such they include both the relations between the direct producers or workers and their employers or those who control their labour, and the relations between the direct producers themselves.

Relation of production is not merely the ownership of means of production. The employer's relation to the worker is one of domination and the worker's relation with co-workers is one of cooperation. The relations of production are relations between people and people whereas means of production are relations between people and things. The relations of production can influence the momentum and direction of the development of the productive forces.

Relations of production are reflection in the economic ownership of productive forces. For example, under capitalism the most fundamental of these relations is the **bourgeoisie's** ownership of means of production while the proletariat owns only its labour power.

The relationships of production can also dominate and generate changes in the forces. For example capitalist relations of production often do revolutionise the instruments of production and the labour process.

### **Activity 1**

Describe briefly in about 250 words the process of industrialisation in India in terms of forces and relations of production. Discuss this topic with your counsellor and fellow students at your study centre before completing this activity.

At a certain stage of their development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production. The contradiction between forces and relations of production accounts for history existing as a succession of modes of production. The contradiction leads to the necessary decline of one mode and its replacement by another. Forces and relations of production, in any mode of production underline not just the economic progress, but a movement of the whole of society from one stage to another. Let us in the next section discuss Marx's concept of mode of production.

## Check Your Progress 2

i) Tick the correct answer.

Relations of production primarily consist of

- a) individual motives for acquisition in society.
- b) asymmetrical exchange of goods in the market.
- c) ideal material needs of humans in history.
- d) differential requirements of classes in society.
- e) social relationship arising out of the production process.

ii) Tick the correct answer.

Relations of production constitute relationships between

- a) things and things.
- b) people and things.
- c) people and people.
- d) none of these.

iii) Which of the following statements is correct?

- a) Relations of production is not merely the ownership of means of production.
- b) Relation of production is not a human relationship at all.
- c) Relation of production is not a cooperative relationship between individuals.
- d) Relation of production is essentially an exploitative relationship between producers.

iv) Which of the following statement is correct?

- a) Relationship of production can also dominate and generate changes in the forces of production.
- b) Relationship of production have essentially no relationship to forces of production.
- c) Relationships of production can be at conflict with forces of production.
- d) Relationship of production can generate changes in forces of production.

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## 7.5 MODE OF PRODUCTION

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In Marx's writing, stages of social history are differentiated not by what human beings produce but by how, or by what means, they produce the material goods for subsistence. In this way, we can say that historical periods

are founded and differentiated on the basis of the modes of material production. In other words, at the basis of history are successive modes of material production. You can also say that the forces and relations of production are two aspects of mode of production. The productive forces of society reflect the degree to which human beings control nature. The more advanced the productive forces, the greater is their control over nature. In order to produce, people enter into definite relations with one another. This is the relations of production aspect of how material goods are produced. Production takes place within these social relations. You can say that any historical mode of production is an integral unity between the forces of production and the relations of production. You can also say that the forces of production shape the relations of production and the two together define the mode of production. That is the general economic frame or particular manner in which people produce and distribute the means to sustain life. In this sense, the successive modes of production are the basic element of a systematic description of history.

Keeping aside the debate among the Marxist scholars concerning the definition of 'mode of production', we can say that crucial element in defining mode of production is 'the way in which the surplus is produced and its use controlled' (Bottomore 1983: 337). Surplus means the amount that remains when use or need is satisfied. According to Marx, under capitalist mode of production, the surplus takes the form of profit. Surplus is produced by exploiting the working class and is sold for more than the wages given to the workers. Because production of surplus enables societies to grow and change, this factor is taken to be most important in defining mode of production.

Each mode of production has its specific relations of production. These are not developed by chance or by accident. They are deliberately ordered because they help the property owning class extract the surplus from the working people. Take an example. The relations of production under feudalism, in which the serf is dominated in all respects by the feudal lord, are necessary to enable the feudal lord to appropriate the surplus from the serf. If such a relationship is continued under capitalism it will fail. Therefore a new set of production relations develops under capitalism that enables the capitalist appropriate surplus value from the workers.

It should also be noted that neither the forces of production nor the relations of production are fixed and static. Even within a given mode of production the forces of production may change. In any society, we may find that over the years greater production follows improvements in technology. The capitalist nations are very different from what they were two to three hundred years ago, when capitalism was born. This change in the productive forces has resulted in changes in the relations of production. The workers in the twenty first century, may not be as exploited as the factory workers in the nineteenth century. Marxists would, however, argue that exploitation still remains, because the modern workers, with modern technology, produce more surplus value than their predecessors, and they do not proportionately earn that much more.



### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Tick mark the correct answer.
- According to Marx, mode of production is
- a) an empirical concept.
  - b) a psychological phenomenon.
  - c) a biological fact.
  - d) an economic variable.
  - e) an abstract construct.
- ii) Which of the following statements is correct about the nature of humans? It is
- a) not immutable but historical.
  - b) a manifestation of ecological factors.
  - c) determined by psychological traits.
  - d) an indeterminate unconscious state of mind.
- iii) Which of the following can be appropriately called a mode of production?
- a) Pastoral
  - b) Agricultural
  - c) Feudal
  - d) Tribal
  - e) National

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## 7.6 FOUR MODES OF PRODUCTION

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More than one mode of production may exist within any particular society at a given point in time. But in all forms of society there is one determinate kind of production which assigns rank and influence to all the others. Here we shall discuss each of the four modes of production, identified by Marx during his studies of human societies.

### 7.6.1 Asiatic Mode of Production

The concept of **Asiatic mode of production** refers to a specific original mode of production. This is distinct from the ancient slave mode of production or the **feudal mode of production**.

The Asiatic mode of production is characteristic of primitive communities in which ownership of land is communal. These communities are still partly organised on the basis of kinship relations. State power, which expresses the real of imaginary unity of these communities, controls the use of essential

economic resources, and directly appropriates part of the labour and production of the community.

This mode of production constitutes one of the possible forms of transition from classless to class societies; it is also perhaps the most ancient form of this transition. It contains the contradiction of this transition, i.e. the combination of communal relations of production with emerging forms of the exploiting classes and of the State.

Marx did not leave behind any systematic presentation of the history of India. He set down his observations on certain current Indian questions which attracted public attention, or drew materials from India's past and present conditions to illustrate parts of his more general arguments. The concept of Asiatic mode of production is therefore inadequate for an understanding of Indian history and society.

**Box 7.2: Marx and Indian Society**

Marx made no full-scale study of Indian society. The ideology of Hinduism was to him an ideology of an outdated social milieu. He was most skeptical of a Hindu golden age of the bygone era. British rule in India was seen by Marx as a graft on to Asiatic despotism.

### **7.6.2 Ancient Mode of Production**

**Ancient Mode of Production** refers to the forms which precede capitalist production. In some of these terms slavery is seen as the foundation of the productive system. The relation of **masters** to **slaves** is considered as the very essence of slavery. In this system of production the master has the right of ownership over the slave and appropriates the products of the slave's labour. The slave is not allowed to reproduce. If we restrict ourselves to agricultural slavery (see box 7.3), exploitation operates according to the following modalities: the slaves work the master's land and receive their subsistence in return. The master's profit is constituted by the difference between what the slaves produce and what they consume. But what is usually forgotten is that beyond this, the slaves are deprived of their own means of reproduction. The reproduction of slavery depends on the capacity of the society to acquire new slaves, that is, on an apparatus which is not directly linked to the capacities of demographic reproduction of the enslaving population. The rate of accumulation depends on the number of slaves acquired, and not directly on their productivity.

Slaves are different from the other members of the community in that they are rightfully deprived of offspring. Their status as 'foreigners' is permanent. A profit is made out of the 'foreigner'.

Hence, if one wants the system to have a certain continuity and to become organic, then one must not allow the slave to have dependents. In each generation one must provide the means of introducing foreigners as replacements for worn-out slaves. We find an intimate and necessary liaison between these two levels of exploitation: a relation through pilfering between one population and another, and a relation of exploitation between the class of slaves and the class of masters.

In slavery, the growth of the labour force is independent of effective demographic forces. It rests not on the demographic growth which is due to natural increase, but on the means devoted to the capture (as in war) of foreign individuals. The possibility of accumulation comes about through the multiplication of slaves independently of growth in the productivity of labour.

### **Box 7.3: Agricultural Slavery**

Slavery mode of production, which Marx referred to, was found in Italy during formation of the Roman empire. Around 200 AD this empire included western Asia, the whole of northern Africa from Egypt to Morocco and most of Europe, including Britain. It had a territory of about one million seventy five thousand square miles and a population of about sixty million. Such a large empire was obviously a mixture of heterogeneous societies with various modes to production. Only in Roman Italy slavery on the land (agricultural slavery) assumed an importance beyond anything experienced before. Also, in some of the city-states. Such as Athens, slavery was a dominant mode production. The ruling classes in these regimes acquired their wealth from slave labour. In the western half of the Roman empire the production transformed from ancient to feudal mode.

This mode of exploitation permits a demographic manipulation of society. It permits the modification of the birth rate, the manipulation of the 'age' at birth, and the manipulation of the duration of life, especially active life.

The test of the dominance of slave mode of production lies not in the numbers of the slaves but in their location, that is, in the extent to which the elite depend on them for their wealth.

### **7.6.3 Feudal Mode of Production**

Marx and Engels were primarily interested in the definition of the capitalist mode of production. Their writing about feudalism tended to mirror that interest, as well as focusing on the transition between the feudal and the capitalist modes of production. They were concerned with the 'existence form' of labour and the manner in which the products of labour were appropriated by ruling classes. Just as capitalists exploited the workers or the 'proletariat', so did the feudal **lords** exploit their tenants or '**serfs**'. Capitalists grabbed surplus value and feudal lords appropriated land rent from their serfs.

Serfs, being legally unfree, were deprived of property rights, though they could use the lord's property. They were obliged to surrender their labour, or the product of their labour, over and above what was needed for family subsistence and the simple reproduction of the peasant household economy. Serfs or the producers were forced to fulfil the economic demands of an overlord. These demands could be in the form of services to be performed. These could also be in the form of dues to be paid in money or kind. The dues or taxes were levied on the family holdings of the peasants. Thus feudal rent whether in the form of services or taxes was an important component of the feudal mode of production. The feudal lord was able to

force serfs on the basis of military strength. This power was also backed by the force of law. In this mode of production, serfdom implied a direct relation between rulers and servants. In feudal serfdom, the instruments of production were simple and inexpensive.

Feudal (see Unit 1 in Block 1 of ESO–13) society was seen by Marx and Engles as intermediate, i.e., between the slave society of the ancient world and capitalists and proletarians in the modern era.

The evolution of the feudal system brought about the development of exchange of agricultural and manufactured products in regional markets. Special needs of the ruling class and high ranking Church officials gave an impetus to the growth of commodity production, including consumption goods such as silks, spices, fruits and wines. Around this activity developed international trade routes and mercantile centres. It laid the foundation for capitalist relations of production, which were to become the main contradiction of the system and cause its downfall. In the course of this transformation, many peasants were expropriated from their lands and forced to become wage-labourers.

### **Activity 2**

Do you think that agrarian society in any part of India was ever dominated by feudal lords? If yes, describe in two pages how during this period peasants were deprived of property rights though they had rights of use. Were the peasants expected to give their labour or product of their labour to feudal lords? Write your answers to these questions on a sheet of paper and compare them with those of other students at your Study Centre.

### **7.6.4 Capitalist Mode of Production**

Capitalism refers to a mode of production in which capital is the dominant means of production. Capital can be in various forms. It can take the form of money or credit for the purchase of labour power and materials of production. It can be money or credit for buying physical machinery. In **capitalist mode of production**, the private ownership of capital in its various forms is in the hands of a class of capitalists. The ownership by capitalists is to the exclusion of the mass of the population. You can take this to be a central feature of capitalism as a mode of production.

As a mode of production, capitalism has the following characteristics (see Bottomore 1983: 64).

- Goods are produced for sale rather than own use.
- The capacity to do useful work or labour power is bought and sold in a market. For a period of time (time rate) or for a specified task (piece rate) labour power is exchanged for money wages. In ancient mode of production labourers were obliged or forced to surrender their labour. Contrarily, in capitalist mode of production labourers enter into a contract with employers.
- The use of money as a medium of exchange. This gives an important role to banks and financial intermediaries.

## Karl Marx

- The production process is controlled by the capitalists or their managers.
- Financial decisions are controlled by the capitalist entrepreneur.
- Individual capitalists compete for control over the labour and finance.

As a mode of production, capitalism first emerged in Europe. The shift from feudalism to capitalism in Western Europe has been discussed in Unit 1 of Block 1 of Eso-13. You may like to go back to this discussion for recapitulating the growth of merchant capital, overseas trade colonisation. The industrial revolution starting in England and spreading across different countries saw a rapid growth of technology and corresponding rise of capitalist economies. Marx viewed capitalism as a historical phase, to be eventually replaced by socialism.

### Check Your Progress 4

- i) Tick mark the correct answer.

In which mode of production is there communal ownership of land?

- a) Asiatic
- b) ancient
- c) feudal
- d) capitalist

- ii) Tick mark the correct answer.

In which mode of production are the producers considered private property?

- a) Asiatic
- b) ancient
- c) feudal
- d) capitalist

- iii) Tick mark the correct answer.

Under which mode of production is labour power bought and sold?

- a) Asiatic
- b) ancient
- c) feudal
- d) capitalist

- iv) Tick mark the correct answer.

In feudal mode of production surplus is expropriated through

- a) profit
- b) rent

- c) speculation
- d) surplus value
- e) trade.

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## **7.7 LET US SUM UP**

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The concepts of forces, relations and mode of production are central to Marxist social theory. The mode of production, which for Marx is the main determinant of social phenomena, is made up of the forces of production and relations of production.

The forces of production refer to both the material worked on and the tools and techniques employed in production of economic goods. The relationships of production refer to the social relations arising in the process of production, especially between the owners and non-owners of the means of production. Relations of production include the control and the capacity to possess the products.

Thus in capitalist societies, for example, the relations of production are those relations that obtain between capitalist and worker such that the former (relations of production) both controls the means of production and can dispose of the goods and services that are produced by the worker.

The forces and relations of production are fundamental to the constitution of any society. The different ways in which different societies are organised depend upon the relationship of the forces of production to the relations of production. The concept of the social relationships of production does not so much refer to the relationship between individuals as between social classes. Because the relationships of production are essentially antagonistic (for example, the capitalist appropriates the product of labour of the worker), so are the relations between the classes.

A mode of production is the relationship between the relations of production and the forces of production. Modes of production can be distinguished from one another by the different relationships between the forces and relations of production. For example, in the feudal mode of production, the lord does not possess direct control over the peasant's forces of production, tools and land, but does have control over the disposition of the peasant's produce. In the capitalist mode of production, on the other hand, the capitalist controls both the forces of production and the disposition of the product.

Mode of production is an abstract analytical concept. In any particular society at a particular point in time there may exist more than one mode of production. However, it is possible to identify a dominant or determinant mode of production which gains primacy over all the other production systems. Particularly during the period of social revolution more than one mode of production co-exist in the same society. However, Marx has left behind the theoretical conceptualisations relating to four modes of production; Asiatic, ancient, feudal and capitalist. This last mode of production was his major theoretical concern. In the next unit, i.e. unit 9



on Class and Class Conflict, we will discuss the Marxian concept of class, which is the bedrock of his analysis of the economic formation of capitalist societies.

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## 7.8 KEYWORDS

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<b>Ancient Mode of Production</b>	Refers to a production system where the master has the right of ownership over the slave and appropriates the products of his labour through servitude, without allowing the slave to reproduce.
<b>Asiatic Mode of Production</b>	Refers to community-based production system where ownership of land is communal and the existence of <i>is</i> expressed through the real or imaginary unity of these communities.
<b>Bourgeoisie</b>	The class of capitalists who, in all developed countries, are now almost exclusively in possession of all the means of consumption and of all the raw materials and instruments (machines, factories necessary for their production (Engels in <i>Principles of Communism</i> , 1827)
<b>Capitalist Mode of Production</b>	Refers to a production system where the owners of means of production, capitalists, extract surplus labour from the proletariat in the form of profits.
<b>Capitalists</b>	The ruling class in capitalism who control the means of production.
<b>Feudal Mode of Production</b>	Refers to a production system where the lords appropriate surplus labour from the serfs in the form of rent.
<b>Forces of Production</b>	Refers to the material technical aspect of production as well as the corresponding labour power and its competencies required in the production process.
<b>Lords</b>	The ruling class in feudalism, who exercise indirect control over serfs.
<b>Masters</b>	The ruling class in slavery who exercise control over slaves.
<b>Mode of Production</b>	A mode of production is the relationship between the relations of production and the forces of production. Modes of production can be distinguished from

one another by different relationships between the forces and relations of production.

**Relations of Production**

Refer to social relationships that arise directly out of the process of production. These social relationships include the relationships between the owners and non-owners of the means of production. These relationships decide and even determine the control and the capacity to possess the product.

**Slaves**

Class of producers in the ancient mode of production, who are directly controlled by the masters as their private 'property'.

**Serfs**

Class of producers in the feudal mode of production whose surplus labour is appropriated through rent.

**Workers**

Class of producers in the capitalist mode of production who have nothing except their labour power as their only means of livelihood. Their surplus labour is appropriated by the capitalists through profit.

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## **7.9 FURTHER READING**

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Bottomore, Thomas B., 1975. *Marxist Sociology*. Macmillan: London

Huberman, Leo 1969. *Man's Worldly Goods*. People's Publishing House: New Delhi

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## **7.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) (f),                      ii) (a),                      iii) (b)

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) (e),                      ii) (c),                      iii) (a),                      iv) (b)

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) (e),                      ii) (a),                      iii) (c)

**Check Your Progress 4**

- i) (a),                      ii) (b),                      iii) (d),                      iv) (b)

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## UNIT 8 CLASS AND CLASS CONFLICT

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### Structure

- 8.0 Objectives
- 8.1 Introduction
- 8.2 The Class Structure
  - 8.2.1 Criteria for Determination of Class
  - 8.2.2 Classification of Societies in History and Emergence of Classes
  - 8.2.3 Intensification of Class Conflict Under Capitalism
  - 8.2.4 Class and Class Struggle
- 8.3 Class Struggle and Revolution
- 8.4 Marx's Concept of Alienation
- 8.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 8.6 Keywords
- 8.7 Further Reading
- 8.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 8.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you should be able to

- define the concept of **class**
- describe the various criteria for class formation
- identify the various stages involved in the history of society that change due to class conflict or change in **mode of production**
- discuss what is social **revolution** and how it will be reached
- understand Marx's concept of alienation.

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### 8.1 INTRODUCTION

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You have already studied two units on Karl Marx's ideas about human society and its historical development. This unit will explain the key notion of class as used by Karl Marx. We shall study in detail about the various criteria that are basic for calling any collectivity a class. Also we shall discuss how and why classes come into conflict with each other. We will seek to understand the impact of these class conflicts on the history of development of society. Finally, the present unit will give you a brief overview of history including the future of human society on the basis of Marxian framework.

The entire unit is divided into four sections. The first section deals with the class structure, including the classification of societies in history and

class conflict. Within this section we go on to elaborate the intensification of class conflict under **capitalism**. The third section deals with class struggle and revolution, while the fourth section explains Marx's concept of alienation.

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## 8.2 THE CLASS STRUCTURE

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The word 'class' originated from the Latin term 'classis' which refers to a group called to arms, a division of the people. In the rule of legendary Roman king, Servius Tullius (678-534 B.C.), the Roman society was divided into five classes or orders according to their wealth. Subsequently, the word 'class' was applied to large groups of people into which human society came to be divided.

Marx recognised class as a unique feature of capitalist societies. This is one reason why he did not analyse the class structure and class relations in other forms of society.

Marx's sociology is, in fact, a sociology of the class struggle. This means one has to understand the Marxian concept of class in order to appreciate Marxian philosophy and thought. Marx has used the term social class throughout his works but explained it only in a fragmented form. The most clear passages on the concept of class structure can be found in the third volume of his famous work, *Capital* (1894). Under the title of 'Social Classes' Marx distinguished three classes, related to the three sources of income: (a) owners of simple labour power or labourers whose main source of income is labour; (b) owners of capital or capitalists whose main source of income is profit or surplus value; and (c) landowners whose main source of income is ground rent. In this way the class structure of modern capitalist society is composed of three major classes viz., salaried labourers or workers, capitalists and landowners.

At a broader level, society could be divided into two major classes i.e. the 'haves' (owners of land and / or capital) often called as **bourgeoisie** and the 'have-nots' (those who own nothing but their own labour power), often called as proletariat. Marx has tried to even give a concrete definition of social class. According to him 'a social class occupies a fixed place in the process of production'.

### Activity 1

Can Indian society be divided into classes in Marxian sense of the word 'class'? If yes, describe these classes. If no, give reasons why Indian society cannot be divided into classes in Marxian sense of the word 'class'.

### 8.2.1 Criteria for Determination of Class

In order to have a better understanding of the concept of class and class structure, one must be able to respond to the question – "What are the criteria for determination of class"? In other words, which human grouping will be called a class and which grouping would not be considered as

class in Marxian terms. For this exercise, one could say that a social class has two major criteria: (i) objective criteria (ii) subjective criteria.

- i) **Objective Criteria:** People sharing the same relationship to the **means of production** comprise a class. Let us understand it through an example – all labourers have a similar relationship with the landowners. On the other hand all the landowners, as a class, have a similar relationship with the land and labourers. In this way, labourers on one hand and landowners on the other hand could be seen as classes. However, for Marx, this relationship alone is not sufficient to determine the class. According to him it is not sufficient for class to be ‘class in itself’ but it should also be class for itself. What does this mean? By ‘class in itself’ he means the objective criteria of any social class. Obviously, Marx is not simply satisfied with objective criteria above. Hence he equally emphasises upon the other major criteria i.e., “Class for itself” or the subjective criteria.
- ii) **Subjective Criteria:** Any collectivity or human grouping with a similar relationship would make a category, not a class, if subjective criteria are not included. The members of any one class not only have similar consciousness but they also share a similar consciousness of the fact that they belong to the same class. This similar consciousness of a class serves as the basis for uniting its members for organising social action. Here this similar class consciousness towards acting together for their common interests is what Marx calls – “Class for itself”.

In this way, these two criteria together determine a class and class structure in any given society.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Define a social class in two lines.  
.....  
.....
- ii) Name the two criteria for determining a class.  
.....  
.....

**8.2.2 Classification of Societies in History and Emergence of Classes**

Marx differentiated stages of human history on the basis of their economic regimes or modes of production. He distinguished four major modes of production which he called the Asiatic, the ancient, the feudal and the bourgeois or capitalist. He predicted that all social development will culminate into a stage called communism. Let us simplify this classification of societies or various stages of human history into (i) primitive-communal, (ii) slave-owning, (iii) feudal, (iv) capitalist and (v) communist stages. In this sub-section we will discuss the first three stages.

### i) **The Primitive-communal System**

The primitive-communal system was the first and the lowest form of organisation of people and it existed for thousands of years. Men and women started using primitive tools like sticks and stones for hunting and food-gathering. Gradually they improved these tools, and learned to make fire, cultivation and animal husbandry. In this system of very low level of **forces of production**, the **relations of production** were based on common ownership of the means of production. Therefore, these relations were based on mutual assistance and cooperation. These relations were conditioned by the fact that people with their primitive implements could only withstand the mighty forces of nature together, collectively.

In such a situation, exploitation of humans by humans did not exist because of two reasons. Firstly, the tools used (namely, means of production) were so simple that they could be reproduced by anyone. These were implements like spear, stick, bow and arrow etc. Hence no person or group of people had the monopoly of ownership over the tools. Secondly, production was at a low-scale. The people existed more or less on a subsistence level. Their production was just sufficient to meet the needs of the people provided everybody worked. Therefore, it was a situation of no master and no servant. All were equal.

Gradually with time, people started perfecting their tools, their craft of producing and surplus production started taking place. This led to private property and primitive equality gave way to social inequality. Thus the first antagonistic classes, slaves and slave owners, appeared.

This is how the development of the forces of production led to the replacement of primitive communal system by slavery.

### ii) **The Slave-owning Society**

In the slave-owning society, primitive tools were perfected and bronze and iron tools replaced the stone and wooden implements. Large-scale agriculture, live stock raising, mining and handicrafts developed. The development of this type of forces of production also changed the relations of production. These relations were based on the slave owner's absolute ownership of both the means of production and the slave and everything they produced. The owner left the slaves only with the bare minimum necessities to keep them from dying of starvation. In this system, the history of exploitation of humans by humans and the history of class struggle began. The development of productive forces went on and slavery became an impediment to the expansion of social production. Production demanded the constant improvement of implements, higher labour productivity, but the slaves had no interest in this as it would not improve their position. With the passage of time the class conflict between the classes of slave-owners and the slaves became acute and it was manifested in slave revolts. These revolts, together with the raids from neighbouring tribes, undermined the foundations of slavery leading to a new stage i.e. feudal system (See Box 8.1).



**Box 8.1: Feudal System**

The term **feudalism** is derived from the institution of ‘fief’, which was a piece of landed property. During the medieval period of European history, this form of property was given to a vassal by a lord in return for military service. In this sense feudalism was a relationship between a vassal and his Lord. This relationship was expressed in terms of property holding through the fief. The relationship was exercised through jurisdiction. Lords held courts for their vassals, settled disputes and punished breaches of law and custom. The court was also an administrative body which levied taxes and raised military forces. Landowners maintained control over the peasantry. By the twelfth century, landowners’ control over tenants and others had increased to a very great extent.

iii) **The Feudal Society**

The progressive development of the productive forces continued under feudalism. People started using inanimate sources of energy, viz., water and wind, besides human labour. The crafts advanced further, new implements and machines were invented and old ones were improved. The labour of craftspersons was specialised, raising productivity considerably. The development of forces of production led to emergence of feudal relations of production. These relations were based on the feudal lords’ ownership of the serfs or landless peasants. The production relations were relations of domination and subjection, exploitation of the serfs by the feudal lords. Nevertheless, these relations were more progressive than in slavery system, because they made the labourers interested, to some extent, in their labour. The peasants and the artisans could own the implements or small parts of land. These forces of production underwent changes due to new discoveries, increasing demands for consumption caused by population increase and discovery of new markets through colonialism. All this led to the need and growth of mass scale manufacture. This became possible due to advances in technology. This brought the unorganised labourers at one place i.e. the factory. This sparked off already sharpened class conflict leading to peasant revolution against landowners. The new system of production demanded free labourer whereas the serf was tied to the land, therefore, the new forces of production also changed the relations of production culminating into a change in the mode of production from feudalism to capitalism. In the next sub-section we will talk about class conflict in capitalist societies. So, the next section will cover our discussion of the fourth stage of social development. But before going to it, let us complete Check Your Progress 2.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Give the five stages of society as given by Marx.

.....  
.....  
.....

ii) Mark True or False against each of the following statements.

- a) History of class antagonism begins with salary systems. True/False
- b) There was no private ownership of property in primitive-communal system. True/False

### 8.2.3 Intensification of Class Conflict under Capitalism

Large-scale machine production is the specific feature of the productive forces of capitalism. Huge factories, plants and mines took the place of artisan workshops and manufacturers. Marx and Engels described the capitalist productive forces in the ‘*Manifesto of the Communist Party*’. “Subjection of Nature’s forces to man, machinery, application of chemistry to industry and agriculture, steam navigation, railways, electric telegraphs, clearing of whole continents for cultivation, canalisation of rivers, whole populations conjured out of the ground”. In a century or two capitalism accomplished much more in developing the productive forces than had been achieved in all the preceding eras of human history.

This vigorous growth of the forces of production was helped by the capitalist relations of production based on private capitalist ownership. Under capitalism, the produces, the **proletariat**, are legally free, being attached neither to the land nor to any particular factory. They are free in the sense that they can go to work for any capitalist, but they are not free from the bourgeois class as a whole. Possessing no means of production, they are compelled to sell their labour power and thereby come under the yoke of exploitation.

Due to this exploitation the relatively free labourers become conscious of their class interest and organise themselves into a working class movement. This working class movement intensified its struggle against the bourgeois class. It begins with bargaining for better wages and working conditions and culminates into an intensified class conflict, which is aimed at overthrowing the capitalist system. Marx said that the capitalist system symbolises the most acute form of inequality, exploitation and class antagonism. This paves the way for a socialist revolution which would lead to a new stage of society i.e. communism.

#### **Box 8.2: Communism**

The word ‘communism’ originated in the mid-1830s, when it was used by members of the secret revolutionary parties in Paris. It referred to political movement of the working class in capitalist society. It also referred to the form of society which the working class would create as a result of its struggle.

During the later half of the nineteenth century, both terms, socialism and communism, were used interchangeably to describe the working-class movement. Marx and Engels also used these terms in a similar fashion.

With the advent of the Third (Communist) International in 1917, the term communism was applied to a form of revolutionary programme for overthrowing capitalism. We can say that the term socialism began to be applied to a more peaceful and constitutional action of long-term changes, while communism referred to a revolutionary action, involving violent forms of changes.

Marx discussed communism as a form of society. In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) he wrote that 'Communism is the positive abolition of private property, of human self-alienation, and thus the real appropriation of human nature, through and for man'.

### 8.2.4 Class and Class Struggle

It is clear that according to Marx the mode of production or economic structure is the base or foundation of society. Any change in this **infrastructure** (see sub sub-section 6.2.2.1 of Unit 6) will cause fundamental changes in the **superstructure** (see sub sub-section 6.2.2.1 of Unit 6) and consequently in a society. The changes in the mode of production are essentially changes in the forces of production and relations of production. In primitive communal stage there was no surplus production and hence it had no inequality and exploitation caused by the private ownership of means of production. The means of production were common property of the community. With the development and improvements in the forces of production there was increased productivity. This caused private ownership of means of production and change in the relations of production. This marked the end of primitive-communal system and thus began the long history of inequality, exploitation and class conflict, coinciding with the emergence of slave-owning society.

In the slave-owning society the class conflict between the slave owners and slaves reached a peak causing a change in the mode of production from slavery to feudalistic mode of production. Marx has said that the history of hitherto existing society is a history of class struggle. This means that the entire history of society is studded with different phases and periods of class struggle. This history of class struggle begins in the slave-owning society and continues through feudal society where this class struggle is between classes of the feudal lords and the landless agricultural labourers or serfs. Due to change in mode of production and class struggle a new stage of society i.e., capitalism replaces the age-old feudal system.

In the capitalistic mode of production the class antagonism acquires most acute dimensions. The working class movement begins to concretise and reaches its peak. Through a class conflict between the class of capitalists and the class of industrial labourers, the capitalist system is replaced by socialism. This violent change has been termed as revolution by Marx. We shall deliberate on this concept of revolution in detail in the next section. This marks, according to Marx, the fifth stage of social development. Before reading about the fifth stage in the next sub-section (8.3), please complete Activity 2.

**Activity 2**

Do you think that Indian history provides us with some examples of class conflict? If yes, elaborate at least one such example. If no, then give reasons for the absence of class conflict in Indian history.

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### **8.3 CLASS STRUGGLE AND REVOLUTION**

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Marx said that the class antagonism and subsequently the class conflict in the capitalist system will usher in socialism in place of capitalism through a revolution. Here the question arises what is the basis of this antagonism? Marx's answer is that the contradiction between the forces and the relations of production is the basis of this antagonism. The bourgeoisie is constantly creating more powerful means of production. But the relations of production that is, apparently, both the relations of ownership and the distribution of income are not transferred at the same rate. The capitalist mode of production is capable to produce in bulk, but despite this mass production and increase in wealth, majority of the population suffers from poverty and misery. On the other hand, there are a few families who have so much wealth that one could not even count or imagine. These stark and wide disparities create some tiny islands of prosperity in a vast ocean of poverty and misery. The onus of this disparity lies on the unequal, exploitative relations of production which distribute the produce in an unequal manner. This contradiction, according to Marx, will eventually produce a revolutionary crisis. The proletariat, which constitutes and will increasingly constitute the vast majority of the population, will become a class, that is, a social entity aspiring for the seizure of power and transformation of social relations.

Marx asserted that the progress of society meant the succession of victories of one class over the other. He assigned his life to planning a victory for the proletariat. In a way, he became a commander, engaged in a campaign. With his solitary aim of defeating the enemy, Marx stressed on acquiring the knowledge of the history of society and the laws that regulate its organisation. His monumental work, *Das Kapital* (*Capital*, 1861-1879), provided an analysis in which Marx was not concerned with arguments for a class-war. He treated the necessity for such arguments as an unnecessary task. He had no love for emotionalism and humanitarianism and appeal to idealism etc. He conceived of the class conflict on every front and proposed the formation of a political party which would eventually gain victory and be the conquering class.

You do not have to imagine that it was Marx who, for the first time ever, advanced the idea of conflict between classes. Saint Simon wrote about human history as the history of struggles between social classes. In the 1790s Babeuf, a French political agitator, spoke of the dictatorship of the proletariat and Weitling and Blanqui (Babeuf's disciple) developed Babeuf's ideas in the nineteenth century. The French State Socialists worked out the future position and importance of workers in industrial states. In fact in the eighteenth century many thinkers advanced such doctrines. Marx

did the admirable task of sifting all this material and constructed a new set of social analysis. His analysis of class struggle was a unique mix of simple basic principles with down-to-earth details.

According to Marx, the bottom rung of the social stratification is the proletariat. Below it there is no class and therefore emancipation of the proletariat will, in fact, be the emancipation of mankind. Marx accepts the right of the bourgeoisie to fight the final war. But for the proletariat the battle is for its very survival and it has to win.

The revolutions of the proletariat will differ in kind from all past revolutions. All the revolutions of the past were accomplished by minorities for the benefit of minorities. The revolution of the proletariat will be accomplished by the vast majority for the benefit of all. The proletarian revolution will, therefore, mark the end of classes and of the antagonistic character of capitalist society. This would mean that the private ownership of property will be abolished. The proletariat will jointly own means of production and distribute the produce according to the needs of the members of the society. This stage is called the stage of dictatorship of proletariat. This stage will later on convert into a stateless society where the communist system will finally be established in the society. This will also end all kinds of social classes and of all kinds of class conflicts for future. This will also mean de-alienation of the proletariat. Since the concept of alienation is now regarded as one of the main ideas of Marxism, after completing Check Your Progress 3, you will also learn a little about this concept, and its relevance to Marxian analysis of class conflict.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Discuss the main features of communism in three lines.  
.....  
.....  
.....
- ii) Mark True and False against each of the following sentences.
  - a) The private ownership of property will not be abolished in communism. True/False
  - b) Communism is characterised by stateless and classless society. True/False

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**8.4 MARX’S CONCEPT OF ALIENATION**

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Alienation literally means “separation from”. This term is often used in literature and Marx has given it a sociological meaning. Marx has conceived of alienation as a phenomenon related to the structure of those societies in which the producer is divorced from the means of production and in which “dead labour” (capital) dominates “living labour” (the worker). Let us take an example of a shoemaker in a factory. A shoemaker manufactures shoes but cannot use them for himself. His creation thus becomes an object which

is separate from him. It becomes an entity which is separate from its creator. He makes shoes not because making shoes satisfies merely his urge to work and create. He does so to earn his living. For a worker this 'objectification' becomes more so because the process of production in a factory is divided into several parts and his job may be only a tiny part of the whole. Since he produces only one part of the whole, his work is mechanical and therefore he loses his creativity.

A systematic elaboration of the concept appears in *Capital* under the heading "Fetishism of commodities and money". But the ethical germ of this conception can be found as early as 1844, when Marx unequivocally rejected and condemned "the state" and "money", and invested the proletariat with the "historical mission" of emancipating society as a whole. In Marx's sense alienation is an action through which (or a state in which) a person, a group, an institution, or a society becomes (or remains) alien

- a) to the results or products of its own activity (and to the activity itself), and/or
- b) to the nature in which it lives, and/or
- c) to other human beings, and in addition and through any or all of (a) to (c) also
- d) to itself (to its own historically created human possibilities).

Alienation is always self-alienation, i.e., one's alienation from oneself through one's own activity. To quote Gajo Petrovic (1983: 10) we can say, "And self-alienation is not just one among the forms of alienation, but the very essence and basic structure of alienation. It is not merely a descriptive concept, it is also an appeal, or a call for a revolutionary change of the world".

### **De-alienation**

Mere criticism of alienation was not the intention of Marx. His aim was to clear the path for a radical revolution and for accomplishing communism understood as "the re-integration of one's return to oneself, the supersession of one's self-alienation". Mere abolition of private property cannot bring about de-alienation of economic and social life. This situation of the worker, or the producer does not alter by transforming private property into state property. Some forms of alienation in capitalist production have their roots in the nature of the means of production and the related division of social labour, so that they cannot be eliminated by a mere change in the form of managing production.

Far from being an eternal fact of social life, the division of society into mutually interdependent and conflicting spheres (economy, politics, laws, arts, morals, religion, etc.), and the predominance of the economic sphere, are, according to Marx, characteristics of a self-alienated society. The de-alienation of society is therefore impossible without the abolition of the alienation of different human activities from each other.

Alienation in the Marxian sense of the term cannot be overcome by the reorganisation of the economy, however radical the programme of such



transformation may be. Alienation of the society and of the individual are integrally connected. Therefore, the de-alienation of neither can be carried out without the other, nor can one be reduced to the other.

The concept of alienation is a key tool of analysis in Marx’s thought. According to Marx, one had always been self-alienated thus far. The bourgeoisie relations of production are the last antagonistic form of the social process of production causing alienation. At the same time, the production forces developing in the womb of bourgeoisie society create the material conditions for the solution of that antagonism and alienation. This social formation constitutes, therefore, the closing chapter of the “prehistoric” stage of human society. Our discussion of the concept of alienation closes Unit 8 on Class and Class Conflict. Before moving on to a summary of the unit, let us complete Activity 3.

**Activity 3**

Is there a word for alienation in your mother-tongue? If yes, provide the term and explain it by giving examples from your day-to-day life.

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## 8.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have discussed the concept of class and class conflict in the history of development of society as given by Karl Marx. He defined class in terms of people’s relationship to the means of production and their class-consciousness. In Marxian terms, the history of society, so far, is the history of class struggle. This means that ever since the social inequality and exploitation started in human history, that is, beginning from slavery system, society has been divided into mutually warring classes of Haves and Have-nots. This successive class conflict and change in mode of production has led to change in the stages of society from slavery to feudalistic and feudalistic to capitalistic system. The final social revolution would transform the capitalistic system into communist system where there would be no more classes, social inequality and class conflict. In other words, there will be de-alienation of the proletariat.

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## 8.6 KEYWORDS

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- |                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| <b>Bourgeoisie</b> | Also known as ‘Haves’ are those people who own the means of production for example – landowners, capitalists in industrial societies.                                 |
| <b>Capitalism</b>  | It is one of the historical stages of society where the means of production are mainly machinery, capital and labour.   |
| <b>Class</b>       | When people share the same relationship to the means of production and also share the similar consciousness regarding their common interest, they constitute a class. |

<b>Class-conflict</b>	When two classes having basic antagonism of class interests struggle or clash in order to safeguard their class interests then it is called class conflict.
<b>Feudalism</b>	It is also one of the historical stages of society where the means of production are mainly land and labour.
<b>Forces of Production</b>	Forces of production mean the ways in which production is done; the technological 'know-how', the types of equipments in use and types of goods being produced, e.g., tools, machinery, labour, etc.
<b>Infrastructure</b>	According to Marx, the materialistic structure or economic structure is the foundation or base of society. In other words, it is also called the infrastructure. The superstructure of society rests on it. Infrastructure includes mode of production and hence forces of production and relations of production.
<b>Means of Production</b>	It includes all the elements necessary for production, e.g., land, raw material, factory, labour and capital, etc.
<b>Mode of Production</b>	It refers to the general economic institution i.e., the particular manner in which people produce and distribute the means that sustain life. The forces of production and the relations of production together define the mode of production. Examples of modes of production are capitalistic mode of production, feudal mode of production, etc.
<b>Proletariat</b>	These people are also known as 'Have-nots' and these are the people who do not own any means of production except their own labour power. Hence all the landless peasants or agricultural labourers in feudal societies and industrial workers in capitalist societies are the proletariat.
<b>Relations of Production</b>	According to Marx, the forces of production shape the nature of the 'relations of production'. These are, in fact, the social relations found in production i.e., economic roles, e.g., labourer, landowner, capitalist, etc.
<b>Revolution</b>	It is the sudden, total and radical change in society brought in by the matured conditions of class conflict.

**Superstructure**

All social, political and cultural institutions of societies excepting economic institutions constitute the superstructure of a society.

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## **8.7 FURTHER READING**

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Coser, Lewis A, 1971. *Masters of Sociological Thought: Ideas in Historical and Social Context*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Inc: New York (Chapter 2, pp. 43-88).

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## **8.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) It comprises people sharing same relationship with the means of production and having similar consciousness regarding their class interests.
- ii) A social class can be determined by two major criteria, namely,
  - a) objective and
  - b) subjective criteria.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Five stages of society as given by Marx are
  - 1) Primitive-Communal System
  - 2) Slavery
  - 3) Feudalism
  - 4) Capitalism
  - 5) Communism.
- ii) a) True
- b) True

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) It will be characterised by a classless society, devoid of private ownership of means of production. There will be no stateless society.
- ii) a) False
- b) True

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# UNIT 9 DIALECTICS AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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## Structure

- 9.0 Objectives
- 9.1 Introduction
- 9.2 The Concept of Dialectics
- 9.3 Laws of Dialectics
  - 9.3.1 The Law of the Unity and Conflict of Opposites
  - 9.3.2 The Law of Negation of the Negation
  - 9.3.3 The Law of Transition of Quantity into Quality
- 9.4 Application of the Laws of Dialectical Materialism
  - 9.4.1 Primitive-Communal Form of Society
  - 9.4.2 Slave-Ownning Society
  - 9.4.3 Feudal Society
  - 9.4.4 Capitalist Society
- 9.5 Social Change and Revolution
- 9.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 9.7 Keywords
- 9.8 Further Reading
- 9.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 9.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit deals with **dialectics** and social change. After studying it you should be able to

- discuss the Marxian concepts of dialectics and social change
- describe the laws of dialectics
- show the application of the laws of dialectics to understand social change
- outline Marx's ideas on social change and revolution.

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## 9.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous units of this block, you learnt the fundamental conceptual and theoretical structure of Marxian thought on the history of development of society. After having read his specific contributions to the materialistic and scientific interpretations of human history in terms of forces of production, relations of production and modes of production one required an understanding of his ideas on class and class conflict. This understanding was rendered to you through Unit 8 on class and class conflict.

Unit 9 undertakes two major tasks: (i) to introduce the significant Marxian concept of dialectics and change and (ii) to summarise the entire conceptual and theoretical structure relating to dynamic and social change as envisaged by Karl Marx. Hence, this unit is divided in four major sections.

The first two sections (9.2 & 9.3) introduce the concept of dialectics and then discuss the laws of **dialectical materialism** and social change in a theoretical perspective.

The third section (9.4) is related to the second task of this unit, i.e., summarising the Marxian structure of thought on social change, with a major difference. This section deals with successive forms and modes of production and social change. This has been dealt in earlier units also, but here the emphasis would be on highlighting the dialectical aspect of the historical course of development of society.

The fourth section (9.5) deals briefly with Marx's ideas on social change and revolution.

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## 9.2 THE CONCEPT OF DIALECTICS

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The word 'dialectics' refers to a method of intellectual discussion by dialogue. It is a term of logic. According to the Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), it referred to the art of deputation by question and answer. Before Aristotle, another Greek philosopher Plato (427-397 B.C.) developed this term in relation with his doctrine of ideas. He evolved it as the art of analysing ideas in themselves and in relation to the idea of ultimate good. Even before Plato, yet another Greek philosopher Socrates (470-390 B.C.) used this term to examine the presuppositions at the back of all sciences. Until the end of the middle ages, this term remained a part of logic. Carrying the same tradition of treating this term as reason, in modern philosophy of Europe, the word was used by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) to discuss the impossibility of applying to objects of a non-sensuous understanding the principles which are found to govern phenomena of sense-experience.

There is one more strand in the meaning of the term dialectics. It is the idea of dialectics as a process. This means the dialectics is a process of reason in ascending and descending forms. In ascending form of dialectics, one is able to demonstrate the existence of a higher reality, e.g., the forms of God. In descending form of dialectics, one is able to explain the manifestation of a higher reality in the phenomenal world of sense-experience.

In order to understand how Karl Marx made use of the term 'dialectics', we need to remember that Marx evolved his concept of dialectical materialism on the basis of his critique of the German philosopher Hegel's theories of idealism. Hopefully you remember that Hegel was introduced to you in Box 6.1 of Unit 6 as an idealist philosopher who saw reality as consisting in minds or ideas. You may once again read about him in Boxes 6.1 and 6.2.

Hegel combined the two strands of dialectic, i.e., the idea of dialectic as reason and as process. In broad sense, he used the notion of dialectics as a logical process and more narrowly he traced it as the generator or motor of the logical process. Hegel maintained that God or the Absolute comes to self-knowledge through human knowledge. In other words, the categories of human thought are equal to objective forms of being and logic is at the same time the theory about the nature of being. Further, Hegel proposed that dialectics can be conceived more narrowly as grasping of opposites in their unity. Hegel saw it as a process which brings out what is implicit. In this way, each development is a product of a previous less developed phase. In a way new development is a fulfilment of the previous state. Thus there is always a hidden tension between a form and its process of becoming a new form. Hegel interpreted history as progress in the consciousness of freedom (See Box 6.2).

Marx was initially influenced by Hegel's philosophy but later on he criticised it due to its idealist nature and propounded his own dialectical materialism. Marx criticised Hegel for deducing the laws of dialectics from consciousness instead of material existence. On this point Marx said that to get a scientifically sound dialectical method one will have to totally invert the logic of Hegelian dialectics. This is what Marx did in his dialectical materialism, where in contradistinction to Hegel, he said it is the matter which is supreme and determinant of consciousness and idea and not vice-versa.

Let us now discuss Marxian concepts and laws of dialectical materialism. But before you go on to the next section, complete Activity 1.

### Activity 1

Compile a bibliography of books by Marx on the basis of references to them in this block. Compare it with the list of references under Marx, given at the end of this block. Remember that while making a bibliography, you need to state (i) name of the author of the book, (ii) year of publication of the book, (iii) full title of the book, (iv) place of publication of the book and (v) name of the publisher of the book. Without any one of these details, a reference is considered incomplete.

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## 9.3 LAWS OF DIALECTICS

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Dialectical materialism evolved by Marx is diametrically opposite to Hegelian dialectics. It seeks to explain everything in terms of contradictions of matter. Dialectical materialism provides abstract laws for natural and social change. Contrary to metaphysics, it believes that in Nature, things are interconnected, interrelated and determined by each other. It considers Nature as an integral whole. Dialectical materialism declares that the law of reality is the law of change. There is constant transformation in inorganic nature and human world. There is nothing eternally static. These transformations are not gradual but there is a violent, revolutionary shift. Marx's colleague Friedrich Engels put forward the following three major laws of dialectical materialism.



### 9.3.1 The Law of the Unity and Conflict of Opposites

We have studied that everything changes, we have also learnt about the nature and direction of change, but what remains to be seen is the cause behind change. What leads to change? The law of the unity and conflict of opposites is the core of dialectics. This law reveals the sources, the real causes of the eternal motion and development of the material world.

It states that there are internal sides, tendencies, forces of an object or phenomena, which are mutually exclusive but at the same time presuppose each other. The inseparable interconnections of these opposite tendencies or contradictions is responsible for the unity of opposites. This contradictoriness of objects and phenomena of the world is of a general, universal nature. There is no object or phenomenon in the world which could not be divided into opposites. These opposites coexist and one is inconceivable without the other. However, these opposites cannot coexist peacefully in one object: the contradictory, mutually exclusive character of opposites necessarily causes a struggle between them. The old and the new, the emergent and the obsolete must come into conflict. Here it is important to note that the unity of opposites is a necessary condition of the conflict, because it takes place only where opposite sides exist in one object or phenomenon. It is the contradiction, the conflict of opposites that is the main source of development of matter and consciousness. Development is the struggle of these opposites. Here, more often than not one opposite or tendency of the two tries to maintain the status quo and the other counterpart tries to radically change the status quo. This conflict leads to a new situation, object, phenomenon or stage or development, when the mature conditions come into existence after several **quantitative changes**. This radical change is the **qualitative** change. This is how one can find the logical interconnections between these three laws of dialectical materialism.

It would be erroneous to ignore the role of external influences which may help or hinder one form of movement or another. Nevertheless, each movement takes its source from internal contradictions, so that the emergence of new contradictions gives rise to a new form of movement, while their disappearance gives place to another form of movement for which other contradictions are responsible. The opposites can never become balanced completely. The unity, the equal effect of opposites, is temporary and relative, whereas their conflict is eternal.

Both the laws of transition from quantitative changes to qualitative changes and that of **negation** of the negation may be regarded as particular instances of the law of unity and conflict of opposites, which reveals the sources of all development and change.

This abstract law of the unity and conflict of opposites can be explained and understood if applied to successive modes of production in the history of development of society.

### 9.3.2 The Law of Negation of the Negation

The term 'negation' was introduced in philosophy by Hegel but with an idealist meaning. Hegel believed that the negation was present in the development of the idea, of thought. Marx criticised Hegel and gave a

materialistic interpretation of negation. He showed that negation is an integral part of development of reality itself. Marx wrote, "In no sphere can one undergo a development without negating one's previous mode of existence."

Let us explain it. For example, the development of the earth's crust has undergone a number of geological eras, each new era, arising on the basis of the preceding one, represents a certain negation of the old. In animal world also, each new species of animal, arising on the basis of the old, at the same time represents its negation. The history of society also consists of a chain of negations of the old social order by the new: as Raymond Aron (1965) puts it, capitalism is the negation of feudal society, and socialism would be the negation of capitalism i.e. **negation of negation**. In the realm of knowledge and science also, each new scientific theory negates the old theories, for example, Bohr's theory of atom negated Dalton's molecular theory or Darwin's theory negated earlier speculations about human evolution.

Here one thing should be kept in mind. Negation is not something introduced into an object or phenomenon from outside, but is the result of the object's or phenomenon's own, internal development. Objects and phenomena develop on the basis of their own inherent, internal contradictions: they themselves create the conditions for their destruction, for the change into a new, higher quality. Negation is the overcoming of the old through internal contradictions, a result of self-development, self-movement of objects and phenomena. Thus, socialism comes to take the place of capitalism because it resolves the internal contradictions of the capitalist system.

Dialectical negation, therefore, consists of the fact that something of a stage which is negated is lost, something becomes part of the new, negating stages (although in a modified form), and something entirely new is added. Thus, recognition of continuity, the connection of the new and the old in development is a feature of the Marxist understanding of negation. But we must bear in mind that the new never takes over the old completely, as it is. It takes from the old only certain elements or aspects. This too, it does not absorb mechanically, but assimilates and transforms them in conformity with its own nature.

For example, after throwing off the colonial yoke, in India we started building a new nation. In this process, we tried to do away with all the vestiges of oppression and the institutions that blocked national development. However, we did retain the educational, legal and bureaucratic structures along with the modern infrastructure of transportation and telecommunication.

Due to these reasons, the succession of developmental stages is progressive. Although no stage is ever completely repeated, some features of earlier stages necessarily recur, although in a different form, at later stages. In this way, the old is destroyed and the new arises. This is only one of the stages of development, not to end, because development does not stop here. Anything new does not remain new forever. While developing, it prepares the prerequisites for the rise of something newer and more progressive.

When these prerequisites and conditions ripen, negation again occurs. This is a negation of the negation, that is the negation of that which itself previously overcame the old: this is replacement of the new by something newer. The result of this second negation is again negated, overcome, and so on till infinity. Development thus appears as a countless number of successive negations, as an endless replacement or overcoming of old by the new.

### 9.3.3 The Law of Transition of Quantity into Quality

In nature, everything is in a state of continuous movement and change. Certain things are arising or coming into existence whereas certain things are developing, and/or decaying and certain things are dying or going out of existence at a given time. This means a state of continuous flux. As said earlier, Marx believed that law of reality is the law of change. Now the question arises regarding the nature of change. What kind of change is this? This law responds to this particular question. According to this law, process of change is not simple or gradual but it is a product of quantitative advances which result in abstract qualitative changes at a particular moment when mature conditions are present. There is never repetition of occurrences. This change is always from lower to higher, simpler to complex, homogeneous to heterogeneous levels of reality.

Let us elaborate this point of quantitative and qualitative changes. The appearance or the birth of the new and the death or disappearance of the old can be considered as qualitative changes, philosophically as well as logically. Whereas all other changes, whereby different parts or aspects of an object become rearranged increase or diminish (while the object retains its identity) could be considered as quantitative changes. To explain and simplify it further, one could say that the qualitative changes may be of two forms: (i) something did not exist, but now it does, and (ii) something existed but now it does not. Quantitative changes, on the other hand, are infinitely diverse, e.g., larger-smaller, more/ less, more often more seldom, faster-slower, warmer-colder, lighter-heavier, worse-better, poorer-richer, and so on.

In fact these quantitative changes occur continuously in every object of Nature and they reach to a limit determined by the nature of each process, after which a leap inevitably occurs. The limit beyond which continuous change is interrupted is described as measure philosophy. This leap is the qualitative change. To give a concrete example, Indian national movement for freedom was continuing for more than a century leading to continuous quantitative changes and when it reached its limit there was a leap at the midnight stroke of the clock on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1947. India was a free country. Independence from colonialism was the qualitative change. Similarly, the process of ageing in human being does not stop even for a fraction of a second. We keep getting older or in other words we keep undergoing quantitative changes and when we reach the limit prescribed by nature, we meet the qualitative change i.e. death. This example could also be applied to birth of an infant. Quantitative changes keep going on during gestation period right from the day of conception but the qualitative change occurs when the baby breaths air in this world i.e. when it is born.

Hence the dialectical level or law of transition from quantity to quality and vice-versa is that continuous quantitative changes, upon attaining measure, cause abrupt qualitative changes, which in their turn determine the character of the further continuous quantitative changes.

From this law, we move on the other very significant law of dialectical materialism known as the law of negation of the negation.

**Check Your Progress 1**

i) Name the laws of the dialectical materialism.

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.....  
.....

ii) Define quantitative change, in two lines.

.....  
.....

iii) Define qualitative change, in three lines.

.....  
.....  
.....

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**9.4 APPLICATION OF THE LAWS OF  
DIALECTICAL MATERIALISM**

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The principles or laws of dialectical materialism hold good for nature, world and society alike. When these laws are applied to the history of society they take the shape of historical materialism. (We have already studied in the previous units that human society according to Marx has gone through four major modes of production viz., Asiatic, Ancient, Feudal and Capitalist. Finally these successive forms of society would reach the stage of communism, as per the predictions of Marxian theory.)

Here we shall see how the laws of dialectical materialism are applied to understand the successive forms and modes of production and hence social change.

**9.4.1 Primitive-Communal Form of Society**

This was the first, the simplest and the lowest form of mode of production. During the period of this form of mode of production, appearance of improved and also new implements, such as bows and arrows and learning to make a fire were examples of quantitative changes in terms of the laws of dialectical materialism. Even beginning of cultivation and herding were examples of similar type of changes. The extremely low level relations of production were based on cooperation and mutual help due to common,

communal ownership of means of production. These relations were conditioned by the fact that people with their primitive tools could only collectively withstand the mighty forces of nature.

Even in primitive society the productive forces developed steadily. The tools were improved and skills were gradually accumulated. The most significant development was the transition to metal tools. With the growth of productivity the communal structure of society started breaking into families. Private property arose and the family started becoming the owner of the means of production. Here the contradiction between the communal relations of production and the potential forms of exploiting classes led to the qualitative change i.e. transition into ancient mode of production. There was conflict of opposites within the system which led to the negation of primitive-communal system. Consequently, a new stage of slavery appeared. The slavery system can be described as the negation of primitive communal system.

### **9.4.2 Slave-Ownning Society**

In this form of society the primitive equality gave way to social inequality and emergence of slave-owning classes and slaves. The forces of production underwent further quantitative changes. In the slave-owning society, the relations of production were based on the slave-owner's absolute ownership of both the means of production and the slaves themselves and their produce.

In this society, there existed the contradictions between slave-owners and slaves. When the mature conditions were reached the struggle of these contradictions led to the qualitative change i.e. the negation of slave-owning society by way of its transition into feudal society. The conflict of the opposites i.e. the slave-owners and slave culminated into violent slave revolts ultimately effecting the negation. We can say that the feudal system stands as an example of negation of negation. It means that feudal society can be seen as an example of negation of slave-owning society which itself is a negation of primitive-communal society.

### **9.4.3 Feudal Society**

Slavery system was the first stage where relations of production were based on domination and exploitation by the slave-owner class of the slave class. This was the stage, where the relations of production saw qualitatively fundamental differences compared to previous stage. In feudal stage, the forces of production saw rapid quantitative change where for the first time inanimate sources of energy such as water and wind were tapped. The development of these productive forces was facilitated by the feudal relations of production. The feudal lords oppressed and exploited their serfs. However, towns began to emerge at this time. Trade, commerce and manufacture began to flourish. Many serfs ran away from the feudal estates to pursue a trade in the growing towns. The conflict of opposites within the feudal system namely, that of landless serfs against feudal lords, reached its maturity. The feudal system declined and its negation was the capitalist system.

### 9.4.4 Capitalist Society

Based on private capitalist ownership the capitalist relations of production facilitated tremendous growth of the productive forces. With this growth of productive forces, capitalist relations of production ceased to correspond to forces of production in feudal system. The most significant contradiction of the capitalist mode of production is the contradiction between the social character of production and the private capitalist form of appropriation. Production in capitalist society bears a strikingly pronounced social character. Many millions of workers are concentrated at large plants and take part in social production, while the fruits of their labour are appropriated by a small group of owners of the means of production. This is the basic economic contradiction of capitalism. This contradiction or conflict of opposites gives rise to economic crisis and unemployment, causes fierce class battles between the bourgeoisie (the capitalists) and the proletariat (the working class), in other words, quantitative changes. The working class would help bring about a socialist revolution. This revolution would, according to Marx abolish the capitalist production relations and usher in the new qualitative change i.e. the communist socio-economic formation.

The new communist socio-economic formation, as we have seen earlier, passes in its development through two phases, socialism and communism. Socialism does away with private ownership of the means of production. It establishes public ownership of means of production. In such a society the proletariat will jointly own means of production and distribute the produce according to the needs of people. This is the stage of dictatorship of proletariat, which will later on also, do away with the state apparatus leading to a stateless society. This stage of the stateless society will be possible in communism, where the dialectic finally unfolds itself, ushering in a social system which would be free of any contradictions within classes. According to the laws of dialectics contradictions will remain as this is the basis of development. Under communism there will be contradiction between Human Being and Nature, as in Primitive-Communism. The basic difference now is that the level of technology will be higher and Nature will be exploited more efficiently. Thus we see how the three laws of dialectics operate in Marx's interpretation of the history of society.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Name the four modes of production.
  - (i) \_\_\_\_\_
  - (ii) \_\_\_\_\_
  - (iii) \_\_\_\_\_
  - (iv) \_\_\_\_\_
- ii) Class antagonism reaches its climax and it leads to which of the following formations?
  - (a) Revolution
  - (b) Slavery
  - (c) Bourgeoisie
  - (d) Proletariat
- iii) Name the stage marked by classless society and mention its main characteristics.



.....  
iv) Which stage follows socialism and what is its characteristic feature?  
.....  
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## 9.5 SOCIAL CHANGE AND REVOLUTION

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Let us now discuss the ideas of Marx on social change and revolution. In the *German Ideology* (1845-6), both Marx and Engels outlined their scheme of history. Here, the main idea was that based on a mode of production there was a succession of historical phases. Change from one phase to the next was viewed by them as a state of revolution brought about by conflicts between old institutions and new productive forces. It was only later on that both Marx and Engels devoted more time and studied English, French and American revolutions. They named them as bourgeois revolutions. Marx's hypothesis of bourgeois revolution has given us a perspective to look at social changes in Europe and America. But more than this, it has stimulated further research by scholars on this subject. Secondly, Marx spoke of another kind of revolution. It pertained to communism. Marx viewed communism as a sequel to capitalism. Communism, according to Marx, would wipe out all class divisions and therefore would allow for a fresh start with moral and social transformation. This was the vision both Marx and Engels carried in their minds for future society. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, we find that their vision has not come true and communism has not had its sway around the world. All the same Marx's ideas have influenced the nature of growth of capitalism. Tempered with socialist ideas it is now beginning to acquire a human face.

Marx's concept of socialist revolution presupposes an era of shift from capitalism to socialism. He explained bourgeois revolution as a defeat of the aristocracy. This defeat came at the end of a long period of growth of capitalism. The overthrow of the bourgeoisie is, on the other hand, only the first phase of the revolutionary change from capitalism to socialism. According to Marx the socialistic phase of revolution would not be without classes, occupational division of labour and market economy etc. It is only in the higher phase of revolution there would be distribution of goods to each according to his needs. This would be the phase of communism. Thus, change to communism was perceived by Marx as a series of steps to completely revolutionise the entire mode of production.

In fact, Marx conceived intensification of class antagonism in capitalism, because the new forces of production do not correspond to the relations of production. There will be increasing gap between the levels of distribution of gains between the two classes. This shall leave the have-nots extremely alienated and conscious of their class interests. The new forces of production in capitalism are capable of mass production and will dump heaps of prosperity at the feet of bourgeoisie without helping the lot of proletariat, who would continue to suffer from misery and poverty. This shall accentuate the class consciousness and hasten the maturation of the

conditions for socialist revolution. The socialist revolution according to Marx would be qualitatively different from all the revolutions of the past as it would for the first time, after the beginning of history of inequality and exploitation, usher in a stage of classless society with a hope for all members of society.

### Activity 2

It is well known that Marxist thought has influenced many Indian scholars, politicians, litterateurs and other thinkers, try to identify them by answering the following questions.

- i) Who am I? I wrote a novel which gave a critical description of the evolution of Hinduism. One of my novels was also serialised on Doordarshan in 1990.
- ii) Who am I? I was inspired by Marx's theory of historical materialism while writing in 1966 '*Light on Early Indian Society and Economy*'.
- iii) Who am I? I am known as 'the Indian theoretician of the British Communist Party'.
- iv) Who am I? I am a communist party leader and a historian of Kerala.
- v) Who am I? I wrote a book on materialism and criticised Marxist historical theory. In 1920 I was sent to Tashkent to organise a training centre for Indian revolutionaries. I attended the second congress of the Communist International and drafted the colonial thesis adopted by the congress. My draft was modified by Lenin.

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## 9.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this concluding unit of the block, we studied Marx's most philosophically profound contribution of dialectics and social change. There was an introduction to the concept of dialectics followed by the fundamental laws of dialectics and change. This was followed by a discussion of the application of the laws of dialectical materialism in the successive modes of production and consequent social change in society. In this unit, we have therefore studied these successive forms of mode of production in the context of dialectical principles of Karl Marx. Finally, we discussed Marx's views on revolution and social change.

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## 9.7 KEY WORDS

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<b>Dialectics</b>	The conflict between two mutually opposite forces or tendencies.
<b>Dialectical Materialism</b>	It is the Marxian theory that seeks to explain everything in terms of change which is caused due to constant contradiction of mutually opposite forces found in matter.

<b>Quantitative Change</b>	All the changes, whereby different parts or aspects of an object become rearranged, increase or decrease while the object undergoing change retains its identity.
<b>Qualitative</b>	Appearance of new or disappearance of old is a qualitative change.
<b>Negation</b>	A new stage which is a product of a qualitative change and it is a progressive change to replace the old.
<b>Negation of Negation</b>	When something that came into existence as negation of the old, is in turn replaced by the new. It is a qualitative change.

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## 9.8 FURTHER READING

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## 9.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) It is the Marxian theory that seeks to explain everything in terms of change, which is caused due to constant contradiction of mutually opposite forces found in matter.
- ii) Law of transition of quantity to quality; law of negation of negation; law of unity and conflict of opposites.
- iii) Minor or major changes in any object whereby the object does not lose its identity.
- iv) Appearance of new or disappearance of old is a qualitative change.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) (i) Asiatic mode of production (ii) Ancient mode of production (iii) Feudal mode of production (iv) Capitalist mode of production.
- ii) (a)
- iii) Socialism. Two of its characteristics are (i) public ownership of means of production, (ii) the proletariat jointly own the means of production
- iv) Communism. It is characterised by a stateless society.

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## Structure

- 10.0 Objectives
- 10.1 Introduction
- 10.2 General Conditions for the Establishment of Social Science
- 10.3 Sociology as a Study of “Social Facts”
  - 10.3.0 Social Facts
  - 10.3.1 Types of Social Facts
  - 10.3.2 Main Characteristics of Social Facts
  - 10.3.3 Externality said Constraint
- 10.4 The Sociological Method
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  - 10.4.1 Rules for Distinguishing between the Normal and the Pathological
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## 10.0 OBJECTIVES

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Human beings have always lived in societies, and as members of their societies, they have pondered about their nature. This is like saying that human beings have their own bodies and they always had some idea of the organism. The knowledge about different parts of the body, its anatomy, and its working or physiology developed as a special discipline much later. Thus scientific knowledge about our body and other things around us developed along with new methods of acquiring the same. This method began to be called the scientific method. Now we try to get knowledge about society, its working, its modifications and changes through a scientific method. In bringing scientific approach to the study of society, Durkheim played an important part. So we try to know what he did and how he did it. When you study this unit, you will be able to

- locate the characteristics of science
- identify the bases for defining social facts
- point out how sociology is different from some other subjects of study
- describe the types of society
- classify social facts
- list the rules of observation of social facts
- identify the rules for explaining facts.

## 10.1 INTRODUCTION

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) is best remembered for his efforts in making sociology accepted as an autonomous academic discipline. He won recognition for the idea of a science of society, which could contribute to the study of moral and intellectual problems of modern society. While discussing Durkheim’s conception of Sociology we shall focus on three important aspects (a) general conditions for establishment of **social science** (b) sociology as a study of ‘social facts’ and (c) the sociological method.

## 10.2 GENERAL CONDITIONS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Sociology was just emerging as a distinctive discipline in Durkheim’s lifetime. To the vast majority of educated people including scholars in the universities, sociology was just a name. When Durkheim was a student at the Ecole Normale there was not a single professorship in sociology in France! It was only in 1887 that the first chair in social science was created for Durkheim by the French Government at the University of Bordeaux. It was many years later that he received the title of Professor of Sociology at Sorbonne in Paris.

Given the existing situation, Durkheim was explicitly concerned with outlining the nature and scope of Sociology. Durkheim considered social sciences to be distinct from natural sciences because social sciences dealt with human relationships. However the method used in the natural sciences could be used in the social sciences as well. He was concerned with examining the nature of Sociology as a social science distinct from Philosophy and Psychology. Philosophy is concerned with ideas and conceptions whereas science is concerned with objective realities. Philosophy is the source from where all sciences have emerged (see figure 10.1).

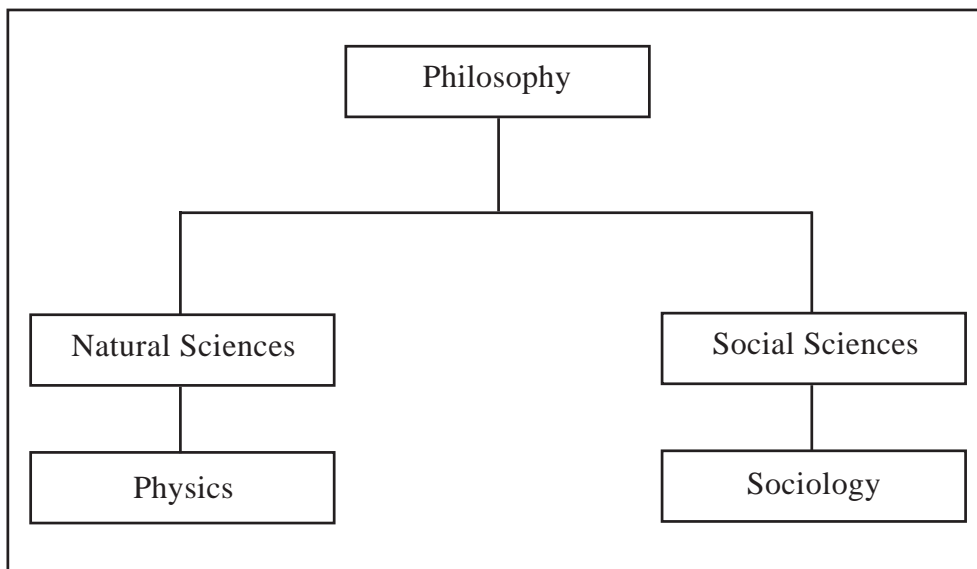


Fig 10.1: Philosophy as a source of all sciences



In his book *Montesquieu and Rousseau*, published in 1892, Durkheim (1960: 3-13) laid down the general conditions for the establishment of a social science (which also apply to Sociology). Let us look at them.

- i) Science, he pointed out, is not coextensive with human knowledge or thought. Not every type of question the mind can formulate can be tested by science. It is possible for something to be the object of the philosopher or artist and not necessarily the stuff of science at all. Thus, science deals with a specified, area — or a subject matter of its own, not with total knowledge.
- ii) Science must have a definite field to explore. Science is concerned with things, objective realities. For social science to exist it must have a definite subject matter. Philosophers, Durkheim points out, have been aware of ‘things’ called laws, traditions, religion and so on, but the reality of these was in a large measure dissolved by their insistence on dealing with these as manifestations of human will. Inquiry was thus concentrated on the internal will rather than upon external bodies of data. So it is important to look things as they appear in this world.
- iii) Science does not describe individuals but types or classes of subject matter. If human societies be classified then they help us in arriving at general rules and discover regularities of behaviour.
- iv) Social science, which classifies the various human societies, describes the normal form of social life in each type of society, for the simple reason that it describes the type itself; whatever pertains to the type is normal and whatever is normal is healthy.
- v) The subject matter, of a science yields general principles or ‘laws’. If societies were not subject to regularities, no social science would be possible. Durkheim further points out that since the principle that all the phenomena of the universe are closely interrelated has been found to be true in the other domains of nature, it is also valid for human societies, which are a part of nature. In putting forth the idea that there is a continuity of the natural and social worlds, Durkheim has been strongly influenced by Comte.
- vi) Although there is continuity between the natural and social worlds, the social is as distinctive and autonomous a sphere of subject matter as either the biological or the physical.

Durkheim was very much against the view held by some scholars that everything in society should be reduced to human volition. Categories of human will and volition, he points out, belong to psychology not social science. If social science is really to exist, societies must be assumed to have a certain nature, which results from the nature and arrangement of the elements composing them.

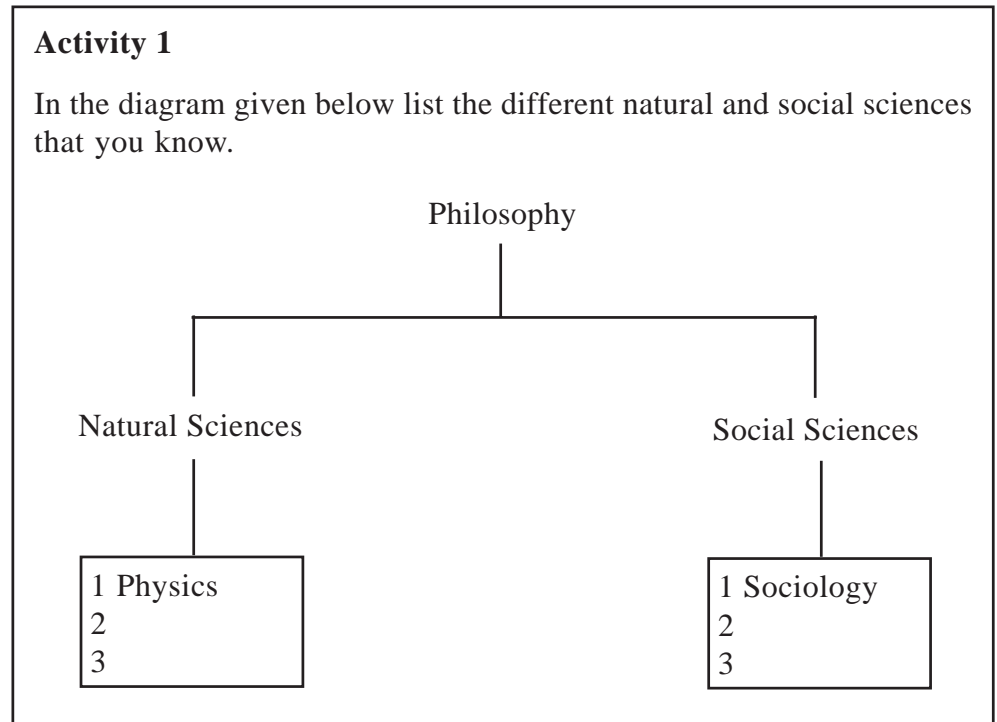
- vii) Finally, to discern the uniformities, types and laws of society we need a method. The methods of science applicable in the field of the natural sciences are valid within the social field.

The criteria of a social science which Durkheim set forth at the beginning of his first published work remained to the end of his life the fundamental

criteria of social science and the identifying attributes of the field he called ‘sociology’.

**Activity 1**

In the diagram given below list the different natural and social sciences that you know.




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### 10.3 SOCIOLOGY AS A STUDY OF ‘SOCIAL FACTS’

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In defining the subject matter of sociology two tasks are involved (a) defining the total field of study and (b) defining the sort of ‘thing’ which will be found in this field. In his book, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, published in 1895, Durkheim (1950: 3) is concerned with the second task and calls social facts the subject matter of sociology. Durkheim (1950: 3) defines social facts as “ways of acting, thinking and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion by reason of which they control him”.

To Durkheim society is a reality **suigeneris** (see the meaning of this term in Key Words). Society comes into being by the association of individuals. Hence society represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics. This unique reality of society is separate from other realities studied by physical or biological sciences. Further, societal reality is apart from individuals and is over and above them. Thus the reality of society must be the subject matter of sociology. A scientific understanding of any social phenomenon must emerge from the ‘**collective**’ or associational characteristics manifest in the social structure of a society. While working towards this end, Durkheim developed and made use of a variety of sociological concepts. Collective representations is one of the leading concepts to be found in the social thought of Durkheim. Before learning about ‘collective representations’ (subject matter of Unit 12) it is necessary that you understand what Durkheim meant by ‘social facts’.

### 10.3.0 Social Facts

Durkheim based his scientific vision of sociology on the fundamental principle, i.e., the objective reality of social facts. Social fact is that way of acting, thinking or feeling etc., which is more or less general in a given society. Durkheim treated social facts as things. They are real and exist independent of the individual's will or desire. They are external to individuals and are capable of exerting constraint upon them. In other words they are coercive in nature. Further social facts exist in their own right. They are independent of individual manifestations. The true nature of social facts lies in the collective or associational characteristics inherent in society. Legal codes and customs, moral rules, religious beliefs and practices, language etc. are all social facts.

### 10.3.2 Types of Social Facts

Durkheim saw social facts as lying along a continuum. First, on one extreme are structural or morphological social phenomena. They make up the substratum of collective life. By this he meant the number and nature of elementary parts of which society is composed, the way in which the morphological constituents are arranged and the degree to which they are fused together. In this category of social facts are included the distribution of population over the surface of the territory, the forms of dwellings, nature of communication system etc.

Secondly, there are institutionalised forms of social facts. They are more or less general and widely spread in society. They represent the collective nature of the society as a whole. Under this category fall legal and moral rules, religious dogma and established beliefs and practices prevalent in a society.

Thirdly, there are social facts, which are not institutionalised. Such social facts have not yet acquired crystallised forms. They lie beyond the institutionalised **norms** of society. Also this category of social facts have not attained a total objective and independent existence comparable to the institutionalised ones.

Also their externality to and ascendancy over and above individuals is not yet complete. These social facts have been termed as social currents. For example, sporadic currents of opinion generated in specific situations; enthusiasm generated in a crowd; transitory outbreaks in an assembly of people; sense of indignity or pity aroused by specific incidents, etc.

All the above mentioned social facts form a continuum and constitute social milieu of society.

Further Durkheim made an important distinction in terms of normal and pathological social facts. A social fact is normal when it is generally encountered in a society of a certain type at a certain phase in its evolution. Every deviation from this standard is a pathological fact. For example, some degree of crime is inevitable in any society. Hence according to Durkheim crime to that extent is a normal fact. However, an extraordinary increase in the rate of crime is pathological. A general weakening in the moral condemnation of crime and certain type of economic crisis leading to anarchy in society are other examples of pathological facts.

### 10.3.2 Main Characteristics of Social Facts

In Durkheim's view sociology as an objective science must conform to the model of the other sciences. It posed two requirements: first the 'subject' of sociology must be specific. And it must be distinguished from the 'subjects' of all other sciences. Secondly the 'subject' of sociology must be such as to be observed and explained. Similar to the way in which facts are observed and explained in other sciences. For Durkheim this 'subject' of sociology is the social fact, and that social facts must be regarded as 'things'.

The main characteristics of social facts are (i) externality, (ii) constraint, (iii) independence, and (iv) generality.

Social facts, according to Durkheim, exist outside individual consciences. Their existence is external to the individuals. For example, domestic or civic or contractual obligations are defined externally to the individual in laws and customs. Religious beliefs and practices exist outside and prior to the individual. An individual takes birth in a society and leaves it after birth death, however social facts are already given in society and remain in existence irrespective of birth or death of an individual. For example language continues to function independently of any single individual.

The other characteristic of social fact is that it exercises a constraint on individuals. Social fact is recognized because it forces itself on the individual. For example, the institutions of law, education, beliefs etc. are already given to everyone from without. They are commanding and obligatory for all. There is constraint, when in a crowd, a feeling or thinking imposes itself on everyone. Such a phenomenon is typically social because its basis, its subject is the group as a whole and not one individual in particular.

A social fact is that which has more or less a general occurrence in a society. Also it is independent of the personal features of individuals or universal attributes of human nature. Examples are the beliefs, feelings and practices of the group taken collectively.

In sum, the social fact is specific. It is born of the association of individuals. It represents a collective content of social group or society. It differs in kind from what occurs in individual consciousness. Social facts can be subjected to categorisation and classification. Above all social facts form the subject matter of the science of sociology

#### Check Your Progress 1

The following are a few statements based on what you have learnt so far. Fill in the blanks with suitable words.

- i) Society is ..... a mere sum of individuals. It is a system formed by the ..... of individuals.
- ii) Society is a reality .....
- iii) In society there are legal codes, customs, moral rules, religious beliefs and ways of feeling, acting thinking etc. Durkheim called them .....

- iv) Durkheim treated social facts as .....
- v) Social facts are ..... of the will or desire of individuals.
- vi) Social facts are ..... to individuals. They are capable of exercising ..... upon them.
- vii) There are normal social facts in society. Also there are .....facts in society.

### 10.3.3 Externality and Constraint

We shall examine the criteria of 'externality' and 'constraint' in some detail.

- A) There are two related senses in which social facts are external to the individual.
  - i) First, every individual is born into an ongoing society, which already has a definite organisation or structure. There are values, norms, beliefs and practices which the individual finds readymade at birth and which he learns through the process of **socialisation**. Since these social phenomena exist prior to the individual and have an objective reality, they are external to the individual.
  - ii) Secondly, social facts are external to the individual in the sense that any one individual is only a single element within the totality of relationships, which constitutes a society.

These relationships are not the creation of any single individual, but are constituted by multiple interactions between individuals. To understand the relationship between the individuals and the society, Durkheim draws a parallel to the relationship between chemical elements and the substances, which are composed of combinations of them. According to Durkheim (1950: X), "whenever any elements combine and thereby produce, by the fact of their combination, new phenomena, it is plain that these new phenomena reside not in the original elements but in the totality formed by their union".

A living cell consists of mineral parts like atoms of hydrogen and oxygen; just as society is composed of individuals. Just the living beings are more important than their parts, the whole (society) is greater than the collection of parts (individuals). The whole (society) differs from individual manifestations of it. You must have seen quite often in daily life that there is a difference between individuals and the group, especially when demands are made by a group. Individually members may agree on a thing, but collectively they may not. In wider society, we find a number of rules of behaviour which "reside exclusively in the very society itself which produces them, and not in its parts, i.e. its members" (Durkheim 1950: x/vii-x/viii). In putting forward this criterion Durkheim wanted to show that social facts are distinct from individual or psychological facts. Therefore their study should be conducted in an autonomous discipline independent of Psychology, i.e. Sociology.

- B) The second criterion by which social facts are defined is the moral ‘constraint’ they exercise on the individual. When the individual attempts to resist social facts they assert themselves. The assertion may range from a mild ridicule to social isolation and moral and legal **sanction**. However, in most circumstances individuals conform to social facts and therefore do not consciously feel their constraining character. This conformity is not so much due to the fear of sanctions being applied as the acceptance of the legitimacy of the social facts (see Giddens 1971: 88).

Durkheim (1950: 4) concedes that to define the social in terms of constraint and coercion is to “risk shocking the zealous partisans of absolute individualism. It is generally accepted today, however, that most of our ideas and our tendencies are not developed by ourselves but have come to us from without. How can they become a part of us except by imposing themselves upon us?” Durkheim put forward his view to counter the utilitarian viewpoint, which was prevalent during his time, that society could be held together and there would be greatest happiness if each individual worked in his self-interest. Durkheim did not agree. Individual’s interest and society’s interest do not coincide. For social order, it was necessary for society to exercise some control or pressure over its members.

To confirm the coerciveness of social facts in their effects on individuals, Durkheim (1950: 6) looks at education’s efforts “to impose on the child ways of seeing, feeling, and acting which he could not have arrived at spontaneously..... the aim of education is, precisely, the socialisation of human being; parents and teachers are merely the representatives and intermediaries of the social milieu which tends to fashion him in its own image”.

Durkheim (1950: 7) adds that social facts cannot be defined merely by their universality. Thus a thought or movement repeated by all individuals is not thereby a social fact. What is important is the corporate or “collective aspects of the beliefs, tendencies and practices of a group that characterise truly social phenomena”. What is more, these social phenomena are transmitted through the collective means of socialisation.

Thus social facts can be recognised because they are external to the individuals on the one hand, and are capable of exercising coercion over them on the other. Since they are external they are also general and because they are collective, they can be imposed on the individuals who form a given society.

### Activity 2

Give some examples of social facts, which are external to individuals and can be defined in terms of constraint and coercion. How does an individual know about these? Write a one-page note on these questions and compare it with that of other students at your Study Centre.



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## 10.4 THE SOCIOLOGICAL METHOD

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Having defined the subject matter of sociology, Durkheim describes the method to study it. His sociological method rests firmly on the experience of biology, which had emerged by then as a science of living beings.

### 10.4.0 Rules for the Observation of Social Facts

The first rule that Durkheim (1950:14) gives us is: “consider social facts as things”. Social facts are real. However instead of being dealt with as things, as concrete realities worthy of direct attention and study, they have been dealt with by other writers in the light of concepts or notions. This is true of all sciences before they emerge as disciplines — thought and reflection precede science. The pre-scientific stage is broken by the introduction of the **empirical** method and not by conceptual discussion alone. This is perhaps even more important in social science than in natural science because there is a strong tendency to treat social facts as either lacking in substantive reality (as creations of the individual will) or, on the contrary, as already wholly known words like ‘democracy’, ‘socialism’ etc. are freely used as if they denoted precisely known facts, whereas actually “they awaken in us nothing but confused ideas, a tangle of vague impressions, prejudices and emotions” (Durkheim 1950: 22). To counter these tendencies, Durkheim said that social facts must be treated as ‘things’. As ‘things’ they have to be studied by the empirical method and not direct intuition; and also, they cannot be modified by a simple effort of the will.

While studying social facts as ‘things’ the following three rules have to be followed in order to be objective.

- i) All preconceptions must be eradicated. Sociologists must emancipate themselves from the common place ideas that dominate the mind of the layperson and adopt an emotionally neutral attitude towards what they set out to investigate.
- ii) Sociologists have to formulate the concepts precisely. At the outset of the research the sociologists are likely to have very little knowledge of the phenomenon in question. Therefore they must proceed by conceptualising their subject matter in terms of those properties which are external enough to be observed. Thus in Division of Labour the type of solidarity in a society can be perceived by looking at the type of law — repressive or restitutive, criminal or civil — which is dominant in the society.
- iii) When sociologists undertake the investigation of some order of social facts they must consider them from an aspect that is independent of their individual manifestations. The objectivity of social facts depends on their being separated from individual facts, which express them. Social facts provide a common standard for members of the society. Social facts exist in the form of legal rules, moral regulations, proverbs, social conventions, etc. It is these that sociologists must study to gain an understanding of social life.

Social facts are seen in “currents of opinion”, which vary according to time and place, impel certain groups either to more marriages, for example,

or to more suicides, or to a higher or lower birth rate, etc. These currents are plainly social facts. At first sight they seem inseparable from the forms they take in individual cases. But statistics furnish us with the means of isolating them. They are, in fact, represented with considerable exactness by the rates of births, marriages and suicides....” (Durkheim 1950: 7).

Social currents are theoretical variables, while statistical rates are the means of obtaining verification for propositions referring to these variables. Recognising the fact that social currents are not observable he insists that ‘devices of method’ must be introduced in order that empirical verification be made possible. It must be noted here that the case of the ‘suicide rates’ is the best example given by Durkheim of the way in which social facts can be studied.

#### **10.4.1 Rules for Distinguishing between the Normal and the Pathological**

Having given us rules for the observation of social facts, Durkheim makes a distinction between ‘normal’ and ‘pathological’ social facts. He considers these aspects important because, as he points out, the scientific study of human beings has been held back to a large degree by the tendency of many writers to consider as ‘pathological’ forms of behaviour, which were different from their own. But Durkheim (1950: 64) explains that the social fact is considered to be normal when it is understood in the context of the society in which it exists. He further adds that a social fact, which is ‘general’ to a given type of society, is ‘normal’ when it has utility for that societal type.

As an illustration he cites the case of crime. We consider crime as pathological. But Durkheim argues that though we may refer to crime as immoral because it flouts values we believe in from a scientific viewpoint it would be incorrect to call it abnormal. Firstly because crime is present not only in the majority of societies of one particular type but in all societies of all types. Secondly, if there were not occasional deviances or floutings of norms, there would be no change in human behaviour and equally important, no opportunities through which a society can either reaffirm the existing norms, or else reassess such behaviour and modify the norm itself. To show that crime is useful to the normal evolution of morality and law, Durkheim cites the case of Socrates, who according to Athenian law was a criminal, his crime being the independence of his thought. But his crime rendered a service to his country because it served to prepare a new morality and faith, which the Athenians needed. It also rendered a service to humanity in the sense that freedom of thought enjoyed by people in many countries today was made possible by people like him.

Durkheim was impressed by the way study of medicine had become scientific. The doctors study the normal working of the body and its pathological features. The study of both of these features helps one identify the nature of the body. He applied this method to study social facts. In his study of division of labour in society, he explained the normal features in the first two parts, and the abnormal features in the third part of the book. He considered crime and punishment both as normal.

How is a social fact normal? When the rate of crime exceeds what is more or less constant for a given social type, then it becomes an abnormal or pathological fact. Similarly, using the same criteria, suicide is a normal social fact (though it may be regarded as ‘wrong’ or ‘immoral’ because it goes against a set of values that makes preservation of life absolute). But the sudden rise in the suicide rate in western Europe during the nineteenth century was a cause for concern for Durkheim and one of the reasons why he decided to study this phenomenon.

### 10.4.2 Rules for the Classification of Social Types

There have been two opposing conceptions of collective life among scholars. Some historians hold that each society is unique and so we cannot compare societies. On the other hand philosophers hold that all societies belong to one species - the human species and it is from the general attributes of human nature that all social evolution flows.

Durkheim takes an intermediary position. He speaks of social species or social types. Though there is so much of diversity in social facts, it does not mean that they cannot be treated scientifically i.e. compared, classified and explained. If on the other hand, we speak of only one species we will be missing out in important qualitative differences and it will be impossible to draw them together.

Classification of societies into types is an important step towards explanation as problems and their explanations will differ for each type. It is also needed to decide whether a social fact is normal or abnormal, since a social fact is normal or abnormal only in relation to a given social type. Durkheim uses the term ‘social morphology’ for the classification of social types. The question is, how are social type constituted? The word “type” means the common characteristics of several units in a group e.g. “bachelors” and “married persons” belong to two types, and Durkheim was able to show that suicide rates are found more among the ‘bachelors’. Please do not apply this to individual cases.

We must study each particular society completely and then compare these to see the similarities and differences. Accordingly, we can classify them. Durkheim (1950: 78) asked, “Is it not the rule in science to rise to the general only after having observed the particular and that too in its entirety?” In order to know whether a fact is general throughout a species or social type, it is not necessary to observe all societies of this social type; only a few will suffice. According to Durkheim (1950: 80), “Even one well made observation will be enough in many cases, just as one well constructed experiment often suffices for the establishment of a law” (see Unit 11 on comparative method). Durkheim wants societies to be classified according to their degree of organisation, taking as a basis the ‘perfectly simple society’ or the ‘society of one segment’ like the ‘horde’. Hordes combine to form aggregates which one could call ‘simple **polysegmental**’. These combine to form polysegmental societies simply compounded’. A union of such societies would result in still more complex societies called ‘polysegmental societies doubly compounded’ and so on.

Within these types one will have to distinguish different varieties according to whether a complete fusion of the initial segments does or does not appear.

Regarding Durkheim's procedure of classifying societies into social species or types, John Rex examines the usefulness of this 'biological approach to sociological investigations'. He finds out cases where biological approaches would be useful in sociological investigations, and where it could become difficult. Cases of the first type are exercises in description, classification and formulation of average types. Difficulties occur in the use of biological approach to sociological investigations when history of societies becomes the subject matter of study. In such cases 'species' are discovered by authors out of the historical process; and a theory of evolution is therefore less helpful here (see Rex 1961: 14).

### 10.4.3 Rules for the Explanation of Social Facts

There are two approaches, which may be used in the explanation of social facts - the causal and the functional.

- i) **Why:** The former is concerned with explaining 'why' the social phenomenon in question exists. The latter involves establishing the "correspondence between the fact under consideration and the general needs of the social organism, and in what this correspondence consists" (Durkheim 1950: 95). The causes, which give rise to a given social fact, must be identified separately from whatever social functions it may fulfil. Normally, one would try to establish causes before specifying functions. This is because knowledge of the causes, which bring a phenomenon into being, can under certain circumstances allow us to derive some insight into its possible functions. Although 'cause' and 'function' have a separate character this does not prevent a reciprocal relation between the two and one can start either way. In fact Durkheim sees a sense in the beginning of his study of division of labour with functions in Part I and then coming to causes in Part II. Let us take an example of 'punishment' from the same work. Crime offends collective sentiments in a society, while the function of punishment is to maintain these sentiments at the same degree of intensity. If offences against them were not punished, the strength of the sentiments necessary for social unity would not be preserved. (It may be pointed out here that functionalism which was dominant in sociology, particularly in the USA in the 1940s and 50s owes a lot to Durkheim's conception of function; we shall come to this point in the last two blocks of the course).
- ii) **How:** Having distinguished between the two approaches to explain social facts, Durkheim's next concern is to determine the method by which they may be developed. The nature of social facts determines the method of explaining these facts. Since the subject matter of sociology has a social character, it is collective in nature, the explanation should also have a social character. Durkheim draws a sharp line between individual and society. Society is a separate reality from the individuals who compose it. It has its own characteristics. There exists a line between psychology and sociology. Any attempt to explain social facts directly in terms of individual characteristics or in terms of psychology would make the explanation false. Therefore in the case of causal explanation "the determining cause of a social fact should be sought among the social facts preceding it and not among the states

of the individual consciousness". In the case of functional explanation "the function of a social fact ought always to be sought in its relation to some social end" (Durkheim 1950: 110).

The final point about Durkheim's logic of explanation is his stress upon the comparative nature of social science. To show that a given fact is the cause of another "we have to compare cases in which they are simultaneously present or absent, to see if the variations they present in these different combinations of circumstances indicate that one depends on the other" (Durkheim 1950: 125).

Since sociologists normally do not conduct laboratory-controlled experiments but study reported facts or go to the field and observe social facts, which have been spontaneously produced, they use the method of indirect experiment or the comparative method.

Durkheim, following J.S. Mill's *System of Logic*, refers appreciatively to the 'method of concomitant variations' as the procedure of the comparative method. He calls it 'the instrument par excellence of sociological research'. For this method to be reliable, it is not necessary that all the variables differing from those which we are comparing to be strictly excluded. The mere parallel between the two phenomena found in a sufficient number and variety of cases is an evidence that a possible relationship exists between them. Its validity is due to the fact that the concomitant variations display the causal relationship not by coincidence but intrinsically. It shows them as mutually influencing each other in a continuous manner, at least so far as their quality is concerned. Constant concomitance, according to Durkheim, is a law in itself whatever may be the condition of the phenomena excluded from the comparison. When two phenomena vary directly with each other, this relationship must be accepted even when in certain cases, one of these phenomena should be present without the other. For it may be either that the cause has been prevented from producing its effect by the action of some contrary cause or that it is present but in a form different from the one previously observed. For example, if a plant receives direct sunlight it grows straight but when the same plant is given indirect sunlight it bends towards that light. This shows the concomitant variation of plant growth and its relation to sunlight. Of course we need to reexamine the facts but we must not abandon hastily the results of a methodically conducted demonstration.

Concomitant variation can be done at different levels - single society, several societies of the same species of social type, or several distinct social species. However to explain completely a social institution belonging to a given social species, one will have to compare its different forms not only among the societies belonging to that social type but in all preceding species as well. Thus to explain the present state of the family, marriage, property, etc. it would be necessary to know their origins and the elements of which these institutions are composed. This would require us to study this institution in earlier types of society from the time domestic organisation was in its most rudimentary form to its progressive development in different social species. "One cannot explain a social fact of any complexity except by following its complete development through all social species" (Durkheim 1950: 139). This would show us the separate elements

composing it since we could see the process of accretion. We would also be able to determine the conditions on which their formation depends.

The comparative method is the very framework of the science of society for Durkheim. According to Durkheim (1950: 139), “comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, in-so-far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for fact” (for a clarification of this method, see Unit 11 on Comparative Method).

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) What rules have to be followed to observe social facts objectively? Answer in about eight lines.

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- ii) What are the two aspects of the explanation of social facts? Answer in about eight lines.

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**10.5 LET US SUM UP**

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To sum up our discussion of Durkheim’s conception of sociology we may say that Durkheim clearly considered sociology to be an independent scientific discipline with its distinct subject matter. He distinguished it from psychology. He identified social facts, laid down rules for their observation and explanation. He stressed on social facts being explained through other social facts. For him explanation meant the study of functions and causes. The causes could be derived through the use of the comparative method.



He demonstrated the nature of these studies through the study of division of labour in different types of solidarities, of suicide-rates in different types of societies, and the study of Religion in a single type. His life and works are regarded as a sustained effort at laying the legitimate base of sociology as a discipline. Further, it follows the empiricist method, which is valid in the natural sciences, biology in particular, observation, classification and explanation through the help of 'laws' arrived by means of the comparative method.

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## 10.6 KEY WORDS

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<b>Collective</b>	A combined action, idea or norm formed by people interacting with each other.
<b>Empirical</b>	Use of observation and other testable methods for gathering data objectively.
<b>Horde</b>	Small band of people related through kinship ties. They are found among nomadic hunters and food gatherers.
<b>Norm</b>	It is a specific guide to action. It defines what is appropriate and acceptable behaviour in specific situations.
<b>Polysegmental</b>	More than one segment
<b>Sanction</b>	Reward or punishment to enforce norm. Former is called positive sanction, the latter negative sanction.
<b>Socialisation</b>	The process by which individuals learn the culture of their society
<b>Social Science</b>	In the context of this unit, social science refer to application of scientific method to the study of human relationships and the forms of organisation which enable people to live together in societies.
<b>Sui generis</b>	That which generates itself; that which exists by itself; that which does not depend upon some other being for its origin or existence. Durkheim considered society as sui generis. It is always present and has no point of origin.

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## 10.7 FURTHER READING

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Aron, R. 1967. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Volume 2, Penguin Books: London.

Durkheim, E. 1950. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. (translated by S.A. Solovay and J.H. Mueller and (Ed) E. G. Catlin), The Free Press, of Glencoe: New York.

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## 10.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) not, association
- ii) sui generis
- iii) social facts
- iv) things
- v) independent
- vi) external, constraint
- vii) constraint
- viii) pathological

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) To study social facts objectively as things, Durkheim formulated the following three rules.
  - a) All preconceptions must be eradicated.
  - b) The subject matter of every sociological study should comprise a group of phenomena defined in advance by certain common external characteristics, and all phenomena so defined should be included within this group.
  - c) When the sociologist undertakes the investigation of some order of social facts he/she must try to consider them from an aspect that is independent of their individual manifestations.
- ii) The two approaches used in the explanation of social facts are causal and functional. Causal is concerned with explaining 'why' the social fact exists. Functional explains a social fact by showing the need of the society (social organism) that it fulfils. Both are required to give a complete explanation of a social fact. Logically causal explanation should come before functional explanation because under certain circumstances the cause gives us some insight into the possible functions. Though they are separate there is a reciprocal relationship between the two. For example, the existence of punishment (which is a social reaction) is due to the intensity of the collective sentiments, which the crime offends. The function of punishment is to maintain these sentiments at the same degree of intensity. If offences against them were not punished, the strength of the sentiments necessary for social stability would not be preserved.

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# UNIT 11 COMPARATIVE METHOD

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## Structure

- 11.0 Objectives
- 11.1 Introduction
- 11.2 Comparisons in Daily Life
- 11.3 Comparisons in Social Sciences
- 11.4 Types of Comparisons Attempted by Durkheim
  - 11.4.0 Comparisons within a Society
    - 11.4.1 Comparisons among Different Societies at a Point of Time
    - 11.4.2 Comparisons over a Period of Time
- 11.5 Indirect Experiment
- 11.6 A Single Case as Experiment
- 11.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 11.8 Keywords
- 11.9 Further Reading
- 11.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 11.0 OBJECTIVES

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Durkheim used comparative method to explain how one set of social facts explains the others. As an example in his study of Suicide Rates, he found the types of social groups in which these rates were high and low. He compared these groups to know their differences, and how these differences could explain the different rates. The method of organising the explanation of facts and the facts that are explained in this way is called comparative method. When you study this unit you will be able to

- point out the use of comparisons in daily life
- locate where comparisons have no special meaning
- find out where comparisons are useful
- identify the uses of comparative methods proposed by Durkheim and Weber
- try out the use of the method through some examples of your own.

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## 11.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit we begin by looking at events in our daily life and see how comparisons are made. It is pointed out where these are useful and where they are unnecessary e.g. when we say 'these two are not comparable'. Then from daily life, we move to sociology and take examples of comparability from social situations and social science literature. The use

of comparisons by Durkheim is explained and the logic or procedure of reasoning is linked with these studies. Durkheim's use of differential rates of **suicide** and their 'explanation' are pointed out here. Finally, we shall clarify how a comparative method becomes an exercise in indirect **experiment**.

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## 11.2 COMPARISONS IN DAILY LIFE

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In our daily life we come across many situations when we have to decide if a thing (called A) is more suited for us than any other (B or C). Then we compare A, B and C. For instance which Sari has to be purchased? Colour of A may be more appealing than of B or C; border of B may be the best; perhaps C may have a combination of colour and the border and we opt for it. All the time what have we been doing? We have been comparing the merits and suitability of the three items. Comparisons help us to take appropriate decisions in daily life, where alternatives are available. Hence the first requirement of comparisons is that alternatives are available. The second is that these things should belong to the same category or class of objects. We do not compare cotton with silk or wool. Thirdly there should be some difference among the objects; and finally this difference should be within narrow limits. There is no point in comparing a silk sari of Rs. 300 with one of Rs. 3,000. In common day usage we will say the two are not comparable. Our proverbs too state the same point "where is *Raja Bhoj* and where the *Gangu Teli*"; or simply where is the Raja and where the oilman, Bhoj and Gangu being just proper names. So comparisons to be useful have to be within the same class, and there has to be some difference, which is meaningful. When the difference is minor, it is called a distinction, and the logicians say, "this is a distinction without a difference". The idea in such cases is that the distinction is too small to influence our decision. A politician referring to such a smallness of distinctions in the other two parties thought they were really of one hue - that one was "*Sarp Nath*" and the other "*Nag Nath*". Thus we come across three situations:

- 1) The difference among two or more objects or social facts is meaningful and needs an explanation.
- 2) The difference is too small to deserve attention.
- 3) The difference is too large to need any attention.

The second situation is a case of "distinction without a difference". If a Cricket team wins over the other side by 210 runs or 220 runs, the difference of these 10 runs is hardly a difference to be accounted for. At times, we find difficulty in picking a team and are unable to decide which of the three players A, B or C can become a member of the playing team. We then tend to say that one is as good as the other. There is hardly a difference. In the third case, the difference could be as large as among Gavaskar and some other opening batsman; or a Kapil and any other opening bowler. Then we will say, for the sake of logic, Gavaskar or Kapil is not comparable with other opening batsmen or bowlers.

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## 11.3 COMPARISONS IN SOCIAL SCIENCES

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The meaningful or relevant difference is important in scientific discussions. The experiences of daily life are refined. The differences can be studied in the same phenomenon over a period of time. For example urbanisation in India can be studied from 1901 to 2001, fall in death rate from 1931 to 2001 or increase in literacy over the same period; or a rise in the expectation of life at birth. Durkheim studied the social rates of suicide in France over the later part of the nineteenth century. Likewise the phenomenon can be studied at different places. Within India same social facts can be studied for different States. We may ask, “How is it that party A succeeds in State X but not Y?” or “How is it that literacy exceeds fifty per cent in one part of the country, but remains around twenty in some other parts?” In the Asian or the Third World context we may as well ask, “How does the democratic form of Government last in some States, but not others?” On the other hand Lipset and Bendix studied social mobility among the industrial societies. A phrase ‘industrial democracies’ indicates the category of nations that are comparable.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Give one example of differences in the same phenomenon over a period of time.  
 .....
- ii) Give one example of variations in the same phenomenon at different places.  
 .....

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## 11.4 TYPES OF COMPARISONS ATTEMPTED BY DURKHEIM

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Durkheim wants it to be understood that comparisons can be made

- i) of variations of a phenomenon in different parts of a society
- ii) of variations of a phenomenon in different societies at a time
- iii) of variations of a phenomenon among different societies at different times corresponding to their levels of development.

Let us now discuss each type of comparison.

### 11.4.0 Comparisons within a Society

Durkheim in his study of Suicide (1897) demonstrated the illustration of the first type. He compared the different rates of suicides among various sections of the French society. (Suicide rate is calculated by the number of persons committing suicide in one year in a population of one million.) Durkheim asked the question: How is **suicide rate** distributed among the males and the females, rural and urban populations, persons following Catholic and Protestant faiths, and married and unmarried persons? He

processed data according to the categories in the question. He has examined the data on differences according to seasons and ‘cosmic’ factors and came to some conclusions other than those already proposed. He found that the rate of suicide had very little to do with the seasons and cosmic factors, such as daytime, evening or night, etc. The rate increased where the social bonds were either too weak (as in the case of **egoistic suicide**) or too strong (as in the case of **altruistic suicide**) in a social group.

**Activity 1**

Obtain from the 2001 census of India the different rates of birth among various sections (i) the male and the female, (ii) rural and urban population (iii) working and non-working classes of Indian society. Write your conclusions on the nature of differences (based on this comparison) of birth rates in Indian society. Compare your findings with those of other students at your Study Centre, if possible.

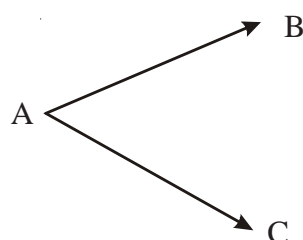
**11.4.1 Comparisons among Different Societies at a Point of Time**

The second type of study relates to the examination of the data from different countries of Europe. Durkheim took the case of Germany as a Protestant country and of Spain as a Catholic country. He found that suicide rates were higher in Germany than in Spain, hence the idea that Protestants commit more suicides than the Catholics. The Jews came still lower. Now we with this kind of comparison move to a new stage in comparative studies. Durkheim studied variations in two phenomena not one, (i) suicide rates and (ii) religions. Variations or changes in the first are accompanied by changes in the second. That is, they vary or change together. This is called concomitant **variation**, i.e. variation or change occurring together. Do you remember a nursery rhyme of “Mary had a little lamb....” The important line for our present purposes is “And everywhere that Mary went, the little lamb was sure to go”. This is a case of two living beings moving together. Some people think that sports and discipline are found together; the rise of the middle class opens the habit of questioning etc. These would also be examples of things changing together. They provide examples of concomitant variation. Thus comparative method tries to see

- i) what are the variations in a phenomenon?
- ii) which other variations occur along with those under examination?

This means that comparative method attempts to find out a possible cause for the phenomenon under study

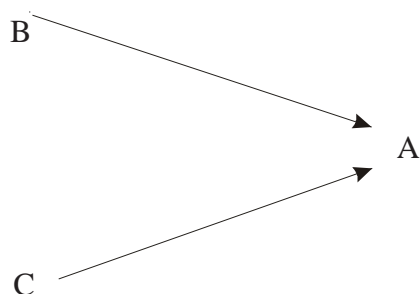
There can be some problems here. More than two things may change at a time. This can be stated in a diagram or a statement.



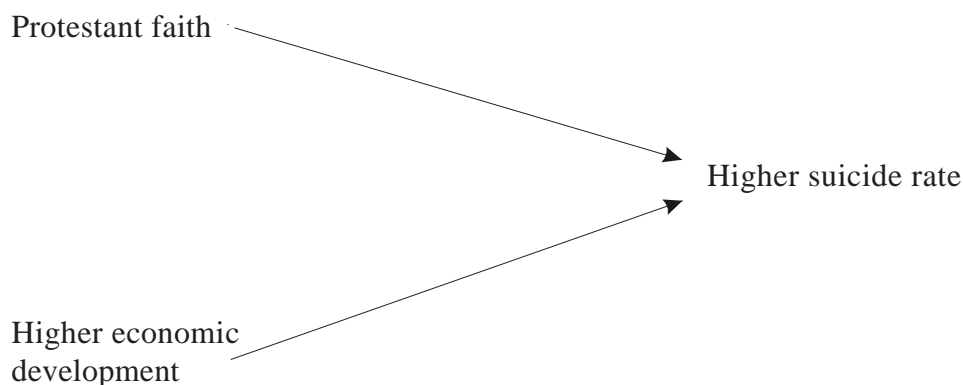


A change in A leads to a change in B as well as C... may be even D and E. Then how shall we say A is related to B? We can now put the arrows in the other direction and see even more clearly. Suppose B can lead to A, and C can also lead to A.

Then we have the situation



Can A then be called a consequence of B, or of C? Durkheim's example can be put here:



This was the case in Germany. Catholic faith and low level of economic development were found in Spain. What shall we do? Shall we say it is the religious difference that is crucial or the level of economic development?

Durkheim attempted a solution. He took only one country; so the question of difference in the level of economic development did not arise. Then the study was designed thus:

Level of economic development	Religious faith	Suicide rate
1) High	Protestant	High
2) High	Catholic	Low

Through this design, it is possible to say that the difference in religious faith is accompanied by difference in the suicide rate; that is, the two vary together. This is concomitant variation. This remains true even when the level of economic development is the same. Keeping this the same, or constant, or controlled (these words are similar in meaning), we get the result that religious faiths have an impact on the differential social suicide rates.

### 11.4.2 Comparisons over a Period of Time

Durkheim clarifies the significance of the time factor in social science studies. Some people try to compare events happening at the same time in different countries. Durkheim objects to this procedure. His view is that different societies may not be at the same level of development at one point of time. The youth of one cannot be compared with the grown-up stage of another. Thus at one point of time, Spain and Germany were not comparable. We can add other examples from our experiences. We do not compare the capacities or abilities of a primary school boy with those of those of university students. Likewise some writers think that nineteenth century Europe or Japan is comparable to the developing societies of late twentieth century; (others would have objections to this procedure) and that developing countries of today cannot be compared to the developed ones of the present.

#### Check Your Progress 2

- i) State in three lines the types of comparison attempted by Durkheim.

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- ii) Describe concomitant variation in about two lines.

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## 11.5 INDIRECT EXPERIMENT

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In natural sciences, it is possible in a laboratory experiment to use the controls effectively. We can check one factor from operating, or allow it to become ineffective in an experiment. In social situations it is not feasible that way. If we want to know what would have happened if free India had Vallabhabhai Patel as Prime Minister, we have no method of removing Nehru and putting Patel instead. Of course neither of them is available; but even if they were, they would not have obliged the social scientist to undertake the experiment. If we want to know the possibilities of a State being ruled by some other party than the one ruling it, the situation cannot be created by us for study. At best, we can make a guess work, or talk indirectly. Indirectly in the sense that a party has worked elsewhere in a particular way, and it might try to repeat its performance at a different place or time. Thus social scientist cannot order events to happen in a particular way to study the situation; i.e. the scope of experiment is very-very limited. What is he to do then? To attempt a scientific study or to give it up? Durkheim would not give up the method of science. He would find situations that provide comparisons and explanations of the type mentioned about suicide rates. Even without a laboratory, social facts can be so arranged as if that had been done in an experiment. Thus economic differences were not allowed to come in the way of studying the relationship

of religion with suicide. This comparison among two religions in the same region i.e., in the, same economy, amounts to an experimental situation, discovered by the social scientist, though not created by him in the laboratory. Therefore Durkheim calls for such use of comparative method an indirect experiment.

Now we have used three sets of words (i) comparisons; (ii) comparative method; (iii) indirect experiment. As we move from an account of comparisons to explanations of events, we move to the second position. The set of words 'comparative method' and 'indirect experiment' convey the same meaning; the second clarifies explicitly the power of explanation. So we recollect: it is not useful to put things or events in parallel lines in a table without first asking, are things comparable? Yes, things are comparable when they belong to the same category, and have differences that need an explanation. So things or social facts should belong to the same **Genus** but to different Species. Try the following exercise.

### Activity 2

Do you agree with the formulation of Durkheim that if we can find an example of a social institution in its simplest and purest form we can understand the essence of that institution? If yes, give two reasons for your acceptance of Durkheim's view. If no, give at least one reason for your disagreement with his view. Compare your answer, if possible with those of other students at your Study Centre.

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## 11.6 A SINGLE CASE AS EXPERIMENT

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Lastly we invite your attention to one more situation. Can an experiment be done by taking up one case only? One experiment conducted in a satisfactory manner can be decisive under certain conditions. Suppose we take the view that social objects were simple in the beginning, and have become more complex with the passage of time.

Then the true form of the thing was in the beginning. Persons who go on pilgrimage to the Gangotri in search of the fountainhead of the purest river act on this principle. Water at the source is the purest, and as we proceed from the sky to the ocean, more and more rivers mix up with the stream, and perhaps the Hooghly word itself signifies dirty water, and the river near Calcutta is the least pure. Thus Allahabad may have purer water than Varanasi, and Haridwar purer than Allahabad. Then by this logic the purest form of water is to be found at the Gangotri. That is the purest at the point of origin, "the simplest and the purest". If we can find an example of a social institution in its simplest and purest form we can understand the 'essence' of that institution. Thus Durkheim studied the social institution of religion among the Australian tribes and traced the essential characteristics of religion in their existing practices. In such cases, the single study acquires an experimental character. It clarifies the 'essentials' without bothering about dilutions. In India, the followers of the Arya Samaj act on the same principle considering the vedic religion as pure, and later growth as an admixture of the wrong practices added on to it.

**Check Your Progress 3**

i) Tick mark YES or NO for following question.

Are the following social situations comparable?

a) the ruler and the ruled

Yes	No
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b) the priest and the cobbler

Yes	No
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c) Chundawat Rajput and Shaktawat Rajput

Yes	No
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d) Soviet Union and the U.S.A.

Yes	No
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e) Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh

Yes	No
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ii) Explain in ten lines how comparative method amounts to an 'indirect experiment'.

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**11.7 LET US SUM UP**

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We may summarise now. Comparisons are undertaken by people in everyday life for making proper choice among the alternatives. The alternatives are usually comparable, i.e. they belong to the same genus,

but different species. There is no point in going for ‘comparisons’ among different species. In sociology, we use these words ‘genus’ and ‘species’ for social facts like customs, institutions and social currents. Best results are obtained when classifications of these facts are made, and differences within each class are then taken into consideration. The differences in one set of social facts are then tried in relation to another set. If two sets change together, we say this is a case of concomitant variation. We may find more than one case of these variations. Then, we try to ‘control’ one set of variations; that is, keep it constant. (Remember how the level of economic development was kept constant by Durkheim.)

Then we see if one set of variations goes along with changes in the other. If yes, we say there is a sort of a cause-effect relationship among them; or the closeness of relationship is not by chance alone. This exercise resembles an experiment; but as the situation cannot be ordered like in a laboratory, it is called an ‘indirect experiment’. This is the most effective use of the comparative method — to bring it to the level of an indirect experiment. An exceptional use of the indirect experiment through one study can be seen in the study of the purest and the simplest case.

Durkheim developed these ideas in his book *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895), and practised them in the study of the *Suicide* (1897). The exceptional case was mentioned in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1911). He maintained that the possibility of the use of scientific method in studying societies is not a matter of philosophical debate: it can be demonstrated, and he did that in his studies spread over two decades with rare consistency. Finally, let us understand that any study gives us (i) significant results and (ii) an account of the method followed — the method can later be used in other studies — yes, by any one of us.

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## 11.8 KEY WORDS

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**Altruistic Suicide** In societies where the individual consciousness is so submerged with the collective consciousness of the society, the kind of suicide found is altruistic in nature. For example, sati or jouhar of women in India.

**Egoistic Suicide** In societies where the individuals are not properly integrated in society and where a person gives too much importance to his or her ego the kind of suicide found is egoistic suicide.

**Experiment** The word is used in natural sciences. It is usual to divide a group into two parts: one is kept in its original state (control group); in the other a change is introduced (experimental group). After some time the results are compared. Any difference is then taken as a result of the change introduced. If there is no difference, the new thing is not effective. Experiment thus proves which is the case — is the new thing

effective or useless. It is a method for arriving at a conclusive proof.

**Genus**

The broad category to which living beings of different types belong. In social sciences, the broader category or class of facts to which a number of facts belong. Genus is a wider category than species. Species are the first order to which facts belong. A number of species sharing some common characteristics belong to one Genus.

**Suicide and Suicide Rate**

The act of killing or ending one's own life is suicide. When a number of people commit suicide in a society, suicides are calculated according to the proportion of suicides per 1,000,000 (one million) population per year. This is the suicide rate.

**Variation**

Different scores of one item under study e.g. variation in literacy rates like 20 per cent, 30 per cent, 50 per cent; different scores of suicide rates e.g. 8 per 10,000 per year, 9 or 10. Concomitant variation means changes in two selected items, which go together e.g. as urbanisation increases the rate of suicide also increases.

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## 11.9 FURTHER READING

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Aron, R. 1967. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Volume 2. Penguin Books: London

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## 11.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Urbanisation in India 1901 to 1981
- ii) Literacy in different states of India in 1951

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Durkheim attempted comparisons of one phenomenon spread over different groups in a society (suicide rates among the rural and the urban); comparisons among different societies (Spain and Germany); and those among two groups within a society (using one as a control group).
- ii) Concomitant variation means changes which take place in one item leading to changes in the other item.



### Check Your Progress 3

### Comparative Method

- i) No for a & b  
Yes for c, d and e
- ii) See Section 11.5

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## UNIT 12 COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATIONS

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### Structure

- 12.0 Objectives
- 12.1 Introduction
- 12.2 Society and Individual Consciousness
- 12.3 Collective Conscience
- 12.4 Collective Representations
  - 12.4.0 Collective Representation—Definition
  - 12.4.1 Individual Representations
  - 12.4.2 Process of Constituting Collective Representations
- 12.5 Cognition and Collective Representation
- 12.6 Religion and Collective Representation
- 12.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 12.8 Keywords
- 12.9 Further Reading
- 12.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 12.0 OBJECTIVES

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By the time you complete the study of this Unit, you should be able to

- explain the relation between society and individual consciousness
- discuss Durkheim’s concept of ‘collective conscience’
- describe the meanings of ‘collective representations’
- explain the ‘collective’ nature of ‘concepts’ or ‘categories of thought’, and
- illustrate collective representations through religion.

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### 12.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Unit 10 you have already learnt about Durkheim’s break with philosophy. You have also studied that he made efforts to raise sociology to the status of science. Now we come to the central theme of Durkheimian thought: the relation between individuals and collectivity. Durkheim wanted to develop a scientific comprehension of this relation in its various forms. However, he was not satisfied with all earlier social theories, which considered ‘individual’ as their starting-point. He rejected theories of society built upon the ‘will’, ‘desire’ or ‘volition’ of the individual and held that scientific understanding of all social phenomena must emerge from the collective nature of a social group, community or society.

In order to explain Durkheim's concept of collective representations, this unit covers five main areas of discussion. First, it tells you about society and individual consciousness. Then it mentions the concept of **collective conscience**. Next it discusses at length the main theme i.e. collective representations. Lastly, it speaks about collective representations in terms of cognition and religion.

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## 12.2 SOCIETY AND INDIVIDUAL CONSCIOUSNESS

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Society has a nature, which is peculiar to itself. It is different from individual nature. Society pursues ends which are special to it. The compulsion of collective existence is such that individuals must forget their particular interests. Individuals must submit to some sort of inconvenience or sacrifice without which social life would be impossible. Thus society imposes upon individuals the nature of its collectivity. For example, at every moment in our life we are obliged to submit ourselves to the rules of conduct or behaviour, which we have neither made nor desired. Such rules of conduct are sometimes even in opposition to individual's instincts and interests. However, we are supposed to obey and follow them. For instance, you may want to lead a completely care free life, without work, studies or family responsibilities. But society forces you to behave in a responsible manner and fulfil your various obligations. In this process, the special reality of society moulds the thinking, acting and consciousness of an individual.

Society exercises the moral authority over individuals. This moral authority provides society venerable respect. The ideas, beliefs, emotions etc. which society imposes upon individuals are marked out for respect. Since such ideas, beliefs and moral codes etc. are upheld by the collectivity, an individual breach is liable to invite societal action or punishment. Thus everything which is good for the health of society is cultivated by it as something **sacred**. Religious dogma, totemic symbols or modern flag etc. are all sacred things. They inspire in the individual at once a feeling of awe and reverence. In opposition to sacred things there are **profane** ones. Profane things are not accorded similar reverence as given to sacred ones. Moreover society keeps profane things apart from sacred things. Durkheim held that sacred things are those, which the interdictions protect and isolate. Profane things are those to which respect is denied and at times people are told to keep a distance from them. Finally there are always rules of conduct, which prescribe how men should behave in relation to sacred things.

Society does not confine itself to demanding sacrifices or efforts from individuals. It does not act upon individuals wholly from without. Society exists in and through individual consciousness. Hence societal force must also penetrate individuals and organise itself within them. Thus it becomes an integral part of individual consciousness. This is the reason that societal beliefs, morals and rules etc. are elevated and magnified by individuals. Their source of origin cannot be traced or attributed to single individuals. Rather their perpetuation lies in collective existence. However such beliefs, ideas, emotions become a permanent part of individual consciousness.

Thus on the one hand, there is the sacred world of things. It is elaborated by a collectivity. It fuses individual consciences into communion. It imposes love and respect and transfers society into individual minds. It connects individuals with something beyond them. On the other hand there is the profane world of things. It gives expression to individual organisms. It also expresses all objects to which individuals are directly related. It relates to men's ordinary day to day life. It involves daily personal preoccupations. This way individual consciousness acquires from society a twofold world i.e. sacred and profane. After appreciating the difference between the sacred and profane, it is easy to complete Activity 1.

### Activity 1

What is the difference between

- a) *Gangajal* and tap-water
- b) *Prasad* and refreshment?

Answer the above question and discuss, in about 100 words, which is sacred and which is not. Compare, if possible, your answer with those of other students at your Study Centre.

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## 12.3 COLLECTIVE CONSCIENCE

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The notion of collective conscience is of paramount importance in Durkheim's thought. Durkheim describes collective consciousness as 'the body of beliefs and sentiments common to the average of the members of a society'. The system of these beliefs and sentiments has a life of its own. It is distributed throughout the whole of the society. It has specific features, which make it a distinct reality. Collective consciousness is independent of the particular conditions in which individuals are placed. It is spread out over the whole of the territory of a society — to large and small towns and villages. It is common to all occupations or professions etc. It links successive generations to one another. Individuals come in and go out of society, however collective conscience remains. Although collective conscience can only be realised through individuals, it has a form beyond a particular person, and operates at a level higher than him/her.

Collective conscience varies in extent and force from one society to another. In less advanced societies collective conscience embraces the greater part of individual consciousness. In such societies the extent of collective conscience is stronger and greater. For example social controls and prohibitions prevalent in primitive societies are imposed upon individual members in strongest fashion and they all submit to it. It is the collective conscience, which governs the existence of individuals. The collective sentiments experienced in common have an extreme force and are reflected in the form of severe punishments on those who violate prohibitions. The stronger the collective conscience of a society, the greater the indignation against crime or against any other violation of the social imperative. Collective conscience is also reflective of the degree of cohesion, integration

or **solidarity** of a society. In primitive societies, collective conscience is strongest and all-embracing. However, in advanced societies there occurs a greater differentiation of individuals. Everyone becomes more and more free to believe, to desire and to act according to one’s own or one’s group preferences in a large number of circumstances. Thus the sphere of influence of collective conscience is reduced. There also occurs a weakening of collective reactions against violations of prohibitions etc.

The concept of collective conscience was originally used and developed by Durkheim in his first major work i.e. *The Division of Labour in Society* (1895). The strength of collective conscience will be later described through the nature of social solidarity which forms part of Unit 13. In his later works, Durkheim developed the concept of ‘collective representations’, which had greater theoretical potential.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Explain in simple words, in five lines, your understanding of Durkheim’s views on the relation between ‘society’ and ‘individual consciousness’.

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- ii) Define, in three lines, the concept of collective conscience given by Durkheim.

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**12.4 COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATIONS**

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Durkheim looks into the role of collective beliefs and sentiments and especially of morality and religion in all societies. How are they inculcated and how do they exercise control over society? How are they affected by society and how in turn do they affect other features of social life? How do collective beliefs and sentiments change during different stages of a society’s development? To prepare for such answers Durkheim used the French term ‘representations collective’, which translated into English is ‘collective representations’.

**12.4.0 Collective Representation — Definition**

The concept of ‘collective representations’ is a major contribution of Durkheim’s social theory. In fact, Durkheim’s later work (1897 onwards) can be seen as a systematic study of ‘collective representations’. Initial

definition forwarded by Durkheim (in his book *Suicide*) stated that 'essentially social life is made of representations'.

There is a difference between an object, and the way it is seen, the manner in which it is described, and its meaning understood commonly in a society. The object is thus presented again in terms of meanings, a word is given a meaning. The object or the word is thus 'represented'; for a scientist water is represented as the formula H<sub>2</sub>O, for a doctor 'fever' is represented as 'temperature above 99°F., in case of religion a piece of stone may be represented as 'Mahadeva'. College or school teams are represented through their symbolic colours, light blue, dark blue, green and white, pink and blue etc. or in Asiad and the Olympics, national teams through their colours.

Collective representations are states of the collective conscience, which are different in nature from the states of the individual conscience. They express the way in which a particular group of individuals conceives itself in relation to the objects, which affect the social group. Collective representations are socially generated and they refer to, and are, in some sense, about society.

### **12.4.1 Individual Representations**

Durkheim stressed the independent reality of collective representations. He used the example of individual representations. Now the substrata of individual representations are like the brain cells of the body. And they result from the combined activity of this substratum. But they cannot be wholly reduced to or explained in terms of the constituent parts of their substratum. In fact individual representations have their own characteristics and have relative autonomy independent of substratum. Further various individual representations (emerging from different persons) can directly influence one another and combine according to their own convenience.

### **12.4.2 Process of Constituting Collective Representations**

Durkheim states that collective representations result from the substratum of associated individuals. But they cannot be reduced to and wholly explained by features of constituent individuals. They are 'sui generis' that is, they generate themselves. Original and fundamental forms of collective representations bear the marks of their origin. Hence the primary matter of all social consciousness is in close relation with the nature of the substratum. This substratum is constituted by the number and nature of social elements, the way in which they are grouped and distributed over a geographical area etc. However once the primary basis of representations has thus been formed, they become partially autonomous realities. Then they live their own life with the power to attract and repel one another. Further, they form synthesis of all kinds and engender new collective representations. As examples, Durkheim noted the enormous growth of myths, legends, theological systems and religious sects etc. which combine and separate and over a period of time get transformed and give rise to a complex of beliefs, values and morals etc. or concepts or categories of thought.



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## 12.5 COGNITION AND COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATIONS

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Cognition is the act of knowing, taking note of things. It is a mental process through which we receive knowledge about events or happenings around us. In group situations people talk about these and thereby increase each other's awareness. Out of the inter play of minds come symbols or products of thought which are mutually owned and mutually proclaimed. Thus collective representation is either a concept or a category of thought held in a sufficiently similar form by many persons to allow effective communication. These collective symbols have force because they have been jointly created and developed. They are independent of any particular mind or set of minds. They possess tremendous force over individuals. They exercise an integrative effect on society, e.g. flag is a political representation; sacred texts are often a religious representation, like the Bible, the Ramayana, the Guru Granth Sahib, and so on.

We will elaborate in some detail the nature of the concepts of thought, and the way they become and act as collective representations.

Concepts of thought are in opposition to sensual representations i.e. sensations, perceptions or images etc. Sensual representations are in a perpetual flux.

They come after each other like waves of a river. Even for a little time they do not remain the same thing. We are never sure of again finding a perception in the same way as we experienced it the first time. On the other hand a concept has a particular stable existence, and it does not move by itself and resists change. It changes only when we discover some imperfection in a concept and rectify it. For example the system of concepts with which we think in everyday life is that which is expressed by the vocabulary of our mother tongue. Every 'word' is representative of a concept. Now language is something fixed. It changes very slowly and consequently it is the same with the conceptual system, which it expresses. Same is true of scientific terminology. After appreciating the relation between cognition and collective representation you can easily complete Activity 2.

### Activity 2

Note the words used for father, father's brother, father's father, and mother's brother in your language and in two other languages. See how these terms are common and how people mean the same thing. Also note the words in three or four languages that describe marriage, and birth. These words express the idea of collective representation. Compare, if possible, your answer with those of other students at your Study Centre.

Further a concept is universal or at least capable of becoming so. An individual can hold a concept in common with other individuals. Individuals can communicate through a concept. On the other hand a sensation holds closely to an individual's organism and personality. It cannot be detached

and passed to other individuals. However, conversation and all intellectual communications between individuals are an exchange of concepts. Thus concepts and categories of thought are essentially impersonal representations. It is through these that cognition structure and human intelligence communicates.

Concepts are the work of the community. They bear the mark of no particular mind. They spring from the associational nature of a group or collectivity. Categories of thought are more stable than sensations or images. The reason is that collective representations are more stable than the individual representations. Only slight changes in environment can affect an individual consciousness, however, any change in the mental status of a society can only be effected through events of extreme gravity, e.g. revolutions or political movements, such as the National Movement for Independence.

Language and consequently the system of concepts, which it translates, is the product of collective elaboration. What it expresses is the manner in which society as a whole represents the facts of collective experience. The ideas which correspond to the diverse elements of language are thus collective representations.

Concepts are collective representations and belong to the whole society. If they belong to the whole social group, it is not because they represent the average of the corresponding individual representations. Because in that case collective representations would be poorer than individual representations in intellectual content. However, as a matter of fact, collective representations contain much more that surpasses the knowledge of the average individual.

Concepts as collective representations are more or less general ideas prevalent in a society. They express categories and classes rather than particular objects, because unique and variable characteristics of things only rarely interest society. Collective representations are the work of society and they are enriched by the societal experience. For example in the context of modern nation states, collective representations are social facts located in the constitutions, the national flag, and the national anthem. Before proceeding to the next sub-section let us complete Check Your Progress 2!

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) We mention some of the concepts used in Sociology, for example socialisation, community, social system. Mention five other concepts in the subject.
  - a)
  - b)
  - c)
  - d)
  - e)

ii) Fill in the blanks in the following sentence.

The ..... of individual ..... are like the brain cells of the body.

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## 12.6 RELIGION AND COLLECTIVE REPRESENTATIONS

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Durkheim considered religion as a reflection of man’s relation with society and nature. Religion cannot be reduced to belief in God. Because there are religions without an apparent God. For example Buddhism denied the existence of God. Further, in all religions there are vital elements, which belong to the day-to-day life like food, drink, body, physical environment etc. which are in no way linked to a deity.

Religion has a foothold in the reality of society. The social basis of religion and the religious basis of society are explained by Durkheim. Religion is a consecration of society. Religion at bottom represents man’s respect for society, which is expressed through a high degree of symbolic intensity. Religion is a reflection of society, more specifically of collective representations.

At one level Durkheim considered the idea of sacred along with communal as the basis of his interpretation of the character of religion. The division of the world into two domains, the one containing all that is sacred, the other all that is profane is the distinctive trait of religious thought. The beliefs, myths, dogmas and legends are systems of representations, which express the nature of virtues and powers of sacred things. They also represent the relations between sacred and profane things.

Besides the notion of sacred, Durkheim noted the obligatory character of the religious beliefs lying behind religious practices. There was a pressure exercised by a society upon its members to prevent them from deviating from the common religious faith. Thus religious phenomena consist of organised systems and collections of obligatory beliefs united with definite practices which relate to the objects given in the beliefs. Religion is obligatory in nature and what is obligatory has its origins in ‘social’. The individual’s conformity to religion involves his/her deference to the moral power of society. Thus it is society which prescribes to the believer the beliefs and rites which he/she must observe. Hence the rites and beliefs are society’s creation. The determining causes of religious phenomena lie in the nature of society. The change and evolution in religious beliefs and practices etc. in different forms result due to transformations taking place in the social organisation of a society in the course of history.

The true nature of religion, Durkheim held, can be revealed by observing the ‘conditions of collective existence’. Religious representations must be seen as work of the nature of collective conscience. They help in the formation of ideas and developing deeper interest in collective representations in social life.

Out of the commonest object, collective representations can make a most powerful sacred being. The powers thus conferred on an object are based

on idea and yet they act as if they are real. They determine the conduct of men similar to physical force. Thus social thought acquires the imperative authority over and above the individual thought. Social thought can add to reality or deduct from it according to circumstances. This way, an idea becomes a reality within the social kingdom. Hence religious ideas or beliefs are fixed on any material things which symbolise them.

Religious force is primarily the sentiments inspired by the group in its members. It is projected outside of the consciousness of individuals. These religious sentiments get fixed upon some object, which becomes sacred. Any object can fulfil this function. The religious belief has nothing to do with the inherent properties of the object of worship. The world of religious beliefs is added and superimposed on the articles of worship. They are simply the symbolic forms of collective representations.

In a primitive society, members of a clan feel that they are somehow related through a common symbol, like a plant, an animal or an object. One group is called ‘Crow’ yet another ‘Eagle’ or a ‘Snake’; there are others that take a place name. This name helps them in many ways. Their attitude towards the totem is one of respect. They will not harm that plant or animal. If there is a grave emergency, they will first worship it and offer collective excuse before killing it. They have a system of rituals for preserving their totem symbol. In this way the totem of a clan outwardly is an expression of totemic principle i.e. a superior power. However it is also the symbol of the determined society i.e. the clan. It is the flag of the clan. It is the sign by which the clan distinguishes itself from other clans. It is the visible mark of the personality of the clan. So it is at once the symbol of the supernatural and of the society. The god of the clan, the totemic principle, is therefore, the clan itself. The clan gets personified and represented to the imagination under the visible form of the animal or plant, which serves, as the totem. The collective representation of the sacred is the cult. The idea of religion originates, perpetuates in and through collective representations of beliefs, ideas, values and religious thoughts and practised through cults and rituals by the community of believers (also called a Church in a wider sense).

Durkheim considered the relationship of man, society and nature. He noted that the study of nature had increasingly been taken over by science. Thus the extension of science reduced the sphere of religion. Earlier religion represented all forms of knowledge — sacred and secular. With the growth of science, the sphere of the secular increased. Earlier morality was considered as religious duty. Durkheim rejected the religious part of that duty and expressed his faith in secular morality. In the modern times secular morality would, according to him, provide the basis for the moral order in society. Thus secular morality could become a new form of group conscience. After learning about Durkheim’s view on religion and collective representation, it is a good idea to complete Check Your Progress 3.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) What is meant by secular morality? Write your answer in five lines.

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ii) How does religion become the soul of society? Write your answer in ten lines.

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## 12.7 LET US SUM UP

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Durkheim viewed the relation between the society and the individual and started with society, not the individual or his will. Language, grammar, and categories of thought are meaningful when more than one individual uses them. Thus thought is collective in its usage and origin. Religion is also a collective mode of behaviour and thought — best illustrated in the religion of the simplest societies — the tribals of Australia. Common cults represent the collective identity of people organised in clans. The ‘totem’ reflects that identity and religion becomes the soul of society. As man’s knowledge of nature improves, science adds secular vision to the people, and they begin to look to secular morality for maintaining their social order.

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## 12.8 KEY WORDS

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**Collective Conscience** According to Durkheim, collective conscience refers to the totality of belief and sentiments common to average member of a society.

**Profane** The elements of a social system, which are not connected with religion or religious purposes. In other words, they are secular.

<b>Sacred</b>	Those elements of a social system which relate to religion or are set apart for the worship of deity.
<b>Solidarity</b>	It refers to unity (as of a group or class) that is based on or produces community of interests, objectives and standards.

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## 12.9 FURTHER READING

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Lukes, S. 1973. *Emile Durkheim, His Life and Work: A Historical and Critical Study*. Allen Lane and The Penguin Press: London.

Nisbet, R.A. 1974. *The Sociology of Emile Durkheim* Oxford University Press: New York.

Raymond, A. 1979. (reprint). *Main Currents in Sociological Thought-11*. Penguin:

Harmondsworth. See Emile Durkheim, pp. 21-108.

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## 12.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Society has an existence of its own which is different from the collective existence of individuals in society. Society imposes certain restrictions on individual consciousness and compels them to conform to social rules of conduct or behaviour. Thus, the compulsion of collective existence due to which individuals conform to social rules is such that individual interests get subordinated to the collective interests of society.
- ii) According to Durkheim, collective conscience refers to the body of beliefs and sentiments, which are found in the average members of a society. It is independent of the particular existence of individuals in society.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) function, b) structure, c) stratification, d) social change, and e) conflict
- ii) substratum, representations

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Moral force controls individual's behaviour. This force makes a person obey the social commands or norms. In earlier societies this force was sanctioned through religion. In modern societies, religious force has become weaker. Yet society controls a member's behaviour. Morality continues to be there, but is now delinked from religion. Such morality is secular.



- ii) Society has collective sentiments. Certain objects, places, times are considered sacred, respected and some times associated with worship of deities and Gods. There are other sets of objects that are considered impure like dead body of animals, dirty clothes, and burning ghats (cremation grounds). Contacts with such things or places are considered polluting. The definition of the pure and the impure, the desirable and the undesirable is collective. Thus society creates the idea of heaven or hell, even of God and the Devil. These ideas and practices like cult and worship or purification unite the people into a common group sentiment. The group is then known for its beliefs and cults, and religion thereby expresses the soul of the society.

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## UNIT 13 FORMS OF SOCIAL SOLIDARITY

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### Structure

- 13.0 Objectives
- 13.1 Introduction
- 13.2 Mechanical Solidarity
  - 13.2.0 Collective Conscience
  - 13.2.1 Collective Conscience: On the Basis of Forms
  - 13.2.2 Collective Conscience: On the Basis of Contents
- 13.3 Organic Solidarity
  - 13.3.0 New Forms of Collective Conscience in Organic Solidarity
  - 13.3.1 On the Basis of Forms
  - 13.3.2 On the Basis of Contents
- 13.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 13.5 Keywords
- 13.6 Further Reading
- 13.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 13.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit you would be able to understand:

- the relationship between mechanical solidarity and its specific social structure
- the repressive law as the means of strengthening the social solidarity in segmental social structure
- the significance of collective conscience in primitive societies
- that organic solidarity, the characteristic feature of complex social structure, is based on division of labour
- the role of **restitutive law** in complex social structure with reference to the solidarity and the changed form of collective conscience in advanced societies.

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### 13.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit, the economic and **social solidarity** as analysed in *The Division of Labour in Society* by Durkheim is discussed briefly. Durkheim was curious to know the forces, which regulate and control social life. To conceptualise his ideas he established dichotomy between segmental and complex societies. What are the characteristics of these societies and what

types of solidarities are found among them? He answers these questions with reference to forms of solidarities. While explaining these affirmatively, he propounds that two types of solidarities i.e., mechanical and organic, can be identified through the types of law in different kinds of social structures. The detailed description is presented in section 13.2 of this unit. In this regard the repressive forms of the law, painful to the criminals, are analysed with reference to the segmental type of social structure. The sub-sections of this part deal with the importance of the **collective conscience** in the social structure, the definition of collective conscience and its nature. Organic solidarity is shown in section 13.3. In this part the restitutive aspects of law with reference to complex social structure which makes individuals interdependent and the way it unites them in complex society are also discussed. The sub-parts of this part bring out the contents of collective conscience with regard to the changed social conditions. This unit should be seen as a continuation of Unit 12. Finally, the summary of the unit is given.

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## 13.2 MECHANICAL SOLIDARITY

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Mechanical solidarity is sui generis i.e. born in the natural course of events based on resemblances of individuals. It directly links them with the society. This type of solidarity has arisen out of a number of common experiences of like members in a given society.

Mechanical solidarity can be characterised by segmental system in which every segment is homogenous and involved in the social structure. Hence the society is divided into quite small compartments which envelop the individual completely. Originally, the segmental society was based on **clans** which were frequently found in less developed societies. But in the process of evolution, the segmental characteristics could not be confined to this one characteristic and started expanding on the bases of territories. Consequently, the division of the society was not solely according to the relation of **consanguinity** (real or fictitious) but also on territorial bases. The segmental social structure is characterised by a low degree of interdependence. What occurs in one segment hardly has any effects on others. Finally, it can be said that the segmental social structure has relatively low volume of moral and material density. This means that interactions take place among limited people (volume). It also means that the number of times people interact is also limited (density). The reason is that what one can do, the other can also do. So he does not need others until more people are needed in a work. If a man has to cut a piece of wood, or catch a bird, or pick a fruit from a tree in a forest, he can do this work by himself like any other. Thus people do the same type of work. They are similar; their inter-dependence is limited. Their density of interactions is low. Then a question arises what forms of **custom** regulate and control the conditions of people bound in mechanical solidarity? Durkheim answers this through collective conscience. Homogeneity of experience leads to the collective conscience. This gives rise to common **beliefs** and practices. The social life blended with religion and economic institutions of such a society, nearer to primitive communism as

differentiations are few. Most of the property is common, the experiences are similar, and rules and regulations too relate to common life. Customs and laws protect the group — its property and its sentiments. The nature of laws is thus collective — a wrong-doer is punished by the collectivity. Penal or **repressive law** is an indicator of mechanical solidarity. Legal sanctions derived from the penal are directly proportional to the number of social bonds, which are regulated and controlled by collective conscience. Thus, we can understand the relative significance of the two. A wrong against the group is punished. On the one hand, punishment is given to the individual; on the other hand, punishment strengthens the beliefs and values of the society. Any wrong brings injury to the group sentiments; every punishment restores the authority of the collectivity.

If a group of individuals are less dependent and conversely more autonomous and if the density of volume of communication is less in such a society, or sect, how is it possible for it to develop collective conscience or social control across individuals or across groups or such sects?

### **13.2.0 Collective Conscience**

Now what is collective conscience under mechanical solidarity at the cultural and ideological level? Durkheim defines collective conscience as a set of beliefs and customs, which on an average are common in a society and form a determinate system, which has its own life-style. Collective conscience exists in a general form in society and one can easily differentiate between the characters relating to its form and those to its content.

#### **13.2.1 Collective Conscience: On the Basis of Forms**

Durkheim views that the strength of social bonds is the feature of mechanical solidarity and is a function of three variables. They are:

- i) relation between the volume of collective conscience and individual's conscience
- ii) average intensity of the stages of collective conscience
- iii) the greater or lesser firmness of all those stages.

The more the beliefs and sanctions are present in the society, the less are the chances of freedom of an individual. Thus, where the mechanical solidarity is effective, there is strong and extensive collective conscience. It brings harmonious relationships in the activities of the people extensively. In such a social condition, it is difficult to distinguish individual's conscience from the collective one. Hence, collective authority becomes the mode of totality, whether it involves the whole of the community or it incarnates the chief of the community.

#### **13.2.2 Collective Conscience: On the Basis of Contents**

With regard to the content of the collective conscience there are distinguishable elements; mainly, its nature is rooted in the totality of a society. It is so because society is controlled by common beliefs and sanctions, which are unanimously accepted by the members of that society.

Indeed, in ancient era, the religious elements were spread in every aspect of the society and everything, which was social, was religious as well. Both words, religious and social, were synonymous in the primitive societies. The source of super human features was deeply rooted in the constitution of conscience. Collective and the social characteristics of the latter were deemed to be transcendental values. These societal conditions lifted people even beyond their own conscience. The stages of the collective conscience were concretely associated with traditional (local) conditions, linking individual to racial and powerful objects in the universe viz., animals, trees and many natural forces such as sun, moon, clouds etc. People have always been linking himself to such objects. These phenomena affect every conscience in the same way Thus, the fusion of the individual's conscience with the collective indicates its form and object. Now it can be said that collective conscience acquires its specific features in different primitive societies.

**Check Your Progress 1**

Read the following questions carefully and write the correct answers.

- i) Originally the segmental society was based on
  - a) caste
  - b) vama
  - c) race
  - d) clan
- ii) The objective of the repressive law was
  - a) to give freedom to individuals
  - b) to divide society
  - c) to bring solidarity in the society
  - d) to maintain division of labour in society

iii) Define in three lines the collective conscience.  
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iv) Give within four lines the meaning of mechanical solidarity.  
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## 13.3 ORGANIC SOLIDARITY

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Durkheim viewed that division of labour is an essential condition of organic solidarity, and it gradually replaces that engendered by social likeness. Here individual depends upon those parts, which the society is composed of. In this respect a society is an arrangement of different and specific functions which are linked mutually by social bonds. In this conception the differences among the individuals are visible to the extent that everybody has his specific field of activities and confines himself or herself to that area only. Hence, the individual's conscience is distinct from the collective conscience.

### 13.3.0 New Forms of Collective Conscience in Organic Solidarity

Even primitive societies are well organised in the society where organic solidarity is greater; the social structure is well organised and has the features opposite that of segmental social structure. Organised social structure is characterised by the system of different organs and each has a specific role. These organs are formed by different components, which are coordinated and subordinated to one another around a single central organ. This central organ influences the rest of the organism within reasonable limits. Organised social structure, in turn, gives rise to the fusion of the segments completely. Hence, an individual extends his sphere of interaction. As this process continues, it increases in its numerical strength and as such its impact is no longer restricted to the local place. The process of fusion of the segments leads to the fusion of markets, which crystallises a single market (city). This virtually embraces whole society, which contains the entire population within its boundary. Thus, the society itself resembles a large city. Now, individuals are no longer grouped according to their **lineage**, but to their specified activities. The existing social conditions and the nature of work do not confine the individual to his birthplace, but also bring him out of it to the place of work.

Organised social structure is thus characterised by high degree of interdependence. The increase in industrialisation corresponds to the progress of division of labour and the latter determine the concentration of the social mass. Any change at one place is rapidly transmitted to the other. Therefore, the intervention of state/legal sanctions is needed. Finally, we can say that organised social structure has relatively high volume (material and moral density). With the above mentioned advancements, societies become more and more voluminous and, in turn, work gets more divided. The population becomes even more concentrated with the advancement of the people as a whole. Whenever the social norms correspond to the organic solidarity, the division of labour gives rise to legal rules. These will determine the nature and relation of specialised functions and any violation is to be entailed through restitutive measures. Law, with sanctions of restitutive or cooperative nature, works as an index of organic solidarity; this index consists of civil, commercial, procedural, administrative and constitutional laws, which had been abstracted from the penal rules, found in the less-advanced societies. Here we find almost similar co-relation as was observed between penal law and mechanical solidarity. The extent of co-operative law is proportional to that part of social life, which consists



in the bond, engendered by the division of labour. Here one can reasonably neglect those interdependent relations, which are regulated by the customs binding the individuals through similarity of work. Nevertheless, the legal and customary rules are essential for organic solidarity. For the existence of such a solidarity it is necessary that different parts cooperate in a determined way (if not in all respects, at least in predetermined conditions). Therefore, the contract is not self-sufficient, but it presupposes a set of regulations, which are as extensive and complicated as the contracted aspects.

### 13.3.1 On the Basis of Forms

Now we turn to the question of what form the collective conscience takes in the condition of organic solidarity. Having considered the volume of collective conscience, its intensity and determinateness, Durkheim argues about the forms of collective conscience where volume remains constant or probably diminishes, while its intensity and determinate character decline. Advancement of society through progressive development in the division of labour leads to a decline in the intensity and determinateness of collective states. The collective conscience seems to have less strength to carry the individuals in collective directions; as the rules of conduct to that of collective conscience become indeterminate, an individual gets more chances for self-reflection which, in turn, provides more opportunity for self-freedom. In other words, individual conscience no longer remains so tightly enmeshed in collective conscience, it acquires a certain degree of autonomy.

### 13.3.2 On the Basis of Contents

The content of collective conscience gradually becomes human oriented, secular and rational. These social conditions start weakening the values of collective curiosity from the society. The religious domain contracts in greater degree and the ever strong domain of collective religious beliefs and sentiments starts decreasing with the rise of scientific procedures. The transcendental characters of society, which were superior to the human interests, begin losing their lustre increasingly.

Durkheim has seen the features of collective conscience in the system of beliefs. In advanced societies the supreme values not only bring dignity to an individual but also equality of opportunity. This has been explained in his work *Ethic and social justice*.

### Check Your Progress 2

Read the following statements carefully and write the correct answer.

- i) Mechanical solidarity was found in that society where
  - a) the group was based on likeness and repressive law was in practice
  - b) the group was based on differentiation and repressive law was in practice
  - c) the group was based on likeness and restitutive law was in practice

- d) the group was based on differentiation and restitutive law was in practice. ii) Durkheim has described mechanical and organic solidarity in his work on
  - a) the suicide
  - b) the elementary form of religious life
  - c) the division of labour in society
  - e) the rules of sociological method.
- iii) Complete the following statement by filling in the gap:  
 Organic solidarity is found in that society where social structure is
  - a) simple
  - b) organised
  - c) mixed
  - d) imaginary
- v) Describe in five lines the organic solidarity.

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### 13.4 LET US SUM UP

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We now present the summary of the unit in a tabular form under three heads. This will help you recall the major differences between mechanical and organic types of solidarity. The first basis for this distinction is structural, the second deals with types of norms, and the third with characteristics of collective conscience — their form and content.

<b>Bases of distinction</b>	<b>Mechanical</b>	<b>Organic</b>
1) Structural bases	based on likeness (predominant in less-developed society)	based on differences and division of labour (predominant in society advanced societies)
	segmental type (firstly, based on clan then on territory)	organised (firstly, fusion of markets and later development of city)

	less volume of interdependence (relatively, weak social bonds)	high volume of interdependence (relatively strong social bonds)
	relatively, low volume of population	relatively, high volume of moral and material density
2) Types of norms	rules with repressive sanctions practices of penal law	rules with restitutive sanctions practices of cooperative law (cooperative, commercial, administrative and constitutional)
3) Characteristics of collective conscience		
a) form	high volume high intensity high determinants absolute collective	low volume low intensity low determinants more chances to individuals for self-reflection
b) content	highly religious (closed for discussion) attaching supreme values to the society concrete and specific	secular, human oriented (open for discussion) attaching supreme values to the individual abstract and general

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## 13.5 KEYWORDS

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**Clan** Descent from a common ancestry; now, often applied to any group of people who count descent unilineally from a common ancestor (actual or mythical). The ancestor in primitive societies may be represented by totem such as animal, plant or sources of natural forces. Common ancestor signifies a relationship through blood. Hence, marriages within group are prohibited.

**Belief** A statement about reality that is accepted by individuals as true and regarded as factual.

<b>Custom</b>	The term refers to the established mode of behaviour, thought and action, which are practised from generation to generation. Violation of this mode of behaviour is socially not accepted because of societal constraints. Customary forces are sometimes more binding than the orders of the state.
<b>Lineage</b>	A group of kin who reckons descent from a known common ancestor, this being conducted in a single line, either exclusively through patrilineal or exclusively matrilineal.
<b>Consanguinity</b>	The relationship of the people who are descended from one. The quality of common ancestors, commonly termed as “relationship by blood”
<b>Collective Conscience</b>	A set of beliefs and customs, which on an average are common in a society and form a determinant system which has its own style of life.
<b>Social Solidarity</b>	The condition within the group in which there is social cohesion and cooperation, and the collective action is directed towards the achievement of group goals and in which social organisation is shown by permanency. These conditions are changeable according to the social conditions. That is why Durkheim proposes two types of solidarity (mechanical and organic).
<b>Repressive Law</b>	Law that punishes the wrong-doer to reestablish the power and authority of the group or the collectivity. The most prevalent type of law in primitive societies.
<b>Restitutive Law</b>	Law which appears no longer a law for punishment but for restitution or reform. Its function is not to expiate but rather to restore to the rightful person what he or she has lost e.g. an amount of money given on loan or a house given on rent.

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## 13.6 FURTHER READING

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Durkheim, Emile 1893. *The Division of Labour in Society*. Macmillan: London

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## 13.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) d
- ii) c
- iii) The totality of beliefs and sentiments in average individuals of the same society forms a determinant system, which has its own style of life, may be called collective or common conscience.
- iv) When the individual is bound to society without any intermediary which, in turn, gives rise to totality of belief and sentiments, i.e., the solidarity of likeness; because, the segments of the society have no special type of action of their own and the individual's conscience depends upon the collective one.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) a
- ii) c
- iii) b
- iv) In organic solidarity the individual is dependent upon the parts of which society is composed. This, in turn, gives a system of interrelated and interdependent functions, which exhibit a division of labour. In such a society solidarity, however, based on differences is called as organic, because it produces the kind of integration where each organ has its own specific function.

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## UNIT 14 IDEAL TYPES

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### Structure

- 14.0 Objectives
- 14.1 Introduction
- 14.2 Ideal Types: Meanings, Construction and Characteristics
  - 14.2.0 Meaning
  - 14.2.1 Construction
  - 14.2.2 Characteristics
- 14.3 Purpose and Use of Ideal Types
- 14.4 Ideal Types in Weber's Work
  - 14.4.0 Ideal Types of Historical Particulars
  - 14.4.1 Abstract Elements of Social Reality
  - 14.4.2 Reconstruction of a Particular Kind of Behaviour
- 14.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 14.6 Keywords
- 14.7 Further Reading
- 14.8 Specimen Answers To Check Your Progress

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### 14.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit you should be able to

- discuss the meaning and characteristics of ideal types
- describe the purpose and use of ideal types in social sciences
- narrate Max Weber's use of ideal type in his major works.

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### 14.1 INTRODUCTION

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This is the first unit of the block on Max Weber. It deals with the concept of ideal type as part of Max Weber's concern with methodology of social sciences. This unit gives a perspective and a background to analyse the major theoretical formulations of Max Weber.

In this unit first we clarify the general meaning of ideal type and explain the sociological concept and characteristics of ideal-type as reflected in the writing of Max Weber. Here we also answer two questions as to how and why of social scientists' construction of ideal type in their researches. Weber used ideal type in three distinctive ways. We explain these three ways of use of ideal type in Weber's work in terms of (a) ideal types of historical particulars, (b) ideal types of abstract elements of social reality and (c) ideal types relating to the reconstruction of a particular kind of behaviour. We examine each of these kinds with suitable illustrations.

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## 14.2 IDEAL TYPES: MEANING, CONSTRUCTION AND CHARACTERISTICS

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To Max Weber, the term ‘ideal type’ has a distinctive meaning and there are certain underlying principles pertaining to its construction. Here in this section we shall explain the general and Weberian meanings of the term ‘ideal type’, its construction and characteristics.

### 14.2.0 Meaning

Let us begin with the dictionary meaning of the terms ‘ideal’ and ‘type’. According to New Websters Dictionary (NWD 1985), ‘ideal’ is a ‘conception or a standard of something in its highest perfection’. It refers to a mental image or conception rather than a material object. It is a model. The Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary says: ‘Your ideal of something is the person or thing that seems to you to be the best example of it’.

The term ‘type’ means a kind, class or group as distinguished by a particular character (NWD 1985). Thus, generally speaking, we may conceptualise ideal type as a kind, category, class or group of objects, things or persons with particular character that seems to be the best example of it.

Weber used ideal type in a specific sense. To him, ideal type is a mental construct, like a model, for the scrutiny and systematic characterisation of a concrete situation. Indeed, he used ideal type as a methodological tool to understand and analyse social reality.

Methodology is the conceptual and logical research procedure by which knowledge is developed. Historically much of the methodological concern in the social sciences has been directed towards establishing their scientific credentials (Mitchell 1968: 118). Max Weber was particularly concerned with the problem of objectivity in social sciences. Hence he used ideal type as a methodological tool that looks at reality objectively. It scrutinises, classifies, systematises and defines social reality without subjective bias. The ideal type has nothing to do with values. Its function, as a research tool, is for classification and comparison. To quote Max Weber (1971: 63):

“The ideal typical concept will develop our skill in imputation in research. It is not a description of reality but it aims to give unambiguous means of expression to such a description”.

In other words, ideal types are concepts formulated on the basis of facts collected carefully and analytically for empirical research. In this sense, ideal types are constructs or concepts which are used as methodological devices or tools in our understanding and analysis of any social problem.

To understand ideal types, as used by Max Weber, we explain how ideal types are constructed.

### 14.2.1 Construction

Ideal types are formulated by the abstraction and combination of an indefinite number of elements, which though found in reality, are rarely or never discovered in specific form. Therefore, Weber does not consider that he is establishing a new conceptual method. He emphasises that he is making explicit what is already done in practice. For the construction of ideal types, the sociologist selects a certain number of traits from the whole which is otherwise confusing and obscure, to constitute an intelligible entity. For example, if we wish to study the state of democracy in India (or for that matter of secularism, communalism, equality a court of law) then our first task will be to define the concept of democracy with the help of its essential and typical characteristics. Here we can mention some of the essential characteristics of democracy, namely, existence of a multi-party system, universal adult franchise, formation of government by peoples representatives, peoples participation in the decision making, equality before law, respect to majority verdict and each others' views as well. This formulation of a pure type or an ideal type concept of democracy will guide us and work as a tool in our analysis. Any deviation from or conformity to it will unfold the reality. Ideal types, therefore, do not represent the common or the average characteristics but focus on the typical and the essential characteristics. For instance in his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber analyses the characteristics of the 'Calvinist Ethic'. These characteristics are taken from various historical writings and involve those components of Calvinist doctrines which Weber identifies as of particular importance in relation to the formation of the capitalist spirit. Ideal types are thus a selection of certain elements, certain traits or characteristics which are distinctive and relevant to the study undertaken. However, one thing which should be kept in mind here is that though ideal types are constructed from facts existing in reality, they do not represent or describe the total reality, they are of pure types in a logical sense. According to Weber 'in its conceptual purity, this ideal mental construct cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality'. This then is the way in which ideal types are constructed. To facilitate our understanding later in this unit we will take up those ideal type concepts which have been used by Weber. Let us have a close look at construction of an ideal type of a court of law shown in figure 14.1.



Figure 14.1: Ideal Type of Court of Law

### 14.2.2 Characteristics

From the above discussion we can draw some important characteristics of ideal types.

- i) Ideal types are not general or average types. That is, they are not defined by the characteristics common to all phenomena or objects of study. They are formulated on the basis of certain typical traits, which are essential to the construction of an ideal type concept.
- ii) Ideal types are not a presentation of total reality or they do not explain everything. They exhibit partial conception of the whole.
- iii) Ideal types are neither a description of any definite concept of reality, nor a hypothesis, but they can aid both in description and explanation. Ideal types are different in scope and usage from descriptive concepts. If descriptive concepts can be used, for instance, in the classification of different sects, and if one wants to apply the distinction in order to analyse the importance of these for the economic activity, then one has to reformulate the concept of sect to emphasise the specific components of sectarianism which have been influential in the economic pursuit. The concept then becomes an ideal typical one, meaning that any descriptive concept can be transformed into an ideal type through abstraction and recombination of certain elements when we wish to explain or analyse rather than describe a phenomenon.
- iv) In this sense we can say that ideal types are also related to the analytic conception of causality, though not, in deterministic terms.
- v) They also help in reaching to general propositions and in comparative analysis.
- vi) Ideal types serve to guide empirical research, and are used in systematisation of data on historical and social reality.

After learning about the meaning, construction and characteristics of ideal type it will not be at all difficult for you to complete Check Your Progress 1.

#### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Tick mark the correct answer to the following question.  
What are ideal types?
  - a) Ideal types are general types.
  - b) Ideal types are average types.
  - c) Ideal types are pure types.
  - d) Ideal types are normative types.
- ii) Tick mark True or False box given below each of the following statements.
  - a) Ideal type is a description of reality. True/False

- b) Ideal type helps in the analysis and explanation of a social phenomenon. True/False
- c) Ideal types are constructed by selection of typical and essential traits. True/False
- d) Ideal types are hypotheses. True/False
- e) Ideal types represent a total reality. True/False
- f) Ideal types help in the causal and in comparative analysis. True/False

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### 14.3 PURPOSE AND USE OF IDEAL TYPES

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Ideal types are constructed to facilitate the analysis of empirical questions. Most researchers are not fully aware of the concepts they use. As a result their formulations often tend to be imprecise and ambiguous, or as Weber himself says, ‘the language which the historians talk contains hundreds of words which are ambiguous constructs created to meet the unconsciously conceived need for adequate expression, and whose meaning is definitely felt, but not clearly thought out’ (Weber 1949: 92-3).

It is however the job of social scientists to render subject matter intelligible by avoiding confusion and obscurity. For example, we may talk about the construction of ideal types of authority. Weber distinguishes three types of authority, namely, rational, legal, traditional, and charismatic, each of which was defined by the motivation of obedience or by the nature of legitimacy claimed by the leader. Reality presents a mixture or confusion of the three ideal types and because of this very reason we must approach the types of authority with a clear idea. Because these types merge in reality each must be rigorously defined.

Ideal types are not formed out of a nexus of purely conceptual thought, but are created, modified and sharpened through the empirical analysis of concrete problems. This, in turn, increases the precision of that analysis.

We can therefore say that, ideal types are a methodological device which not only help us in the analysis of empirical questions, but also in avoiding obscurity and ambiguity in the concepts used, and in increasing the accuracy of our analysis. Completing Activity 1 at this stage will help you appreciate the process of construction of an ideal type.

#### Activity 1

You may be aware of the functioning of the institution of Village Panchayat in the rural areas and that of the Municipal Corporation in the urban areas. If you are living in a rural Area, construct an ideal type of a Village Panchayat. If you are living in an urban area, construct an ideal type of a Municipal Corporation. Exchange your note, if possible, with the notes of your co-learners at the Study Centre.

Ideal type, a key term in Weber’s methodological essays has been used by him as a device in understanding historical configurations or specific

historical problems. For this he constructed ideal types, that is, to understand how events had actually taken place and to show that if some antecedents or other events had not occurred or had occurred differently, the event we are trying to explain would have been different as well. For example, because of the implementation of the land reform laws and penetration of other modernising forces, like education, modern occupation etc., the joint family system has broken down in rural India. This means that there is a causal relation between the event (land reform, education and modern occupation) and the situation (the joint family). In this way ideal type concept also helps in the causal explanation of a phenomenon.

This, however, does not mean that every event has a particular or a specific cause. Weber does not believe that one element of society is determined by another. He conceives the causal relations both in history and sociology as partial and probable relations. It means that a given fragment of reality makes probable or improbable, favourable or unfavourable to another fragment of reality. For instance, certain Marxists would say that private ownership of the means of production makes inevitable the political power of the minority possessing these means. Weber would say that an economic regime of total planning makes a certain type of political organisation more probable. In Weber’s work such analysis of causal relations was related to his interest in world wide comparisons or in analysis of events and establishment of general preposition. That is, he used ideal types to build up a conception of a particular historical case, and used the same ideal type conceptions for a comparative analysis. This interdependence of history and sociology appears most clearly in Weber’s conception of the ideal type.

Besides examining any particular historical case Max Weber also used ideal types to analyse the abstract elements of social reality and to explain particular kinds of social behaviour. We shall discuss these in greater detail in the following section, dealing with ideal type in the body of Weber’s work.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) How do we construct ideal type? Answer in about two lines.  
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.....
- ii) What is the purpose of constructing ideal type? Answer in about three lines.  
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**14.4 IDEAL TYPES IN WEBER’S WORK**

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Weber used ideal types in three distinctive ways. Indeed, his three kinds of ideal types are distinguished by three levels of abstraction. The first



kind of ideal types are rooted in the historical particularities namely, Western city, the Protestant ethics etc. In reality, this kind of ideal types refer to the phenomena that appear only in the specific historical periods and in particular cultural areas. The second kind relates to the abstract elements of social reality, for example, the concepts of bureaucracy or feudalism. These elements of social reality are found in a variety of historical and cultural contexts. The third kind of ideal type relates to the reconstruction of a particular kind of behaviour (Coser 1977: 224). In the following subsections we shall be dealing with each of these kinds of ideal types.

#### **14.4.0 Ideal Types of Historical Particulars**

According to Weber capitalism has been fully realised in modern western societies. Weber constructs an ideal type of capitalism by selecting a certain number of traits from the historical whole to constitute an intelligible entity. This was to show that there was a spiritual affinity between Calvinism and the economic ethics of modern capitalist activity. For this he identified those components of Calvinist doctrine which he considered as of particular and significant importance in the formation of capitalist spirit.

The essence of capitalism according to Weber is embodied in that enterprise whose aim is to make maximum profit or to accumulate more and more. These are based on the rational organisation of work and production. It is the conjunction of desire for profit and rational discipline which constitutes the historically unique feature of western capitalism. The desire for profit is satisfied not by speculation or conquest or adventure, but by discipline and rationality. This is possible with the help of legal administration of the modern state or rational bureaucracy. Hence capitalism is defined as an enterprise working towards unlimited accumulation of profit and functioning according to bureaucratic rationality.

Weber tried to show that there was a close affinity between this type of economic activity and elements of Calvinist doctrine. According to the Calvinist ethic, God is all powerful and above common man. Man has to work for God's glory on earth and this can be done through hardwork and labour which are rational, regular and constant. The calling of the individual is to fulfil his duty to God through the moral conduct of his day to day life whether he is rich or poor. For him work is worship and there is no room for idleness and laziness. This specific character of Calvinistic belief accounted for the relation between Calvinist doctrine and the spirit of capitalism which was characterised by a unique devotion to the earning of wealth through legitimate economic activity. This is rooted in a belief in the value of efficient performance in the chosen vocation as a duty and a virtue.

The affinity between the two and the emergence of Capitalist economic regime as defined by Weber existed only in the west, which made it a historically unique phenomenon. In Calvinist ethic, religious and economic activities are combined in a way not found either in Catholicism or in any other world religion like Hinduism, Islam, Confucianism, Judaism and Buddhism of which Weber made a comparative analysis.

### 14.4.1 Abstract Elements of Social Reality

These elements of social reality are found in a variety of historical and cultural contexts. Bureaucracy and types of authority and types of action are important examples of these abstract elements. Let us examine these three examples.

#### Box 14.I

##### Bureaucracy

General meaning of the term bureaucracy is the rule by departmental or administrative officials following inflexible procedures. Max Weber emphasised the indispensability of bureaucracy for the rational attainment of the goals of any organisation in industrial society (Mitchel 1967: 21)

#### i) Bureaucracy

Weber pointed out that bureaucracy was the best administrative form for the rational or efficient pursuit of organisational goals. Weber's ideal type of bureaucracy comprised various elements such as (a) high degree of specialisation and a clearly-defined division of labour, with tasks distributed as official duties, (b) hierarchical structure of authority with clearly circumscribed areas of command and responsibility, (c) establishment of a formal body of rules to govern the operation of the organisation and administration based on written documents, (d) impersonal relationships between organisational members and the clients, (e) recruitment of personnel based on ability and technical knowledge, (f) long term employment, promotion on the basis of seniority and merit, (g) fixed salary and the separation of private and official income.

Though examples of developed bureaucracies existed in different parts of the world prior to the emergence of modern capitalism, it is only within this that organisations are found which approximate to this ideal typical form. Weber used these abstract elements of bureaucracy to explain a concrete phenomenon.

#### ii) Types of Authority

To understand the various aspects of authority Max Weber constructed its ideal types in terms of three types of authority. These are traditional, rational and charismatic.

Traditional authority is based upon the belief in the sanctity of age-old customs and rules. Rational authority is maintained by laws, decrees, regulations. Charismatic authority is characterised by exceptional virtue possessed by or attributed to the leader by those who follow the leader, have confidence in the leader and are devoted to the leader.

These three ideal type of concepts may be used to understand concrete political regimes, most of which contain certain elements of each (for more detail see Unit 16).

### iii) Types of Action

According to Max Weber “Sociology is a science which attempts the interpretative understanding of social action in order thereby to arrive at a causal explanation of its cause and effects”. Here we can point out the following important elements of social action

- i) social action includes all human behaviour.
- ii) social action attaches a subjective meaning to it.
- iii) the acting individual or individuals take into account the behaviour of others.
- iv) social action is oriented in its course.

Hence the construction of a pure type of social action helps the sociologists as an ideal type “which has the merit of clear understandability and lack of ambiguity” (Weber 1964: 128-129).

#### **Box 14.2**

##### **Social Action**

It denotes social behaviour. This concept is used both by social psychologists and sociologists. Many social scientists regarded social action as the proper unit of, observation in the social sciences. Action is social when the actor behaves in such a manner that his action is intended to influence the action of one or more other persons. In sociology it was Max Weber who first explicitly used and emphasised social action as the basis for sociological theory (Mitchel 1968: 2).

Weber has talked about four types of social actions. These are i) Zweckrational or rational action with reference to goals, ii) Wertrational or rational action with reference to values, iii) traditional action and iv) affective action. These are classified according to their modes of orientation. Rational action with reference to goals is classified in terms of the conditions or means for the successful attainment of the actor’s own rationally chosen ends. Rational action with reference to value is classified in terms of rational orientation to an absolute value, that is, action which is directed to overriding ideals of duty, honour or devotion to a cause. Traditional action type is classified as one which is under the influence of long practice, customs and habits. Affective action is classified in terms of affectual orientation, especially emotional, determined by the specific states of feeling of the actor. Since reality presents a mixture of the four pure types of action, for our analysis and understanding we separate them analytically into pure or ideal types. For instance, the use of rational ideal types can help in measuring irrational deviation and we can understand particular empirical action by interpreting as to which of the four types of action it most closely approximates.

In order to understand better the types of action, identified by Max Weber, it is a good idea now to complete Activity 2.

**Activity 2**

List two examples from your day-to-day life for each of the four types of action identified by Max Weber. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of your co-learners at the Study Centre.

**14.4.2 Reconstruction of a Particular Kind of Behaviour**

This ideal type includes those elements that constitute rationalising reconstructions of a particular kind of behaviour. For example, according to Weber, all propositions in economic theory are merely ideal typical reconstructions of the ways people would behave if they were pure economic subjects. These include laws of supply and demand, marginal utilities etc. Supply of commodity in the market governs prices in relation to demand. Similarly, utility of a commodity for consumption is higher or lower depending upon the units available for consumption. Economic theory rigorously conceives economic behaviour as consistent with its essence. This essence is often defined in a precise manner (Weber 1964: 210). It is now time to complete Check Your Progress 3.

**Check Your Progress 3**

i) In what sense Weber used the concept of ideal type to show the relationship between Calvinist ethic and the spirit of capitalism? Use four lines to answer.

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.....  
.....  
.....

ii) What are the major characteristics of ideal type of bureaucracy as outlined by Max Weber? Use five lines to answer.

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iii) What are the four ideal types of social actions stated by Max Weber. Answer in about eight lines.

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## 14.5 LET US SUM UP

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This unit began with a clarification of the general meaning of the terms ‘ideal’ and ‘type’. We discussed the concept and characteristics of ideal type as associated with Max Weber’s writings. Ideal types are those constructs or concepts which are formulated for interpretation and explanation of social reality. Weber used ideal types in three distinctive ways. First, he used ideal types of historical particulars to explain Protestant ethics that appeared only in specific historical periods and in particular cultural areas. Secondly he used ideal type to explain abstract elements of social reality, namely, bureaucracy, types of authority, social action and so on. His third kind of ideal type relates to the reconstruction of particular kind of behaviour. We examined in detail the use of ideal type in Weber’s work in this unit.

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## 14.6 KEYWORDS

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<b>Affective Action</b>	It is that type of action, which is carried out under the sway of some sort of emotional state or condition.
<b>Authority</b>	Authority is that type of power whose exercise people see as legitimate.
<b>Bureaucracy</b>	A system of administration based on the division of labour, specialisation, hierarchy of officials, formal body of rules to govern, written documents, impersonal relations, recruitment and promotion on the basis of ability and separation of private and official income etc.
<b>Calvinism</b>	One of the four main streams of Protestantism besides Methodism, Pietism and Baptist. Calvinism has three major important tenents: that the universe is created to further the greater glory of God; that the motives of the almighty are beyond human comprehension; and that only a small number of people are chosen to achieve eternal grace i.e. the belief in predestination.
<b>Capitalism</b>	An economic organisation which consists of private ownership of property, control of

capital, has market mechanism and provision of workers and which aims at making maximum profit.

**Charismatic Authority** In this type of authority, commands are obeyed because followers believe in the extraordinary character of the leader.

**Legal-Rational Authority** This involves obedience to formal rules established by regular public procedure.

**Protestant Ethic** A doctrine of Christianity which provided much of the cultural content of capitalism like individualism, achievement motivation, hostility to inherited wealth and luxury, emphasis on work and profit, opposition to magic and superstition and commitment to rational organisation.

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## 14.7 FURTHER READING

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Aron, R. 1967. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Volume 2. Penguin Books: London, pp 193-210

Bendix, R. 1960. *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*. Anchor: New York

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## 14.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) c.
- iii) a) False
  - b) True
  - c) True
  - d) False
  - e) False
  - f) True

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Ideal types are constructed by selecting those characteristics or elements of an object of study, which are considered essential or typical to it.
- ii) Ideal types are formulated, first, to understand and analyse a particular social phenomenon or problem; secondly, to avoid confusion or obscurity in the concepts used and thirdly, to increase the precision and accuracy of the analysis.



### Check Your Progress 3

### Ideal Types

- i) Weber constructed ideal type of capitalism and identified those components of Protestant ethic which he thought were of significant importance in the formation of capitalist spirit and was responsible for the rise of modern capitalism in the West.
- ii) According to Max Weber the ideal typical characteristics of bureaucracy are: division of labour and specialisation, work distributed as official duties, hierarchy or offices with clearly defined areas of command and responsibility, formal body of rules to govern, written documents, impersonal relations, recruitment on the basis of merit, separation of private and official income, promotion and fixed salary.
- iv) Max Weber has talked about four types of social actions. These are as follows:
  - a) Rational Action with reference to Goal — e.g. the action of the collector who makes preparation for the coming election.
  - b) Rational Action with reference to value — e.g. the action of the soldier who risks his life for one's country.
  - c) Affective Action — e.g. the abuses given by the bowler to the empire in a cricket match for not giving the batsperson out.
  - d) Traditional Action — e.g. the action of taking bath by an individual after coming from the cremation ground.

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## **UNIT 15 RELIGION AND ECONOMY**

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### **Structure**

- 15.0 Objectives
- 15.1 Introduction
- 15.2 Religion and Economy — Meaning and Inter-relationship
  - 15.2.0 Religion
  - 15.2.1 Economy
  - 15.2.2 Inter-relationship between Religious Ethics and Economy
- 15.3 The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism
  - 15.3.0 The Spirit of Capitalism
  - 15.3.1 The Protestant Ethic: Features Influencing the Development of Capitalism
  - 15.3.2 Main features of Calvinism
  - 15.3.3 Beliefs of those following Calvinism
- 15.4 Weber's Comparative Studies on Religion
  - 15.4.0 Confucianism in China
  - 15.4.1 Judaism in West Asia
  - 15.4.2 Hinduism in India
- 15.5 Critical Evaluation of Weber's Studies on Religion and Economy
- 15.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 15.7 Keywords
- 15.8 Further Reading
- 15.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### **15.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After going through this unit you should be able to

- discuss the meaning of religion and economy and their interconnections
- understand the influence of the Protestant ethic on the development of modern capitalism as discussed by Weber
- review Weber's comparative studies on three world religions, i.e. Confucianism in China, Judaism in West Asia and Hinduism in India
- evaluate Max Weber's studies on religion and economy.

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### **15.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the previous units, you have studied Weber's concept of ideal type. In this unit you will see the application of this idea in Weber's analysis of religion and economy.

The unit starts by clarifying the meaning of the terms ‘religion’ and ‘economy’. It then goes on to examine the inter-relationship between religious beliefs and economic activity.

To bring out the inter-relationship clearly, there is discussion of the major argument in Max Weber’s famous book, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Next the unit goes into what Weber meant by the “spirit of capitalism” and contrasts it with “traditionalism”. We then discuss certain aspects of the “Protestant ethic” which according to Weber, contributed to the development of capitalism in the West.

This unit further clarifies the relationship between religious beliefs and economic activity by describing three of Weber’s ‘comparative religious studies’, namely those of Confucianism in China, Judaism in ancient West Asia and Hinduism in India. Lastly there is evaluation of his views on economy and religion.

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## 15.2 RELIGION AND ECONOMY — MEANING AND INTER-RELATIONSHIP

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In this section there is brief discussion of what is meant by the terms religion and economy. After defining these two terms, the following sub-section (15.2.2) provides preliminary ideas about the relationship between religion and economy as formulated by Weber.

### 15.2.0 Religion

The term ‘religion’ refers to a set of ideas and beliefs about the “supernatural” and its impact on the lives of human beings. Human beings have always been confronted with certain problems and crises, which seem to defy logical explanation.

Why is it that a loved one dies? Why does a good man suffer and an evil one prosper? Why do natural calamities happen? Religious beliefs provide supernatural answers to these difficult questions. For instance, suffering may be explained by saying that it is “God’s way” of testing a man’s faith or that it is a punishment for sins committed in past lives. Religious beliefs give meaning to life. They help answer questions about oneself and the world one lives in. They provide certain guidelines of behaviour, certain codes of conduct which individuals are expected to follow.

### 15.2.1 Economy

What do we mean by ‘economy’? In order that society may survive, certain basic physical needs have to be met. Food, clothing and shelter are essential for life. The economy or economic system refers to those arrangements made by society for the production, consumption and distribution of goods and services.

What is to be produced? How much of it is to be produced? How are goods made available to those who want them? How is work to be divided? These are some of the concerns of the economic system.

### 15.2.2 Inter-relationship between Religious Ethics and Economy

This is a brief outline of the meaning of religion and economy. Superficially, they seem poles apart. Religion concerns itself with the beyond, whereas economy deals with the practical business of working, producing and consuming. Are these two seemingly diverse systems related?

Max Weber thought so. According to him, it was the ideas, beliefs, values and world-view of human societies that guided the way their members acted, even in the economic sphere. As has already been mentioned, religion prescribes certain guidelines of behaviour. It is in accordance with these guidelines that followers direct or orient their activities. These guidelines are incorporated in the body of religious ethics of each religious system. Let us illustrate Weber’s view with an example from our society.

A health expert might suggest that if Indians would eat beef, the problem of hunger and malnutrition might be lessened. But the very idea of cow-slaughter is revolting to most Hindus and would probably be rejected outright. So even though cow-slaughter may seem economically rational or logical, values and ideas (in this case, the idea that the cow is sacred) definitely influence the making of certain decisions. It is our beliefs and values, which help to shape our behaviour. It was this link between religious beliefs and economic behaviour that Weber tried to bring out in his work. In order not to confuse religion with ethics, see Box 15.1 to learn about ethics and ethical behaviour.

**Box 15.1**

**Ethic**

The term “ethic” is not restricted to religion alone. You can speak of business ethics, political ethics and so on. Ethics is related to social structure because it affects in some way the social behaviour of individuals in society. Ethics is important because it sets certain standards of thought and behaviour, which are used to evaluate or judge actual behaviour. Ethical codes, in other words, represent what “ought” to be done. They reflect the particular values and beliefs of the social groups of which they are part.

According to Max Weber, there were certain affinities between the Protestant religious ethics and the economic system known as capitalism. These affinities, said Weber, helped capitalism to grow in the western world.

The next section (15.3), describes the major argument contained in Weber’s thesis.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) What is meant by “religion”? Answer in three lines.

.....  
.....  
.....

- ii) Mention two functions of religion.
  - a) .....
  - b) .....
- ii) Describe, in two lines, how religious beliefs affect economic behaviour.
  - .....
  - .....

### 15.3 THE PROTESTANT ETHIC AND THE SPIRIT OF CAPITALISM

Weber located a positive relationship between the Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism. Western capitalism, according to Weber, assumed its shape because it was supported by a certain belief system, namely, the “Protestant ethic”. Weber argued that the Protestant ethic is closely associated with the spirit of capitalism. In order to bring out this inter-relationship, Weber constructed ideal types of both, the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Let us now understand what Weber meant by the term ‘the spirit of capitalism’.

#### 15.3.0 The Spirit of Capitalism

Why do people work? Most of us would answer, “to earn money, of course”, in order to feed, clothe and shelter ourselves and our families. We also earn so that we may have certain comforts and luxuries, which make life more enjoyable.

The desire for wealth or profit is as old as human history. Wealth has long been regarded as a symbol of power, status and prestige. But never before in human history did the desire for wealth assume the organised and disciplined form that it did in modern or rational capitalism. It is this rational capitalism that Weber wanted to study. He distinguishes between traditional or adventurist capitalism of former times and rational capitalism of modern times (see Box 15.2).

**Box 15.2**

**Traditional Capitalism and Rational Capitalism**

Traditional or adventurist capitalism existed at many times and many places. It was particularly noticeable in the Italian cities. Traditional capitalism was a risky business, involving the import of luxury items from distant places. Foreign silks, spices, ivory etc. were sold to buyers at exorbitant prices. The aim was to extract as much profit as possible because no one knew when and where the next business deal would occur. It was thus a series of one-shot deals. Rational capitalism on the other hand depends on mass production and distribution of goods. This became possible with the Industrial Revolution and factory

production. What is important is to note that rational capitalism does not deal with a few luxury items but with almost all the daily material requirements from bread to cloth to cars. Rational capitalism is constantly expanding and looking for new methods, new inventions, new products and new customers. Involving methodical work and regularised transactions, it is thus qualitatively and quantitatively different from traditional capitalism.

According to Weber, the capitalists desired wealth not for enjoyment or luxurious living. They wanted it so that they could use it to make more wealth. The thirst for money-making for its own sake is the very essence of modern capitalism. Capitalism is an economic system which aims at the unlimited **accumulation** of profit through the rational organisation of production.

Capitalism arose in the Western nations like England and Germany, which experienced what we call the “**Industrial Revolution**”. The growth of the factory system, new techniques of production, new tools and machines made it possible for the capitalists or the owners to earn vast amounts of money. The production process had to be rationally organised; in other words, efficiency and discipline were essential.

The worker was a means to an end, the end being profit. The attitude towards work was that it should be done well not because one had to do it, but because it carried an intrinsic reward. The popular American saying, “Anything that’s worth doing is worth doing well”, sums up this attitude. Hard work and efficient work was an end in itself.

Weber contrasted this work-ethic with another type which he termed traditionalism.

Here, workers prefer less work to more pay, relaxation to exertion. They are either unable or unwilling to take up new work-methods and techniques.

As has been mentioned before, in capitalism, the worker is regarded by the capitalist as a means to an end. But under traditionalism, the worker-employer relationship is informal, direct and personal.

Traditionalism hampers the growth of capitalism. Capitalism stresses individualism, innovation and the relentless pursuit of profit. Traditionalism, as described above, is characterised by a much less disciplined and efficient system of production. You have just seen that the spirit of capitalism is a work-ethic which calls for accumulation of wealth for its own sake. To do so, work has to be organised in an efficient, disciplined manner. Hard work is a virtue that carries intrinsic rewards.

Unlike “traditionalism”, the spirit of capitalism demands individualism, innovation, hard work and the pursuit of wealth for its own sake. It is thus an economic ethic unlike any in the past.

Let us now try to understand what Weber meant by the Protestant ethic, in other words, the major tenets or principles of the Protestant religion. But before doing so, just complete Check Your Progress 2.



**Check Your Progress 2**

i) Tick the correct answer.

The essence of capitalism according to Weber is that

- a) capitalists exploit workers.
- b) capitalists aim to increase profit so that they can lead a luxurious life.
- c) making money is an end in itself.
- d) all of the above.

ii) Tick the correct answer.

Capitalism arose when the western nations went through

- a) the French revolution.
- b) the Green revolution.
- c) the Industrial revolution.
- d) none of the above.

iii) Tick the correct answer.

“Rational Organization” of production requires

- a) efficiency, discipline and hard work.
- b) Less work and more pay for workers.
- c) large amounts of money.
- d) all of the above.

iv) Place the following items, under the correct heading.

- a) informal relationship with owner
- b) work as an end in itself
- c) innovation and individualism
- d) resistance to change
- e) worker as a means to an end
- f) unlimited pursuit of profit

Traditionalism	Capitalism

**15.3.2 The Protestant Ethic: Features Influencing the Development of Capitalism**

Let us first clarify a few historical details. What is Protestantism? As the name suggests, it is a religion of protest. It arose in the sixteenth century in Europe in the period known as the **Reformation**.

Its founding fathers like Martin Luther and John Calvin broke away from the **Catholic Church**. They felt that the Church had become too immersed in doctrines and rituals. It had lost touch with the common people. Greed,

corruption and vice had gripped the Church. Priests had a life-style more suitable for princes.

The Protestant sects that sprang up all over Europe tried to recapture the lost spirit of the Church. They stressed simplicity, austerity and devotion. Calvinism founded by the Frenchman John Calvin was one such sect. The followers of Calvin in England were known as the Puritans. They migrated to the continent of North America and were the founders of the American nation. Weber observed that in the West, it was by and large the Protestants who had made greatest progress in education and employment. They were the top bureaucrats, the most skilled technical workers and the leading industrialists.

Was there something in their religion that inspired them to make such progress? Weber thought so, and attempted to prove it. The brand of capitalism that Weber was most interested in was Calvinism. An examination of its main features would show us how there is the link between religion and economy.

### **15.3.3 Main Features of Calvinism**

As said before, for showing the link between religion and economy or in this particular case between the spirit of Capitalism and Calvinism, let us first discuss the main features of Calvinism.

#### **Calvin's Image of God**

God, said Calvin, was all powerful, transcendent. His Divine Will was unknowable. It would be foolish of any human being to try to understand God's Will. It could not be understood simply because it was God's Will!

#### **Doctrine of Pre-destination**

At the core of Calvinism is the belief that certain persons are chosen or 'elected' by God to enter Heaven while the rest are damned. The 'chosen' will reach Heaven no matter what they do on Earth. We cannot bribe God to give us a place in Heaven through prayers or sacrifice. As this Will is unknowable, we cannot change it. Imagine the insecurity of the followers of this stern religion! He did not know whether he was elected or damned. They could not turn to a priest for solace and help because no mortal man could understand God. What could they do to cope with the anxiety of an uncertain destiny? How could they prove to themselves that they were the chosen ones?

They could do so by prospering on Earth. Their material prosperity would be the symbol or token of their election. He would work for the glory of God.

#### **Calvinism and "this-worldly asceticism"**

By 'asceticism' we mean strict self-discipline, control and conquest of desires. In Protestantism, particularly Calvinism Weber detected this-worldly asceticism. It stressed rigorous self-discipline in order to master the environment. A simple, frugal life-style was recommended along with hard work. Worldly or sensual pleasures were viewed with horror; fine clothes, dance and music, theatre and novels came from the Devil as they would

divert a person from working for the glory of God. Even the very human expression of laughter was frowned upon!

This emphasis on hard work was not confined to Calvinists alone. It was a common feature of all Protestant sects. The idea that ‘honesty is the best policy’ was the principle of early capitalism. Weber (1948:313) gives us the example of the ‘Methodists’ a sect who forbade their followers

- a) to haggle when buying and selling.
- b) to trade with commodities without paying the necessary taxes and tariffs.
- c) to charge rates of interest higher than the law of the country permits.
- d) ‘to gather treasures on earth’ (meaning the transformation of investment capital into ‘funded wealth’).
- e) to borrow without being sure of one’s ability to pay back the debt.
- f) “luxuries of all sorts”.

The fruits of hard labour could not be spent on worldly pleasures. Thus there was only one outlet for money. It was reinvested and hence used to make more money.

Not a moment was to be idled away as “work is worship” and “time is money”.

See Figure 15.1: Spirit of Capitalism that illustrates the ideas mentioned above.



Figure 15.1: Spirit of Capitalism

### The notion of “calling”

Would a University graduate accept a sweeper’s job? Probably not. Most of us would consider the job of a sweeper or garbage-collector too “low”

or too “dirty” for us. The Calvinist ethic, on the other hand, holds that all work is important and sacred. It is not mere work, it is a calling or a mission and should be performed with devotion and sincerity.

At this point let us complete Activity 1 that deals with some of the point discussed in sub-section 15.3.2.

**Activity 1**

Write two page note on any religious sect in India in terms of its guidelines for shaping one’s day-to-day behaviour. Compare your note, with those of other students at your study centre.

We have so far looked at how Weber described the strong relationship between the spiritual vision of the world and a certain style of economic activity. This relationship is conspicuous among the Calvinists. Weber summarised the Calvinist ethic in five points (Aron 1967: 221-222).

- a) There exists an absolute transcendent God who created the world and rules it, but who is incomprehensible and inaccessible to the finite minds of men.
- b) This all powerful and mysterious God had predestined each of us to salvation or damnation, so that we cannot by our works alter a divine decree which was made before we were born.
- c) God created the world for His own glory.
- d) Whether he is to be saved or damned, man is obliged to work for the glory of God and to create the Kingdom of God on earth.
- e) Earthly things, human nature, and flesh belong to the order of sin and death and salvation can come to man only through divine grace.

This helped to create a disciplined and dedicated workforce without which capitalism could not have emerged.

Hard work, saving and re-investment and the desire to prosper have a strong affinity with the “spirit of capitalism” which you read about earlier in sub section 15.3.0.

Let us see the link that Weber was trying to establish. Ideas impinge upon or affect human conduct and human conduct can be understood in the context of the ideas lying behind it. Working day and night and not enjoying the fruits of that labour might seem very irrational to most of us. But if we keep in mind the doctrine of “pre-destination” and the need to prosper to prove one’s “election” by God, this irrational behaviour makes sense. As we have earlier stated, religious beliefs set guidelines for action, they motivate us to behave in a certain manner.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Why did Max Weber try to establish a link between the Protestant ethic and capitalism? Answer in about five lines.

.....

.....  
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.....  
.....  
ii) Why did the followers of Calvin stress so much on hard work? Answer in about four lines.

.....  
.....  
.....  
.....

iii) Why no work was regarded as “low” by the Calvinists? Answer in about four lines.

.....  
.....  
.....  
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## 15.4 WEBER’S COMPARATIVE STUDIES ON RELIGION

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You have just studied the link that Weber tries to establish between religious ethics on the one hand and economic behaviour on the other. Let us now see how Weber further tries to substantiate or validate this idea with the help of comparative studies of various world religions. In this section, we shall describe Weber’s studies of Confucianism in ancient China, Hinduism in ancient India and Judaism in ancient Palestine (West Asia).

### 15.4.0 Confucianism in China

Ancient China had a well-developed economy. Trade, commerce, finance and manufacture were quite advanced. Despite the presence of these material conditions, Western-style of capitalism did not develop there. Why? According to Weber, the Confucian ethic would not permit this. Confucian ideas can be summed up as follows.

- i) Belief in the order of the Universe, the cosmos.
- ii) Man should aim at being in harmony with nature and the cosmos.
- iii) Behaviour is to be guided by tradition. All wisdom lies in the past.
- iv) Family and kin ties and obligations were never to be neglected.

The stress on harmony, traditionalism and family obligations are quite contradictory to the relentless pursuit of profit for its own sake. Indeed,

the “spirit of capitalism” would probably have been considered to be bad manners.

### 15.4.1 Judaism in West Asia

This is the religion of the Jews who originally inhabited the land of Palestine in West Asia. Judaism is the oldest of the monotheistic religions. It is a religion that speaks of one, all-powerful and almighty God. The Jews believe themselves to be the chosen ones of God or “Yahweh”. Their prophets united them in the belief that they were the chosen ones of God and must help to establish God’s Kingdom on Earth. Judaism, unlike Confucianism and Hinduism speaks of an ethic of mastery over the environment, not harmony.

Judaism, says Weber, could have generated the “spirit of capitalism”. However, certain historical forces prevented this. The **Exodus** or mass migration of the Jews from their homeland due to persecution left them scattered all over the world.

Their economic participation was restricted to money-lending, which they did very successfully.

### 15.4.2 Hinduism in India

While dealing with the Religion of India Weber expressed a strict negative attitude towards the possibility of rational capitalism existing within the ethos of Hinduism. To him, it is extremely unlikely that the organisation of modern capitalism could have originated in a caste-based society like India. Nor could capitalism imported from the West hope to flourish in India.

India like China was economically fairly advanced. You probably know that ancient India made valuable contributions to science. Manufactured goods found world-wide markets and trade links were established in various parts of the world.

But Hinduism, says Weber, did not provide a suitable ethic for the development of capitalism. The ideas of “*Karma*”, “*dharma*” and “*punarjanma*” (the cycle of births and rebirths) made Indians defeatists, fatalists. You have probably heard the statement “I am being punished for my deeds in my last life”. Since one’s present condition is believed to be the consequence of past deeds, Weber feels that Hindus have no motivation to improve their economic condition. Hindus, says Weber, would not consider it worthwhile to put in the sort of hard work that capitalism demanded.

The Hindu ideal of “*moksha*” or salvation states that our souls can be liberated only when we empty ourselves of worldly desires or “*vasana*”. The material world is an illusion or “*maya*”. True bliss is ours when we free ourselves from this web of desires or “*maya-jaal*”. Hinduism preaches “other-worldly asceticism”. The material world is de-emphasised. Material prosperity is not given importance, as it is temporary and illusory.

It is welfare of the spirit or soul or “*atma*” which is imperishable that is more important. Religions that place more stress on otherworldly asceticism



and de-emphasise the material world can hardly foster attitudes that promote capitalism.

So, as we can see, mere material conditions like finance, trade and technology are not enough to promote capitalism. India and China had both of these, yet the value-systems of these societies were such that the pursuit of wealth for own sake and rational organisation of work to achieve this purpose did not make sense. It did not fit in with the ethos or the ideals of these societies.

Before reading about critical evaluation of Weber's studies on religion and economy, complete Activity 2.

### Activity 2

You must have seen the popular tele-serial Mahabharata. How is the Hindu ethic depicted in this serial? To what extent does it differ from the 'Hindu ethic' as described by Weber? Write down your observation in about two pages. Compare your note, if possible, with your co-learners at the Study Centre.

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## 15.5 CRITICAL EVALUATION OF WEBER'S STUDIES ON RELIGION AND ECONOMY

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Weber's work on religion and economy has often been subjected to criticism. Some scholars feel that he has concentrated very selectively on certain aspects of religious ethics and interpreted them very narrowly so that they may fit in with his theory.

For instance, in his studies on the Hindu ethic, Weber has seen only one aspect of the Hindu ethic and has over-emphasised the fatalistic and passive aspect of it. Some scholars and students would argue that the notions of "*karma*" and "*dharma*" actually spur individuals to act, to perform their duties, to live up to their obligations. It is pointed out that the concept of calling which forms the very foundation of the spirit of capitalism is also prevalent in Hinduism. The principle in the Bhagwad Gita of doing one's duty without thinking of benefit is similar to the doctrine of calling which is the focal point of material progress in West.

Milton Singer has presented a functional equivalent of the Protestant ethic in India in his study of the leading industrialists of the city of Madras. To him caste background and tradition may equally be fitted for the industrial development in India. Caste based division of labour has been used successfully in the specialisation of industrial workers. Singer observed that through the process of "compartmentalisation", many industrialists kept their business obligations and ritual obligations separate or in distinct compartments. Hence there was no conflict between an individual's role as a businessman, on the one hand, and a religious person on the other.

According to Milton Singer (1969) if capitalism is to be developed in India then it must not be an aping of the west that destroys the traditional way

of life. Capitalism in India can rather develop within the given cultural norms and institutions of our society.

Now at the end of the unit on Religion and economy, you need to complete Check Your Progress 4.

#### **Check Your Progress 4**

- i) Confucianism stressed on
  - a) individualism
  - b) harmony with the universe
  - c) fatalism and passiveness.
- ii) According to Weber, Hindus were not motivated to work hard because
  - a) their religion made them silently accept their fate
  - b) their technology and manufacture were well developed
  - c) they were lazy.
- iii) Capitalism did not develop in ancient Palestine because
  - a) Judaism stressed “other-worldly asceticism”
  - b) the Jews were dispersed all over the world
  - c) Jewish prophets preached mastery over the environment.

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### **15.6 LET US SUM UP**

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The unit began with explanations of the concepts of ‘religion’ and ‘economy’. It tried to see the link between the two as described by Max Weber. Then it discussed the major argument put forward by Weber for the development of rational capitalism in the West. It presented his argument for the non-development of capitalism in China, in West Asia and in India. Finally, it looked at some criticisms of Weber’s theory raised in the context of Indian society.

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### **15.7 KEYWORDS**

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#### **Catholic Church**

It is also called the Church of Rome. Its headquarters are in the Vatican City and the head of the Church is the Pope. Before the Reformation, it was the central Church of the Christian religion. After the Reformation, a number of sects broke away from it, e.g. Calvinists, Lutherans, Baptists etc.

#### **Capital Accumulation**

This means the stock piling of resources, which can be reinvested into industry so that industry may expand.

**Exodus**

It relates to the departure of the Jews from West Asia because of religious persecution.

**Religion and Economy****Industrial Revolution**

This term refers to the striking changes in the economic sphere in the period 1750-1850. England was the home of this Revolution, which then spread to all parts of Europe. New discoveries like steam power, inventions like the power loom, spinning frame etc. revolutionised production. The factory system and capitalism rose in this period.

**Reformation**

Religious revolution in Western Europe in the sixteenth century protesting against the corruption of the Church. It led to the formation of Protestant sects, which broke away from the Catholic Church.

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**15.8 FURTHER READING**

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Aron, Raymond 1967. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Volume 2, Penguin Books: London pp. 210-237.

Haralambos, M. 1980. *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*. Oxford University Press: London.

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**15.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) By 'religion', we mean certain ideas and beliefs about the 'supernatural' or those phenomena that defy explanation. Religion refers to certain values, ideas and guidelines of behaviour that help people to understand themselves and the world around them.
- ii)
  - a) Religion helps man to come to terms with events beyond his control.
  - b) It provides certain guidelines of behaviour that help followers to orient or direct their activities.
- iii) Religious beliefs prescribe certain values which followers are expected to adhere to or stick to. Thus economic behaviour is shaped by the values or guidelines provided by the religious system of a society.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) c)
- ii) c)
- iii) a)

iv) TRADITIONALISM	CAPITALISM
(a)	(b)
(d)	(c)
	(e)
	(f)

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Max Weber observed that in Europe, it was the Protestant community that had made great progress in the economic field. They were the leaders in industry, education and bureaucracy. Weber tried to see whether it was their religion that contributed to their success. Thus he tried to see if there was a link between the Protestant ethic and the spirit of capitalism.
- ii) The Calvinist teachings said that people were pre-destined to be saved or damned. The Calvinists tried to prove to themselves that they were chosen or elected to be saved by prospering on earth. The only way they could prosper was by working hard and saving. Hence they stressed on hard work and discipline.
- iii) The Calvinists regarded work as a calling or a mission. It was to be performed with utmost sincerity and devotion. Work carried intrinsic rewards, it was to be done for its own sake. Work is worship, hence no job was regarded as low or dirty.

**Check Your Progress 4**

- i) b)
- ii) b)
- iii) b)

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# UNIT 16 POWER AND AUTHORITY

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## Structure

- 16.0 Objectives
- 16.1 Introduction
- 16.2 Concepts of Power and Authority
  - 16.2.0 Power
  - 16.2.1 Authority
  - 16.2.2 Elements of Authority
- 16.3 Types of Social Action and Types of Authority
  - 16.3.0 Types of Social Action
  - 16.3.1 Types of Authority
    - 16.3.1.0 Traditional Authority
    - 16.3.1.1 Charismatic Authority
    - 16.3.1.2 Rational-Legal Authority
  - 16.3.2 Lack of Conformity between Typologies
- 16.4 Bureaucracy
  - 16.4.0 Major Features of Bureaucracy
  - 16.4.1 Characteristics of Officials in Bureaucracy
- 16.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 16.6 Keywords
- 16.7 Further Readings
- 16.8 Specimen Answers To Check Your Progress

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## 16.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you should be able to

- understand the concepts of power and authority as explained by Max Weber
- show the connections between Weber's types of social action and types of authority
- describe in detail the three types of authority namely, traditional, charismatic and rational-legal
- describe bureaucracy as the instrument for the operation of rational-legal authority.

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## 16.1 INTRODUCTION

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In units 14 and 15 of this block you read about Weber's views on the **ideal type** and the link between religion and economy. In this unit, you will find some of Weber's important contributions in understanding **power** and **authority**. In the first section (16.2), there is a brief discussion of the

sociological concepts of power and authority with special reference to Weber's understanding of the terms. The second section (16.3) will mention the types of social action that Weber identifies and the types of authority that flow from them, namely, traditional, charismatic and rational-legal authority. The third section (16.4) will focus on the instrument through which rational-legal authority is exercised, namely, bureaucracy.

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## 16.2 POWER AND AUTHORITY

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Let us now examine the key concepts of power and authority, both, in the general sociological sense as well as in the specific Weberian context.

### 16.2.0 Power

In ordinary usage, the term 'power' means strength or the capacity to control. Sociologists describe it as the ability of an individual or group to fulfil its desires and implement its decisions and ideas. It involves the ability to influence and/ or control the behaviour of others even against their will.

For Max Weber, power is an aspect of social relationships. It refers to the possibility of imposing one's will upon the behaviour of another person. Power is present in social interaction and creates situations of inequality since the one who has power imposes it on others. The impact of power varies from situation to situation. On the one hand, it depends on the capacity of the powerful individual to exercise power. On the other hand it depends upon the extent to which it is opposed or resisted by the others. Weber says that power can be exercised in all walks of life.

It is not restricted to a battlefield or to politics. It is to be observed in the market place, on a lecture platform, at a social gathering, in sports, scientific discussions and even through charity. For example, giving alms or '*daan*' to a beggar is a subtle way of exercising your superior economic power. You can bring a smile of joy to the beggar's face or a feeling of despair by giving or refusing alms.

What are the sources of power? Weber discusses two contrasting sources of power. These are as follows

- a) Power which is derived from a constellation of interests that develop in a formally free market. For example, a group of producers of sugar controls supply of their production in the market to maximise their profit.
- b) An established system of authority that allocates the right to command and the duty to obey. For example, in the army, a *jawan* is obliged to obey the command of his officer. The officer derives his power through an established system of authority.

As you have seen in the last point, any discussion of power leads us to think about its legitimacy. It is legitimacy, which according to Weber constitutes the core point of authority. Let us now examine the concept of authority.



### 16.2.1 Authority

The German word “Herrschaft”, used by Weber, has been variously translated. Some sociologists term it as ‘authority’, others as ‘domination’ or ‘command’. Herrschaft is a situation in which a ‘Herr’ or master dominates or commands others. Raymond Aron (1967: 187) defines Herrschaft as the master’s ability to obtain the obedience of those who theoretically owe it to him. In this unit, Weber’s concept of Herrschaft will denote the term “authority”.

A question may be raised, namely, what is the difference between power and authority? Power, as you have seen, refers to the ability or capacity to control another. Authority refers to legitimised power. It means that the master has the right to command and can expect to be obeyed.

Let us now see the elements that constitute authority.

### 16.2.3 Elements of Authority

For a system of authority to exist the following elements must be present.

- i) An individual ruler/master or a group of rulers/masters.
- ii) An individual/group that is ruled.
- iii) The will of the ruler to influence the conduct of the ruled which may be expressed through commands.
- iv) Evidence of the influence of the rulers in terms of compliance or obedience shown by the ruled.
- v) Direct or indirect evidence which shows that the ruled have internalised and accepted the fact that the ruler’s commands must be obeyed.

We see that authority implies a reciprocal relationship between the rulers and the ruled. The rulers believe that they have the legitimate right to exercise their authority. On the other hand, the ruled accept this power and comply with it, reinforcing its legitimacy.

It is time to complete Activity 1 and Check Your Progress 1.

**Activity 1**  
 Give example of at least five authority from your daily life. What are the elements involved in them? Prepare a note of one page on them. Exchange your note, if possible, with the co-learners at your Study Centre.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) In one line define the concept of power.  
 .....
- ii) Describe, in about three lines, two important sources of power.  
 .....  
 .....

iii) Point out, in three lines three important elements of authority.

.....  
.....  
.....

Let us now examine the types of authority identified by Weber. Before we do so, it is very important to study his typology of social action. The types of authority Weber discusses are, as you will soon see, closely linked with the types of social action.

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## 16.3 TYPES OF SOCIAL ACTION AND TYPES OF AUTHORITY

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In sub-section 14.4.1(iii) of unit 14 we discussed the Weberian concept of social action. Max Weber describes sociology as a comprehensive science of social action (Aron, 1967: 187). He presents a typology of social action, which we will now briefly discuss.

### 16.3.0 Types of Social Action

Weber identifies four distinct types of social action. They are

i) **Zweckrational action or rational action in relation to a goal**

An example of this is an engineer constructing a bridge, who uses certain materials in a certain manner to achieve goal. This activity is directed towards obtaining that goal, namely, completing the construction.

ii) **Wertrational action, or rational action in relation to a value**

Here, one may give the example of a soldier laying down his life for the country. His action is not directed towards attaining specific material goal like wealth. It is for the sake of certain values like honour and patriotism.

iii) **Affective action**

This kind of action results from the emotional state of mind of the actor. If some one is teasing a girl in a bus, she may get so irritated that she may slap the offending person. She has been provoked so much that she has reacted violently.

iv) **Traditional action**

This is an action, which is guided by customs and longstanding beliefs, which become second nature or habit. In traditional Indian society, doing '*pranam*' or '*namaskar*' to elders is almost second nature needing no prompting.

One may find that the above typology of social action is reflected in Weber's classification of types of authority. We will discuss this in the following sub-section (16.3.2).

### 16.3.1 Types of Authority

As you have already read in sub-section 16.2.1, authority implies legitimacy. According to Weber, there are three systems of legitimation, each with its corresponding norms, which justify the power to command. It is these systems of legitimation which are designated as the following types of authority.

- (i) Traditional authority
- (ii) Charismatic authority
- (iii) Rational-legal authority



**Fig. 16.1 Types of Authority**

Let us describe each of these types in some detail.

#### 16.3.1.0 Traditional Authority

This system of legitimation flows from traditional action. In other words, it is based on customary law and the sanctity of ancient traditions. It is based on the belief that a certain authority is to be respected because it has existed since time immemorial.

In traditional authority, rulers enjoy personal authority by virtue of their inherited status. Their commands are in accordance with customs and they also possess the right to extract compliance from the ruled. Often, they abuse their power. The persons who obey them are 'subjects' in the fullest sense of the term. They obey their master out of personal loyalty or a pious regard for his time-honoured status. Let us take an example from our own society. You are familiar with the caste system in India. Why did the 'lower' castes bear the atrocities inflicted by the 'upper' castes for centuries? One way of explaining this is because the authority of the 'upper' castes had the backing of tradition and antiquity. The 'lower' castes some say had become socialised into accepting their oppression. Thus, we can see that traditional authority is based on the belief in the sacred quality of

long-standing traditions. This gives legitimacy to those who exercise authority.

Traditional authority does not function through written rules or laws. It is transmitted by inheritance down the generations. Traditional authority is carried out with the help of relatives and personal favourites.

In modern times, the incidence of traditional authority has declined. Monarchy, the classic example of traditional authority still exists, but in a highly diluted form. The Queen of England is a traditional figure of authority but as you may be aware, she does not actually exercise her authority. The laws of the land are enacted in her name, but their content is decided by the legislators, the representatives of the people. The queen has a parliament, which governs the kingdom, but she does not appoint ministers. She is a nominal head of state.

Briefly, traditional authority derives its legitimacy from longstanding traditions, which enable some to command and compel others to obey. It is hereditary authority and does not require written rules. The 'masters' exercise their authority with the help of loyal relatives and friends. Weber considers this kind of authority as irrational. It is therefore rarely found in modern developed societies.

### 16.3.1.1 Charismatic Authority

Charisma means an extraordinary quality possessed by some individuals (see Box 16.1). This gives such people unique powers to capture the fancy and devotion of ordinary people. Charismatic authority is based on extraordinary devotion to an individual and to the way of life preached by this person. The legitimacy of such authority rests upon the belief in the supernatural or magical powers of the person. The charismatic leader 'proves' his/her power through miracles, military and other victories or the dramatic prosperity of the disciples. As long as charismatic leaders continue to 'prove' their miraculous powers in the eyes of their disciples, their authority stays intact. You may have realised that the type of social action that charismatic authority is related to is affective action. The disciples are in a highly charged emotional state as a result of the teachings and appeal of the charismatic leaders. They worship their hero.

#### Box 16.1

##### Charisma

Dictionary meaning of the term charisma is a divinely inspired gift. It is gift of divine grace. This term is used by Weber to denote "a kind of power over others which is also perceived as authority by those subject to it. the holder of charisma may be a human being, in which case his authority might be interpreted in terms of myth of the divine mission, insight or moral attributes" (see Scruton 1982: 58).

Charismatic authority is not dependent on customary beliefs or written rules. It is purely the result of the special qualities of the leader who governs or rules in his personal capacity. Charismatic authority is not organised; therefore there is no paid staff or administrative set-up. The leader and his

assistants do not have a regular occupation and often reject their family responsibilities. These characteristics sometimes make charismatic leaders revolutionaries, as they have rejected all the conventional social obligations and norms.

Based, as it is, on the personal qualities of an individual, the problem of succession arises with the death or disappearance of the leader. The person who succeeds the leader may not have charismatic powers. In order to transmit the original message of the leader, some sort of organisation develops. The original charisma gets transformed either into traditional authority or rational-legal authority. Weber calls this **routinisation** of charisma.

If the charismatic figure is succeeded by a son/daughter or some close relative, traditional authority results. If, on the other hand, charismatic qualities are identified and written down, then it changes into rational legal authority, where anyone acquiring these qualities can become a leader. Charismatic authority can thus be described as unstable and temporary. We can find examples of charismatic leaders throughout history. Saints, prophets and some political leaders are examples of such authority. Kabir, Nanak, Jesus, Mohammed, Lenin and Mahatma Gandhi, to name a few were charismatic leaders. They were revered by people for their personal qualities and the message they preached, not because they represented traditional or rational-legal authority. Let us now describe the third type of authority identified by Max Weber.

### Box 16.2

#### Routinisation

Weber used routinisation to mean the “transformation of charismatic leadership into institutionalised leadership where one office takes the place of a personality as the focus of authority” (Scruton 1982: 415).

### Check Your Progress 2

i) Tick mark the correct answer.

Which one of the following is not a type of authority according to Weber?

- a) Traditional authority
- b) Rational-legal authority
- c) Charismatic authority
- d) Personal authority

ii) Tick mark the correct answer.

When the original charisma of a leader gets transformed into traditional or rational-legal authority, what does Weber call it?

- a) Routinisation of one’s power to capture devotion of ordinary people

- b) Routinisation of legitimacy
  - c) Routinisation of one's ability to lead
  - d) Routinisation of one's capacity to control the behaviour of other's against their will
- iii) Tick mark the correct answer.

Traditional authority derive legitimacy from

- a) Law of the land
- b) Long standing customary law
- c) Outstanding performance of the leader
- d) All of the above.

### **16.3.1.2 Rational-legal Authority**

The term refers to a system of authority, which are both, rational and legal. It is vested in a regular administrative staff who operate in accordance with certain written rules and laws. Those who exercise authority are appointed to do so on the basis of their achieved qualifications, which are prescribed and codified. Those in authority consider it a profession and are paid a salary. Thus, it is a rational system.

It is legal because it is in accordance with the laws of the land which people recognise and feel obliged to obey. The people acknowledge and respect the legality of both, the ordinance and rules as well as the positions or titles of those who implement the rules.

Rational-legal authority is a typical feature of modern society. It is the reflection of the process of rationalisation. Remember that Weber considers rationalisation as the key feature of western civilisation. It is, according to Weber, a specific product of human thought and deliberation. By now you have clearly grasped the connection between rational-legal authority and rational action for obtaining goals.

Let us look at examples of rational-legal authority. We obey the tax collector because we believe in the legality of the ordinances he enforces. We also believe that he has the legal right to send us taxation notices. We stop our vehicles when the traffic policeman orders us to do so because we respect the authority vested in him by the law. Modern societies are governed not by individuals, but by laws and ordinances. We obey the policeman because of his position and his uniform which represents the law, not because he is Mr. 'X' or Mr. 'Y'. Rational-legal authority exists not just in the political and administrative spheres, but also in economic organisations like banks and industries as well as in religious and cultural organisations.

### **16.3.2 Lack of Conformity between Typologies**

From the above discussion on the types of social action and types of authority one may find that traditional authority corresponds to traditional action, rational-legal authority corresponds to rational action in relation to goal and charismatic authority corresponds to affective action or emotional



action. However one easily finds that Weber distinguishes four types of social action and only three types of authority. The lack of conformity between the typology of social action and the typology of authority is a subject for open discussion.

In order that you might clearly grasp the manner in which rational-legal authority functions it is necessary to examine the institution of 'bureaucracy'. Bureaucracy is the medium through which rational-legal authority is carried out and it is the subject matter of the next section (16.4). Before going to the next section, complete Activity 2.

### Activity 2

Give an example of rational-legal or a traditional authority from your own society with special reference to the basis of legitimacy of that authority. Prepare note of one page. Exchange your note, if possible, with the notes of your co-learners at your Study Centre.

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## 16.4 BUREAUCRACY

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Bureaucracy, as just mentioned, is the machinery, which implements rational-legal authority. Max Weber studied bureaucracy in detail and constructed an ideal type which contained the most prominent characteristics of bureaucracy. Let us examine this ideal type which reveals to us the major features of bureaucracy.

### 16.4.0 Major Features of Bureaucracy

- i) In order that the bureaucracy may function adequately, it relies on the following rules and regulations.
  - a) The activities which comprise bureaucracy are distributed among the officials in the form of official duties.
  - b) There is a stable or regular system by which officials are vested with authority. This authority is strictly delimited by the laws of the land.
  - c) There are strict and methodical procedures which ensure that officials perform their duties adequately.

The above mentioned three characteristics constitute 'bureaucratic authority', which is to be found in developed and modern societies.

- ii) The second feature of bureaucracy is that there is a hierarchy of officials in authority. By this we mean that there is a firmly built structure of subordination and superordination. Lower officials are supervised by higher ones and are answerable to them. The advantage of this system is that governed people can express their dissatisfaction with lower officials by appealing to the higher ones. For instance, if you are dissatisfied with the behaviour or performance of a clerk or a section officer in an office, you can appeal to the higher official to seek redress.

- iii) The management of the bureaucratic office is carried out through written documents or files. They are preserved and properly kept by clerks who are specially appointed for this purpose.
- iv) The work in the bureaucratic office is highly specialised and staff is trained accordingly.
- v) A fully developed bureaucratic office demands the full working capacity of the staff. In such a case, officials may be compelled to work over-time.

Having looked the main features of a bureaucratic set-up, let us now learn something about the officials that you have found repeatedly mentioned above.

### **16.4.1 Characteristics of Officials in Bureaucracy**

Weber mentions the following characteristics of officials in a bureaucratic set-up

- i) Office-work is a ‘vocation’ for officials.
- ii) They are specially trained for their jobs.
- iii) Their qualifications determine their position or rank in the office.
- iv) They are expected to do their work honestly.

Their official positions also have a bearing on their personal lives. Let us see how.

- i) Bureaucratic officials enjoy a high status in society.
- ii) Often, their jobs carry transfer liabilities. By this we mean that they may be transferred from one place or department to another leading to some instability in their professional and personal lives.
- iii) Officials receive salaries not in accordance with productivity but status. The higher their rank, the higher their salaries. They also receive benefits like pension, provident fund, medical and other facilities. Their jobs are considered very secure.
- iv) Officials enjoy good career prospects. They can move from the lower rungs of the bureaucratic ladder to higher ones if they work in a disciplined manner.

It is time to complete Check Your Progress 3.

#### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Bureaucracy is an example of
  - a) traditional authority.
  - b) rational-legal authority.
  - c) charismatic authority.
  - d) none of the above .

ii) Mention in three lines important features of bureaucratic authority.

.....  
 .....  
 .....

iii) Mention in four lines important characteristics of the officials of bureaucracy.

.....  
 .....  
 .....  
 .....

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## 16.5 LET US SUM UP

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This unit began with a discussion of the Weberian concepts of ‘power’ and ‘authority’. It then went on to discuss the types of social action identified by Max Weber, followed by the types of authority described by him. Next you studied traditional, charismatic and rational-legal authority in some detail. Finally, the unit focused upon bureaucracy as the instrument through which rational-legal authority operates. Not only did the unit outline the features of a bureaucratic office but also the officials or staff that constitute it.

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## 16.6 KEYWORDS

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<b>Power</b>	One’s capacity to impose his or her will on others
<b>Authority</b>	When power is legitimised it becomes authority
<b>Ideal type</b>	A methodological tool developed by Weber through which the most commonly found features of a phenomenon are abstracted. Ideal type is an analytical construct with which the social scientist compares existing reality.
<b>Routinisation</b>	A process of transformation of the charismatic authority either into traditional or rational legal authority
<b>Money-economy</b>	Any economic transaction made in terms of money

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## 16.7 FURTHER READING

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Bendix, Reinhard, 1960. *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait*. Heinman: London

Freund, Julien 1968. *The Sociology of Max Weber*. Random House: New York

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## 16.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Power is one's capacity to impose his or her will on others.
- ii) Power can be derived from a constellation of interests that develop in a formally free market situation. Power can again be derived from an established system of authority that allocates the right to command and duty to obey.
- iii)
  - a) Presence of individual ruler/master or a group of rulers/masters
  - b) Presence of an individual/group that is ruled
  - c) Evidence of influence of the rulers in terms of compliance and obedience shown by the ruled

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) d)
- ii) a)
- iii) b)

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) b)
- ii) Important features of bureaucratic authority are
  - a) it operates on the principle of jurisdictional area which relies on certain administrative regulations.
  - b) there is a stable regular system by which officials are vested with authority.
  - c) there are strict and methodical procedures which ensure that officials perform their duties adequately.
- iii) Important characteristics of the officials of bureaucracy are that
  - a) office work is a vocation for the official
  - b) officials are especially trained for their job
  - c) their qualifications determine their position or rank in the office, and
  - d) they are expected to do work honestly.

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## UNIT 17 RATIONALITY

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### Structure

- 17.0 Objectives
- 17.1 Introduction
- 17.2 The Meaning of Rationality and Rationalisation
- 17.3 Weber's Treatment of the concept of Rationality
  - 17.3.0 Protestantism
  - 17.3.1 Capitalism
  - 17.3.2 Bureaucracy
  - 17.3.3 Types of Rationality: 'Zweckrationalitat' and 'Wertrationalitat'
- 17.4 Rationality in Sociological Investigation: Value-free Sociology
- 17.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 17.6 Keywords
- 17.7 Further Reading
- 17.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 17.0 OBJECTIVES

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This unit deals with rationality, a recurrent concept in Weber's work. After reading this unit you should be able to:

- explain the meanings of the terms rationality and rationalisation
- examine Weber's work on rationality with reference to Protestantism, capitalism and bureaucracy
- discuss Weber's views on rationality in sociological investigation and value-free sociology.

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### 17.1 INTRODUCTION

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The previous units of this Block have made you familiar with some of the important sociological contributions of Max Weber, namely, ideal types the relation between religious ethics and economic behaviour as well as his understanding of power and **authority**. It is now time for us to handle the central theme in his work, namely, the idea of rationality and the process of rationalisation. As this is a concept that touches almost all of Weber's work, you might find parts of this unit repetitive. However, it is a good opportunity for you to revise some concepts learnt earlier as well as study them from the point of view of rationality.

This unit has been divided into three sections. In the first section, you will get a brief description of the meanings of the terms 'rationality' and 'rationalisation'. The second section will highlight how Weber used the

concept of rationality in his work. The issues taken up will be Protestantism, capitalism, bureaucracy and types of rationality. The third and final section will focus on Weber's application of rationality in sociological investigation with special reference to his plea for a **value**-free sociology.

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## 17.2 THE MEANING OF RATIONALITY AND RATIONALISATION

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Rationality refers to those ideas and behaviours which are logically coherent and consistent and amenable to empirical knowledge. Rationalisation refers to the process whereby rationality is applied to various aspects and activities of life. The conviction that rationality is the distinctive characteristic of human beings has made it a central theme in Western philosophy for over two hundred years (Mitchel 1968:142).

According to Weber, the contemporary world is characterised by rationality. Max Weber believed that the key to understand modern society is to be found in its rational features and rationalising forces. For him, the modern Western world is characterised by rationality. As a result of this, human activity is marked by methodical calculation. Quantification, predictability and regularity become important. Individuals rely more on logic, **reason** and calculation than on supernatural beliefs. To Weber rationalisation means that "principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious power existed" (Weber 1946: 139, Cf. Hearn 1985: 76). Let us take an example. If a farmer wants to reap a good harvest, he can spend time, energy and money on conducting *poojas* and prayers. On the other hand, he can utilise the same effort and expense in digging irrigation canals or a tube-well so that his crops may thrive. In the first case, he is dependent on "mysterious incalculable forces"; in the second case he is using rational calculation.

To Weber rationalisation is the product of scientific specialisation and technological differentiation of western culture. He describes rationalisation as striving for perfection, as an ingenious refinement of the conduct of life and the attainment of mastery over the external world (see Freund 1972: 18). Demystification of beliefs and secularisation of thought are important facets of rationalisation which assist in attaining mastery over the world. Rationalisation also involves formalisation of laws and organisations.

As has been mentioned earlier, rationality is a recurrent concept in Weber's work and rationalization is a recurrent theme in the sense of making more rational. His own attempt is to render a rational account of society. Rationality and rationalisation occur several times and in several senses. It could indeed even be argued that the whole body of Weber's work is an exploration of the rationality of social forms and the logic of their changes.

Weber views rationality as a process of rationalisation of social system. This takes place through the emergence of rational organisation and institutions in human society. He also finds the reflection of the process of



rationalisation in human values, beliefs, thoughts and actions. Here he locates the emergence of elements of rationality in social sciences as well.

The rationalisation characteristic of modern societies is manifested in terms of the 'Zweckrational' actions, i.e. actions in relation to goals. Hence the sphere of rationalisation is extended to economic, political, religious organisations etc. Weber makes extensive use of the concept of rationality in his study of social actions, organisations and processes. He also uses it as a mode of scientific investigation. Thus, rationality appears in Weber's work in two broadly distinct, but inter-related ways. Let us see what these are in the next section (17.3).

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Fill in the blanks with suitable words
  - a) To Weber, rationalisation is the product of scientific ..... and ..... differentiation.
  - b) Rationalisation implies mastery over .....
- ii) State whether the following are True (T) or False (F)
  - a) Rationality means greater reliance on spirits and magic True/False
  - b) Human values and beliefs can never be rationalised. True/False
  - c) Rationalisation can extend to all aspects of society. True/False

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## 17.3 WEBER'S TREATMENT OF THE CONCEPT OF RATIONALITY

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Weber treated or handled rationality in his work in the following two major ways.

### i) Society as a Rationalisation Process

The first meaning is related to the study of society as a process of rationalisation. That is, an older, less rational form changes into a newer more rational form. This is what he calls rationalisation, i.e. the way in which reason becomes effective in history, the actual historical process.

Weber sees the development of history, and particularly recent history, i.e. the 'modern', as one of increasing rationality and rationalisation. Protestantism, capitalism and bureaucracy are successive forms of this process of rationalisation. They gain their meaningfulness as part of a historical development, i.e. the way in which a later development is more rational than a former.

### ii) Rationality as a Methodological Tool

The second way of seeing rationality is as a methodological principle, a strategy of inquiry, a method of investigation. It is Weber's aim to

lay bare the logic of various social forms and processes even when they appear at first glance to be irrational, non-rational or anti-rational. In this sense rationality is a mode of inquiry that seek to discover the reason of a social form or development.

In the following sub-sections, let us examine society as a process of rationalisation. Let us consider the rational features of Protestantism, capitalism, bureaucracy and historical social processes.



Figure 17.1 Society and rationality

### 17.3.0 Protestantism

Weber's study of the *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* is usually regarded as one of his most important contributions. In this work, Weber argues for the impact of ideas, particularly religious ideas on creating and transforming of material reality, society and its forms. Thus, Weber sees the primacy of capital and 'capitalism' in the social organisation of the contemporary age, as the most significant way to grasp the society in which we live. For Weber, capitalism is the outcome of the appearance and development of a particular form of religious consciousness the Protestant ethic.

The Protestant ethic, particularly the Calvinist ethic, is a rationalisation of traditional Christian doctrine, which reconciled otherworldly aspirations with the pursuit of this-worldly material gain. Drawing attention to the precise ways in which the pursuit of personal religious salvation are made to coincide with the achievement of material prosperity and power, Weber argued that it was this 'heroic' rationalisation that gave birth to capitalism. The most important rationalisation is the development of a 'this-worldly' asceticism foregoing of consumption of 'the pleasures of the flesh', in favour of saving and accumulation. Through it the believer assures himself of being included amongst those born to be saved, in a religious sense. Weber argued that the rationalism embedded in the Protestant ethic helped to further develop the material condition of modern capitalism (see Hearn 1985: 76).

### 17.3.1 Capitalism

Max Weber identifies some important conditions for the development of rational capitalism in modern society. These are: Private ownership of all physical means of production, freedom of the market, mechanisation, written law and administration, **free labour** and commercialisation of economic life. Weber claims that though these conditions had been developing in various parts of the world, they first appeared in modern rational capitalism where the religious ethic of Protestantism prevailed. To him Protestantism was instrumental in weakening traditional opposition to the development of material bases of rational capitalism (see Hearn 1985: 77).

Weber is far more impressed with the rationality of capitalist society and the systematic rationality of its social forms and processes. The modes of social organisation and association, and the very mentality of the people reflect rationality. Weber devotes a great deal of space and time to the consideration of the various ways in which capitalist society is not only more rational than the society or societies which preceded it, but actually introduces and establishes reason itself as a desirable process and principle of organisation. His major work, *'Economy and Society'*, explores the ways in which capitalist society is compatible with clear principles of reason and rational organisation. It goes on to examine how an ongoing process of rationalisation and further rationalisation is part of the logic of the growth of capitalism.

### 17.3.2 Bureaucracy

According to Weber modern bureaucracy is social manifestation of formal rationality. Formal rationality implies the importance of rules and procedures rather than beliefs and sentiments. Bureaucracy's development is based on the separation of the rulers from the ruled, people from the position, and sentiments and beliefs from procedures and regulations. Thus there are several senses in which Weber sees bureaucracy as a form of rationalisation. Among them those that need to be enumerated here are: (i) the systematisation of purposes and procedures (ii) rights and obligations based on established and clearly-defined norms for the purpose of efficiency, and (iii) most importantly, the rationalisation of the procedures of recruitment, promotion and retirement of bureaucrats through which their lives gain security and manageability.

To Weber, bureaucracy is a structure of rational domination. As you already know, bureaucracy is a typical expression of rational-legal authority. Hence, power is legitimate only when its exercise is consistent with the formal, impersonal rules and regulations, which define the organisation. Again a bureaucratic organisation helps promote rational action of its members (see Hearn 1985: 79).

Weber sees the development of bureaucracy as part and parcel of the logic of the development of capitalism, because it is so rational and rationally oriented. Weber also highlights an important paradox or contradiction. The growth of the bureaucratic mentality stifles creativity and daring, the very things that made capitalism possible.

It is time now to complete Check Your Progress 2.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Explain how rationality is projected in Max Weber’s work. Answer in about six lines.

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- ii) Explain a process in which the Protestant ethic brought about rationalisation of Christian belief which was favourable for the emergence of capitalism in Europe Answer in about five lines.

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.....

<p><b>Activity 1</b></p> <p>Is there a word for rationality in your mother-tongue? If yes, provide the term and give its definition.</p>
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**17.3.3 Types of Rationality: ‘Zweckrationalitat’ and ‘Wertrationalitat’**

After reading the above sub-sections you may have concluded that rationality is a characteristic of modern, capitalist society alone. Does this mean that non-capitalist forms of social organisation are irrational? Well, as students of sociology you know that society has a special meaning and coherence for its members. Each society has its own logic of development, its own mode of order and social relationship. In this sense, all societies, capitalist or non-capitalist have a rationality of their own. Exploring a large variety of social forms and norms, Weber identifies two distinct types of rationality. These are: i) ‘Zweckrationalitat’ or goal oriented/ ends based rationality and ii) ‘Wertrationalitat’ or value-based rationality.

The former is characteristic of modern, capitalist society and flows from goal-oriented social action. Zweckrationalitat refers to rationalisation of means and goals/ ends. Reason and logical thinking are recommended in order to obtain one’s desires.

Wertrationalität, on the contrary, is characteristic of traditional social formations. It is involved with morality and touches upon emotions, sentiments and beliefs. Societal approval of individual action is considered important. Weber believes that traditional societies did have rational elements in their social organisation, but these were defined in terms of values or moral norms.

To give you an illustration, take agriculture in traditional (pre-capitalist) society. When to plough, when to sow or when to harvest the crop was determined by rational requirements of season, temperature or moisture in the soil. But at the same time these occasions were also sanctioned as morally desirable events. Festivities and rituals were prescribed for each of these events. In contrast, in a modern factory (capitalist organisation) all activities are governed mechanically by standards of maximising productivity in terms of means and ends.

### Activity 2

See a film or read a short story. Identify five social actions in the film or story. State their types in terms of goal-oriented rationality and value oriented rationality.

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## 17.4 RATIONALITY IN SOCIOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION: VALUE-FREE SOCIOLOGY

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It has been mentioned earlier that the concept of rationality permeates Weber's work from two distinct but inter-related directions, firstly the actual march of rationalisation as part of the historical process, and secondly as a principle of method, a mode of investigating society. Weber is part of the mainstream of the development of sociology, to which he is amongst the most eminent contributors. He devotes, as other classical sociologists, time to the consideration and elaboration of methods, to the actual utilisation of these methods, and is involved in the important historical ventures of his times.

One of the basic concerns of Max Weber is the relation between science and human action. Here he conceives sociology as a comprehensive science of social action. To Weber, the prime characteristics of the world we live in are rationalisation. The rationalisation characteristic of modern societies is expressed in terms of Zweckrational actions, actions in relation to goals. He also viewed science as an important aspect of the process of rationalisation which is the characteristic of the modern European societies (Aron 1967: 189). As a part of rationalisation, Weber argued, for a 'value-free' social science, a debate that continues even in our own times though in different terms, Weber was a firm advocate of separating the rationality of social inquiry from the attempt to make the world more rational. The personal evaluations of the sociologist he said, must be separate from the analysis of society that he/she conducted. The main points of Weber's value-free sociology can be briefly stated as

- i) Sociologists in their study of society are principally concerned with the analysis and understanding of values, as these are the crucial elements of any society. However, they must not let their own values come in the way of a clear understanding of the subject matter. This is the basic foundation of a value-free sociology.
- ii) Sociologists, as human beings are fundamentally involved in evaluating, or passing certain value-judgements. In so far as they are personally involved, can hardly avoid having or living by values. The values, by which sociology develops, however, are the values by which knowledge and science develop as the commitment to dispassionate inquiry. In this inquiry, the sociologists own experiences of valuing or devaluing are themselves data, giving insight into the meaning and relevance of that which they explore.
- iii) The development of a value-free social science in this sense is necessary for creating a body of reliable and assured knowledge. As to whether such knowledge becomes subsequently cause for action is not within the domain of merely sociology as a discipline. Knowledge can guide action only when the discipline itself becomes reliable.

It bears mentioning, in this context that Weber in addition to being an eminent sociologist was also a politician in the troubled Germany between the two World Wars. He is remembered, both for his sociological studies and political activity as having firmly championed the cause of reason, at a time when it was beset with challenges on all sides. This is a fact we must keep in mind when we consider his plea for a value-free sociology.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Describe Zweckrational society in about three lines.  
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- ii) Describe Wertrational society in three lines.  
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- iii) Describe the basic idea of a value-free sociology, in about three lines.  
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**17.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit you have read about the idea of rationality and its accompanying process, rationalisation, the two key themes in the work of Max Weber.



After learning what these terms mean, you have seen how they were studied by Weber in his analysis of Protestantism, capitalism and bureaucracy. You have also seen how Weber classified rationality into two types namely, 'Zweckrationalitat' and 'Wertrationalitat'. Finally, you have learnt how Weber used rationality in sociological investigation and argued for a value-free sociology.

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## 17.6 KEYWORDS

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<b>Authority</b>	Legitimate power that is institutionalised.
<b>Free labour</b>	Free labour is the labour of the contractual labourers who are free to choose their employment, employer and the terms and conditions of employment.
<b>Hypothesis</b>	A statement of inter-related concepts, which may be tested for its validity.
<b>Reason</b>	An explanation or justification of an act, idea etc.
<b>Value</b>	An idea about what is good, right, wise or beneficial.

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## 17.7 FURTHER READING

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Thompson, K. and J. Tunstall (eds). 1971. *Sociological Perspectives*. Penguin Books: Middlesex

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## 17.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) a) specialisation, technological
- ii) b) the external world
- iii) a) F (b) F (c) T

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Rationality appears in two distinct ways in Max Weber's work. First, he studied society as a process of rationalisation: that is the logic of change in society itself from less rational form to or more rational form. Secondly he used rationality as a methodological tool, i.e. a methodological principle, a strategy of inquiry. In this sense rationality is a mode of inquiry that seeks to discover the reason of a social form or development.
- ii) Weber argued that rationalisation of traditional Protestant ethic gave birth to capitalism. The most important rationalisation is the

development of an inner worldly asceticism, a foregoing of consumption in favour of saving and a accumulation among the Protestant believers. Hence believers assume themselves of being included amongst those born to be saved in a religious sense.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Zweckrational society is a capitalist society. This society represents the rationalisation of the means and ends and resorts to reason as an effective instrument to affect one's desires.
- ii) Wertrational society is a traditional society. This society has more to do with morality that touches upon value judgments, emotions, and stresses social approval of individual activity.
- iii) Sociologists in their study of society are primarily concerned with the analysis and understanding of values, as these are crucial elements of any society. However, they must not let his own values come in the way of a clear understanding of that which they undertakes to study.

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# UNIT 18 METHODOLOGY: MARX, DURKHEIM AND WEBER

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Methodology: Marx,  
Durkheim and Weber

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## 18.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you should be able to understand and compare the methodological perspectives of

- Karl Marx
- Emile Durkheim and
- Max Weber.

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## 18.1 INTRODUCTION

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In Blocks 2, 3 and 4 of this course, you have studied in detail some of the enduring sociological contributions of the 'founding fathers' of sociology.

In this Block, we are going to compare the views of Marx, Durkheim and Weber on certain issues. Before we do so, it is important to understand their distinctive methodologies, and this is exactly what we will do in this unit. For this purpose, we have divided the unit into four sections. In the first section (18.2), we will try and understand the meaning of the term ‘methodology’ and the reasons for studying it. The second section (18.3) will take up the methodological perspective of Karl Marx. The third and fourth sections (18.4 and 18.5) will be devoted to an understanding of the methodologies of Emile Durkheim and Max Weber, respectively.

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## **18.2 MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF METHODOLOGY**

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In Blocks 2, 3 and 4 you have studied many things. You are now familiar with Karl Marx’s theory of historical materialism, his understanding of class conflict, dialectics and so on. You also have an understanding of the contributions of Durkheim and Weber.

Yet, no separate unit has been devoted to the study of their methodologies in detail. The reason behind this is that, we hope that your study of the substantive or concrete elements of their work will help you to gain a better appreciation of their frameworks of enquiry, which is what is attempted in this unit. We have used the term ‘methodology’ a number of times so far without really clarifying its meaning. Let us do so now.

### **18.2.0 What do we mean by ‘Methodology’?**

By the term ‘methodology’, we refer to a system of method or procedures with which the study of a problem is approached.

### **18.2.1 Difference between Methodology and Method**

There is an important point to be noted here; ‘methods’ and ‘methodology’ are not one and the same thing. Whilst methods are a part of methodology, methodology is a system which combines or integrates certain methods. Methods are the tools or techniques, which help to implement a methodological approach or perspective.

Let us take an example. In Block 3, you studied how Emile Durkheim understood the problem of suicide. His methodological perspective was the study of social phenomena as social facts and his methods included those of concomitant variations.

Having understood the difference between methodology and method, let us now see why we should study methodology. You might point out that having understood the substantive contributions of the founding fathers, a study of their methodology is not really necessary. This is not the case.

### **18.2.2 Why Study Methodology?**

A study of methodology does more than merely list methods. It gives us an understanding of the overall approach of thinkers to the problems under study. In sociology, the subject matter or problems under study are human beings and human society. Sociologists are not observing atoms or

molecules under a microscope. They are studying human life, human behaviour, human problems. Sociological methodology includes a conception about social reality. It reflects the manner in which thinkers conceptualise the relationship between individuals and society. It gives us an insight into the aims and objectives with which thinkers study society. Since the subject matter under study is so closely and intimately connected to the sociologist, methodology sharply reflects the sociologist's overall concerns and orientations regarding human beings and society. Hence, studying methodology is not only very important but also very interesting.

Let us now go on to examine the methodology of Karl Marx. You have seen in Block 2 that Marx was not a 'sociologist' in the sense that he called his work specifically 'sociological'. He was also an economist, a philosopher and a political activist. Thus, he did not specifically set out to define special methodological rules for sociology as Durkheim and Weber did later. Yet, the mode of enquiry that he introduced has had a profound impact on sociology, both methodologically and substantively.

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## **18.3 THE METHODOLOGY FOR KARL MARX**

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Karl Marx introduced into the social sciences of his time a new methodology, new concepts and a number of bold new hypotheses.

All of these came to exercise a deep influence on the writing of history, political science and sociology.

Marx elaborated his conception of the nature of society and the means to study it in a more precise and empirical manner than the social theorists before him did. We will examine, firstly, Marx's materialistic conception of history. You have read about this in Block 2 of this course. Here we will briefly review it in the light of his methodology.

### **18.3.0 Marx's Materialistic Conception of History**

The motivating force in history, according to Marx, is the manner in which human beings act upon nature in order to obtain their basic survival needs. The production of material life is the first historical act, in Marx's view. Even after meeting survival or primary needs, human beings remain dissatisfied. This is because new or secondary needs arise as soon as primary ones are fulfilled.

In the effort to satisfy primary and secondary needs, human beings enter into social relationships with each other. As material life becomes more complex, social relationship too undergo a change. Division of labour emerges in society and class formation begins. The existence of classes implies that distinct divisions of human beings have emerged, in other words, society is divided into the "haves" and the "have-nots".

You have studied that Marx places particular stress on the material or economic basis of society. It is the economic "infrastructure" that shapes or moulds/the rest of society. It is the particular mode of production from which emanate the relations of production on which the whole cultural superstructure rests. Law, polity, cultural formations and so on cannot be



separated from the economic basis in which they are embedded. We can thus say that Marx's approach to society is holistic. This is a very important methodological contribution. Marx stresses on the study of human societies as wholes or systems in which social groups, institutions, beliefs and doctrines are interrelated. They cannot be studied in isolation, rather they should be studied in their interrelations.

However, in the ultimate analysis, it is the economic system, which proves decisive in shaping the specific features of the superstructure of society. Marx applies his materialistic conception of history by studying the history of human society in terms of distinct stages, each marked by a distinct mode of production. From the mode of production flow the specific kinds of relationships and class antagonisms distinct in every phase of history.

In Block 2 of this course you have studied in detail Marx's theory of "historical materialism" and the stages of history identified by him. Marx can be described as a relativising historicist. By this we mean that he roots all systems of social relationships and all systems of ideas within a specific historical context. He holds that each stage of history is marked by class struggles, but the nature of the struggle and the participants in the struggle are qualitatively different in every epoch. The slaves in the ancient stage are very different from the feudal serfs or the capitalist industrial workers.

Briefly, Marx assigns to the economic realm the crucial role of shaping the nature of other sub-systems in society. He studies society in a holistic fashion, stressing on the inter-relatedness of its components. He also takes note of the specificities of the various stages of history. Although Marx insists that the history of human society is the history of class struggle, he accounts for the distinctive features of the classes down the ages.

Let us now move on to another significant methodological contribution of Marx, namely, his conception of social conflict and social change.

### **18.3.1 Social Conflict and Social Change**

Early sociology, as you have studied in Block 1 of this course, was profoundly influenced by the idea of evolution. The work of Auguste Comte and more importantly, Herbert Spencer reflected the doctrine of evolutionary change. We can say that the early sociologists stressed on change through peaceful growth. For them, social order and harmony was normal and disorder and conflict was pathological.

It is against this background that you will be able to appreciate better how important Marx's contributions are. According to Marx, societies are inherently mutable or changeable systems. Changes are produced mainly by internal contradictions and conflicts. Each stage in human history is marked by certain contradictions and tensions. These become intensified over a period of time to such an extent that the existing system has to break down, giving way to a new system. In other words, each historical stage contains within itself the seeds of its own destruction. The new system emerges from the womb of the old. Thus, Marx understands conflict not as something pathological and harmful, but as a creative force. It is the engine of progress.

His conception of conflict as the major harbinger of change reflects in the unique way in which he deals with both the past and the present, and also in his anticipation of the future. This brings us to one of the problem areas in Marxist social theory, namely, the conflict between objective science and political commitment. Let us briefly consider this aspect of Marx's work.

### **Activity 1**

Carefully read the daily newspapers. Identify some major national or inter national conflicts. Try to interpret them using Marx's methodology. Write a note of about one page and compare it if possible with other students at your Study Centre.

## **18.3.2 Marx's Notion of 'Praxis'**

Ever since the birth of sociology right down to the present time, sociologists have argued over the separation between sociological theory and political ideology. Marx's work represents that stream of social thought where theory and political activism unite. Marx very clearly voices his opinions of capitalist society in his work. He sees it as an inhuman system of exploitation and anticipates its breakdown under the weight of its own contradictions. He awaits the birth of a classless, communist society, which will be free of contradictions. Marx advocates "praxis", namely, using theory for practical political action. Thus, Marx's methodology aims not just at understanding society, but also anticipating and assisting in changing it. You can read more about the concept of 'praxis' in Box 18.1.

### **Box 18.1**

**Praxis:** The word 'praxis' is of Greek origin and refers to action or activity of all kinds. The term passed into Latin and through it to the modern European languages. The Greek Philosopher Aristotle gave the term a more precise meaning and used it to denote specifically human activity. He contrasted it with theory or 'theoretica'. In medieval European philosophy, the term was used to denote applications of theory, e.g. theoretical geometry ('theoretica') and practical or applied geometry (praxis). The medieval European scholar Francis Bacon insisted that true knowledge is that which bears fruit in praxis, defining it as the application of human powers and actions for the attainment of good and useful things. Immanuel Kant distinguished between "pure" and "practical" reason in his work *Critique of Pure Reason*. Philosophy is thus divided into theoretical and practical. The theoretical part tells us 'what there is' and the practical one tells us 'what there should be'. Kant insisted on the primacy of practical philosophy. Hegel too accepted the distinction between the two but also thought that the two united in a third, higher moment. Hegel's philosophical system is divided into three parts, namely, logic philosophy of nature and philosophy of spirit. In each of these parts, a distinction between theoretical and practical aspects arises and is transcended in a higher synthesis. In Hegel's system, praxis became one of the moments of 'absolute truth'. In Marx's, the concept of praxis becomes central. Philosophy is to be transcended

into revolutionary action, which will transform the world. Marx speaks of praxis as the goal of true philosophy and revolution as true praxis. Marx sees 'praxis' basically as free, conscious activity through which alienation is eliminated. Thus praxis is the transformation of alienative labour into non-alienative, creative 'self-activity'.

Let us now go on to study the methodology of Durkheim. Here, we move on to a distinctly sociological methodology. Durkheim, as you already know, was actively involved in developing the emerging concerns of the sociology of his times. According to Randall Collins (1985: 123), Durkheim made sociology a distinctive science with its own lawful generalisations.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

Answer the following in three sentences each.

- i) Distinguish between 'methods' and 'methodology'.
- ii) Why is Marx's approach to society said to be 'holistic'?
- iii) Marx is a 'relativising historicist'. What does this statement mean?
- iv) Complete the following sentences.
  - a) According to Marx, changes in society are mainly produced by .....
  - b) By 'praxis' Marx refers to .....
  - c) Durkheim made a clear distinction between ..... and sociological explanations.
  - d) According to Durkheim, human desires can be checked by .....

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## **18.4 THE METHODOLOGY OF EMILE DURKHEIM**

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Emile Durkheim is one of the key figures in the development of a distinctly sociological orientation. Durkheim's work is marked by an emphasis on the social aspect of phenomena. To Durkheim goes the credit of making a clear separation between psychological or individualistic explanations and sociological explanations. To understand this point further, we will first describe how Durkheim views the interrelationship between the individual and society. We will then consider how Durkheim identifies social facts as the subject matter of sociology and finally, we will describe in brief his "functional analysis" of society.

### **18.4.0 Individual and Society**

To Durkheim, human beings are creatures with unlimited desires. Unlike other animals they are not satisfied when biological needs have been fulfilled. Human desires can only be held in check by external or societal control, according to Durkheim. Society constitutes a regulative force, which sets certain limits to individual passions.

When social regulations break down, the controlling influence of society on individuals is no longer effective. Individuals are left to their own devices. Durkheim terms this state of affairs as “anomie” or normlessness. It is a condition wherein individual desires are no longer regulated by common norms, thus leaving individuals without moral guidelines for pursuing their goals.

According to Lewis Coser (1971: 133), the major concern in Durkheim’s sociology is the problem of social order versus disorder. Durkheim is concerned with explaining the forces that contribute to social regulation and de-regulation. He addresses himself to the tensions between individual desires and social cohesion. He attempts to establish a balance between individual and societal claims.

Focus on analysing this tension expresses itself all throughout Durkheim’s work. For instance, in *Division of Labour* Durkheim (1893) identifies two types of societies, those based on mechanical solidarity and those based on organic solidarity. The former society is marked by the total grip of the ‘collective conscience’ on the individual. The latter type is marked by the flowering of individualism. Durkheim speaks favourably of organic solidarity because he sees it as a state where individual concerns can in fact help build stronger societal bonds. Thus, Durkheim’s understanding of the relationship between individual and society is a complex one. He does not take an extreme stance by stating that the individual is unimportant, and emphasises the role of individual creativity. He does not advocate pure, unchecked individualism either, but recognises the need for societal regulation.

For Durkheim, society is ‘sui-generis’. It is self-generating. It is more than just the sum of individuals that constitute it. It existed before the individual and will continue to exist long after individuals. Its members are born and die, but society lives on. It thus exists independently of the individuals that constitute it. However, individuals cannot exist without or apart from society. Having understood the interrelationship between individual and society as described by Durkheim, let us go on to see what, according to him, the task of the sociologist is. In other words, what is the subject matter of sociology?

#### **18.4.1 Subject Matter of Sociology — The Social Fact**

In his major works ‘*The Division of Labour in Society*’, ‘*Suicide*’ and ‘*Elementary Forms of Religious Life*’, Emile Durkheim explains the phenomena in question by sociological explanations. He rejects individualistic or psychological explanations. For instance, in tracing the causes for suicide, Durkheim dismisses explanations like madness or alcoholism (psychological explanations) but looks towards society for explanation. For Durkheim, suicide has a social aspect and reflects poor social integration. For Durkheim sociology is the study of essentially social facts and the explanation of these facts in a sociological manner. Durkheim systematically discusses this in ‘*The Rules of Sociological Method*’ (1895). He tries to demonstrate that there may and must be a sociology, which is an objective science, based on the model of other sciences. The subject matter of this science must be specific and distinct from that of the other

sciences and must be such that it can be observed and explained just like facts are observed and explained in other sciences. To make this objective science of social facts possible, Durkheim gives the following two guidelines, namely, (1) social facts must be regarded as things, and (2) a social fact exercises a constraint on individuals.

Let us examine the first of these points. What does Durkheim mean when he asks us to regard social facts as “things”? He means that we must shed our preconceptions and prejudices and observe social facts from outside. We must discover and observe them as we discover physical facts. For instance, you want to study ‘democracy’ in India. If you follow Durkheim’s suggestion, you will shed your preconceived or vague ideas, e.g., “democracy is a failure in India” or “democracy is people’s rule”, and so on.

You will instead observe it objectively and scientifically. How can a social fact be observed and recognised? This brings us to the second point, namely, that a social fact forces itself upon or exercises a constraint upon the individual. To take the example of democracy in India, the social fact, namely, democracy, can be recognised during elections. Politicians ask citizens for their votes and support. Thus democracy forces itself upon or constrains citizens to make certain choices or act in a certain manner. Let us take another example of a social fact, which exercises constraints on individual behaviour. You are part of a crowd in a cricket match. When Sachin Tendulkar hits a six the whole crowd goes into frenzy. You may not be a Tendulkar fan, but since you are in that crowd, you too will clap and cheer. You are constrained or pressurised into behaving in a certain manner. These two propositions, to regard social facts as things and to recognise social facts by the constraints they exercise, are according to Raymond Aron, (1970: 72) the foundations of Durkheim’s methodology.

Durkheim’s prescription to study social facts externally and objectively shows the impact of natural sciences in shaping sociology. Remember that sociology was in its infancy at that time, struggling to carve out a niche for itself in the academic world. The contributions of Durkheim to the methodology of the subject must be seen in this light. Let us now briefly look at Durkheim’s ‘functional’ analysis of social institutions and phenomena.

#### **18.4.2 Durkheim’s Functional Analysis of Society**

Among Durkheim’s most important methodological contributions is his functional analysis or explanation. The idea of studying social phenomena in terms of their function or role in maintaining the life of society has its origins in biology. Each part of a living organism has a particular function in maintaining the life and health of the organism. For instance, if we consider the various organisms of the human body in a functionalist manner, we will see that each part contributes to maintaining the whole. The heart pumps blood, the lungs purify air, the stomach grinds and breaks down food, the brain directs and coordinates the other organs. All these functions performed by the various organs help to keep us alive and healthy.

If society is studied with a functionalist perspective, we will view the various systems and institutions of society in terms of their contributions in keeping



society intact, or maintaining social order. Durkheim clearly establishes the procedure of the functional approach in studying social phenomena. According to him, “the determination of function is... necessary for the complete explanation of the phenomena... To explain a social fact it is not enough to show the cause on which it depends; we must also... show its function in the establishment of social order.” (*Rules of Sociological Method*, p. 97.)

In other words, for Durkheim, sociological understanding of phenomena cannot be complete until the role or function of these phenomena in maintaining social order is understood. The concept of function plays a key part in all of Durkheim’s work. In *Division of Labour* he tries to see how the process of occupational specialisation functions to maintain social order and cohesion. (You will study this point in greater detail in Unit 20 of this Block.) In *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* he demonstrates the function of religious rules and beliefs in strengthening social bonds, as you will see in Unit 19. The thread that runs right through Durkheim’s work is the need to demonstrate social order.

Briefly, Emile Durkheim attempts to demarcate a subject matter for sociology that will enable the sociologist to gain an objective and unbiased view of social phenomena. The task of the sociologist, according to Durkheim, is to understand social facts in a sociological manner. By doing so, he/she can give explanations regarding the function of social phenomena in helping to maintain social order.

If you have read the above pages on the methodology of Marx and Durkheim carefully, one major point of difference will have become clear to you. Marx’s emphasis is on conflict whilst Durkheim’s is on order. Let us now briefly compare the perspectives of these thinkers. But before that, complete Activity 2.

### **Activity 2**

Identify any two social institutions in your society, e.g., marriage, family, caste, clan, etc. Try and understand them with the help of functional analysis. Write a note of about two pages and compare it if possible with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

### **18.4.3 Social Conflict Versus Social Order**

Whilst Marx stressed the role of conflict and struggle in maintaining the vitality of society, Durkheim stresses harmony and social order. Durkheim regards conflict as pathological or abnormal; Marx regards it as the vehicle of social change. Durkheim studies social facts in terms of their contribution to social order and Marx constantly explores the contradictions and tensions within a society, which will bring in change.

Notice, though, that both thinkers treat society as an entity or reality in itself. Marx speaks of various subsystems constituting an interrelated whole and is concerned with the historical movement of the total society from one stage to another. Durkheim too speaks of society as a reality, which is ‘sui-generis’. Both thinkers are more concerned with social wholes rather



than individual behaviour and feeling which, according to them, emanate from particular societal conditions. Marx and Durkheim can thus be described as social realists.

This point becomes particularly relevant when we compare their methodologies with that of Max Weber. Weber's brand of sociology reflects a shift in emphasis. Weber's starting-point is social action. He is concerned with the behaviour of the individual which, he holds, is shaped by the individual's attitudes, values and beliefs. Weber is concerned with interpreting the meanings ascribed by actors to the world around them. Let us now first complete Check Your Progress 2 and then study Max Weber's methodology in some detail.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

Answer the following questions in 2 to 3 sentences each.

- i) State whether the following statements are True' (T) or 'False' (F).
  - a) Durkheim held that the individual is unimportant because society is all -powerful.
  - b) In organic solidarity, individuals can exist without society.
- ii) How can a 'social fact' be recognised? Give an example.

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.....  
.....  
.....

- iii) Give two examples of Durkheim's functional analysis.

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## **18.5 THE METHODOLOGY OF MAX WEBER**

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Max Weber conceives sociology as a comprehensive science of social action. He focuses on the subjective meanings that human actors attach to their actions and interactions within their specific social-historical contexts.

Weber's focus on the meanings ascribed by actors to their actions reflects his distinctive methodology. Weber challenges the notion that social sciences can be modelled on the lines of natural science. He thus charts out a special subject matter and special methods of inquiry for social sciences.

Weber rejects the positivist notion that the aims and methods of natural sciences and social or cultural sciences are the same. He takes the stand that the human being, in contrast to things or natural objects, has certain underlying motivations, which the sociologist must try to understand. He suggests a method that will help the sociologist achieve this purpose. Let us see what it is.

## 18.5.0 'Verstehen' or Interpretative Understanding

Weber points out that a natural scientist's understanding of natural phenomena is from the outside. Let us take an example. When a chemist studies the properties of a particular substance, he does so from the outside. When a sociologist tries to understand human society and culture, he approaches it as an insider, or a participant. Being human, the social scientist has access to the motives and feelings of his/her subject matter. Social scientists can understand human action by probing the subjective meanings that actors attach to their own behaviour and the behaviour of others. Sociological understanding is thus qualitatively different from that of other sciences. Sociology, in Weber's opinion, must use the method of interpretative understanding or "verstehen" (which means 'to understand' in German). The method of verstehen implies that the sociologist should visualise the motivations of the actor by trying to interpret his feelings, his understanding of the situation. But is verstehen sufficient for sociological explanation? According to Weber, it is only the first step. The next step of analysis is causal explanation or searching for the causes or reasons behind the occurrence of any social phenomena. In order to facilitate sociological analysis, Weber develops an important methodological tool, which you have already studied in detail in Block 4 of this course. This is the "ideal type".

### 18.5.1 The Ideal Type

The ideal type provides a basic method for comparative study. It refers to creating a kind of model which includes the most prominent characteristics of the phenomena to be studied. In a way, it is an exaggerated picture of a particular reality. For instance, if you want to construct an ideal type of a villain in an Indian film, you may develop an image of a man with small, wicked eyes, a moustache, a deep voice and a sinister laugh, wearing a flashy suit, carrying a gun and surrounded by "gondas"! Of course, not all villains in Indian movies are just like this. But you have abstracted the most commonly found characteristics and created an analytical construct (see figure 18.1: Ideal type of a film villain). This ideal type can be used as a measuring rod with which the sociologist can compare existing reality.



Figure 18.1 Ideal type of a film villain

Ideal types help to construct hypotheses. Using ideal types, the sociologist can measure real development and clarify important aspects of reality. In Block 4, you have seen how Weber used the ideal types of “the Protestant ethic” and “the spirit of capitalism”, showing the linkages between them. His study of the sociology of religion with which you are by now familiar, reflects the ‘historicity’ which is an important aspect of Weber’s approach. At this point it will be interesting for you to complete Activity 3.

### **Activity 3**

Construct ideal types of (a) the Indian joint family and/or (b) life in an urban slum. Try and compare the existing reality with your ideal types. How representative or accurate are your ideal types? Note down your findings.

## **18.5.2 Causality and Historical Comparison**

What we have studied so far about Weber’s methodology is that he advocates the study of social action. To do so, an interpretative understanding of the motives and values of actors is recommended by him. The use of ‘ideal types’ will help the sociologist to gain insights into actual, concrete events. Weber is also interested in providing causal explanations. But human society being so complex single or absolute causes to explain phenomena cannot be given, according to Weber. He thus speaks of a plurality of causes. Certain causes, however, can be identified as being more important than others. For instance, in his understanding of capitalism, Weber speaks of the importance of religious ethics. But he certainly does not say that religious values are the only causes behind the growth of modern capitalism. To show the importance of religious values in influencing the development of capitalism, Weber uses the method of historical comparison. You have seen in Unit 16, Block 4 of this course how he compared the growth of capitalism in the west to the absence of its growth in ancient China and India. The reason for this difference, he concluded, was the presence or absence of an appropriate ethic or value-system. Thus, Weber’s methodology does include a search for causal explanations but not monocausal explanations. Since Weber was so concerned with the importance of values and beliefs in social action, it will be interesting to ask what his stand concerning values in social science was. Did Weber, like Marx combine theory and political activism? Did he, like Durkheim speak of strict objectivity? Why not read the next sub-section for an answer?

## **18.5.3 Values in Social Science**

Science is often described as an ‘objective’ search for truth. It is supposed to be value-free, unbiased, impartial. You have seen how Durkheim advocates objective understanding of social facts and how he recommends that the sociologist free himself/herself from prejudice and pre-conceived notions. Is an ‘objective’, ‘value-free’ science, natural or social, really possible? According Weber, values play an important role in choosing a particular topic of study. Why have you chosen sociology as an elective course? Certain values have guided you. You might have thought it

interesting, or easy, or may be you did not like the other elective courses. Similarly, if a scientist decides to study, say, the behaviour of an atom or the life and customs of rural Indians, he/she has been guided by certain value orientations.

But Weber makes a clear distinction between value-orientations and value judgments. The researcher or scientist may be guided to undertake a particular study because of certain value-orientations, but, according to Weber, he/she must not pass moral judgments about it. The researcher must observe ethical neutrality. His/her job is to study phenomena, not pass judgments about whether they are 'good' or 'evil'. These, in brief are the major methodological contributions of Weber.

You have by now gained an understanding of the distinctive methodological orientations of each of the three founding fathers of sociology. It is time now, to ask an important question, namely, how did they define the role and tasks of the social scientist? The answer to this question will help you to summarise the aims and objectives, which they had in mind when they undertook their respective studies of social phenomena.

#### **18.5.4 The Role of the Social Scientist**

You have already studied how Emile Durkheim conceptualises sociology as the study of social facts. The sociologist, having rid himself/herself of preconceived notions and prejudices, can objectively understand the characteristics of social facts and study the role of social institutions in helping to maintain social order.

Weber assigns to the sociologist the task of interpretative understanding of the motives of human actors. The humanness of the sociologist can prove an asset in understanding society and culture because the sociologist can examine phenomena from the inside. He/she can attempt causal explanations by using ideal types and historical comparison. But ethical neutrality must be maintained. In Marx, we find that the role of the social scientist is linked to the role of the political activist. By understanding the tensions and conflicts that mark society, the social scientist can anticipate and help to pave the way for an ideal society, free of contradictions and exploitation.

#### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Complete the following, statements.
  - a) According to Weber, social scientists can understand human action by probing ..... assigned by actors to their behaviour.
  - b) ..... can be used as a measuring rod to compare existing reality.
  - c) Weber distinguishes between value-orientations and .....
- ii) State whether the following statements are 'True' (T) or 'False' (F)
  - a) Weber maintained that a social scientist must give monocausal explanations for social phenomena.

- b) Since social science cannot be value-free, sociologists cannot maintain ethical neutrality.

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## 18.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit we have tried to understand what is meant by ‘methodology’ and why it is important to study it. We have then briefly described the methodological perspectives of each of the three founding fathers, drawing comparisons on the way.

We studied how Marx conceptualised the history of society using a materialistic methodology. Studying social institutions in terms of their relatedness, Marx stressed the inherently mutable or changeable nature of society. In his view, social conflict is the engine of change and it is the role of the politically committed social scientist to study and anticipate the birth of the classless society of the future, namely, the communist society.

Emile Durkheim was concerned with establishing sociology as a legitimate science. He introduced a certain rigour in sociological method. He spoke of ‘social facts’ as the proper subject-matter of sociological enquiry and made a clear distinction between psychological and sociological explanations. It was Durkheim who brought into vogue functional analysis, which is in use even today.

Max Weber’s methodology marked a shift in sociological emphasis. Whilst Durkheim and Marx practised social realism, Weber focused on interpretative understanding of the motives of human actors. He undertook comparative historical studies and provided multi-layered or multi-casual analyses of social phenomena.

The aims and objectives with which these thinkers approached the study of society differed. Whilst Durkheim and Weber were keen on maintaining a certain scientific aloofness, Marx believed in the use of theory to guide political action.

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## 18.7 KEYWORDS

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<b>Anomie</b>	A term used by Durkheim to denote a situation where previously existing norms have lost their validity. The individual no longer feels integrated into society and is left to his/her own devices.
<b>Collective conscience</b>	A term used by Durkheim to denote the totality of beliefs, sentiments and values held in common by the members of a society.
<b>Ethical Neutrality</b>	Not passing value-judgments, i.e. not commenting on whether something is “good” or “bad”.
<b>Hypothesis</b>	A statement of cause and effect which has to be scientifically proved. Hypotheses are important in scientific research and when proved, they

become laws. If they cannot be proved, they are discarded or improved upon. An example of a sociological hypothesis could be “the children of divorced parents are likely to become juvenile delinquents”. Sociologists must verify this hypothesis before it becomes a law.

**Ideology**

A body of ideas usually political and/or economic with which to guide policy.

**Mechanical solidarity  
and organic solidarity**

Durkheim differentiated between solidarity or social bonds based on similarity (mechanical solidarity) on the one hand and differences or heterogeneity (organic solidarity) on the other. The former can be observed in simple traditional societies and the latter in more complex, modern societies.

**Pathological**

Diseased, harmful.

**Positivist**

Based on practical experience. The term ‘positivism’ is used to denote the scientific model on which early sociology tried to develop itself.

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## **18.8 FURTHER READING**

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Aron, Raymond 1970. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Volumes 1 and 2, Penguin: London. (See the sections on Marx, Durkheim and Weber)

Coser, Lewis 1971. *Masters of Sociological Thought - Ideas in Historical and Social Context*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York. (See the sections on Marx, Durkheim and Weber.)

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## **18.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) By ‘methodology’ we mean a system of methods or procedures with which the study of a problem is approached. ‘Methods’ refer to the specific techniques, which comprise methodology. Thus, methodology is a system and methods are parts or tools of that system.
- ii) Marx considered societies as social wholes. The various institutions and sub-systems of society were studied by him in terms of their interrelationships, not in isolation. Hence his approach is said to be ‘holistic’.
- iii) Marx considered the various stages of history to be distinctive and with their own specificities. For instance, although he considered class conflict to be a common feature of all the stages, he maintained that



its nature and participants differed in each stage. Hence he is described as 'relativising historicist'.

- iv) a) internal contradictions and conflicts
- b) tying together theory and political action
- c) psychological
- d) societal control.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) a) F b) F
- ii) A 'social fact' can be recognised because it exerts a constraint on individuals. It forces or pressurises individuals to behave in a certain manner. For example, if one is part of a crowd at a cricket match and the crowd claps and cheers, one also gets carried away and behaves like the others in the crowd.
- iii) In '*Division of Labour*' Durkheim explains the growth of occupational specialisation in terms of its contribution in bringing about social cohesion. In '*The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*', Durkheim explains the role of religion in strengthening social bonds. This illustrates his functional analysis.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) a) subjective meanings
- b) ideal type
- c) value-judgments
- ii) a) F b) F

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# UNIT 19 RELIGION: DURKHEIM AND WEBER

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Religion: Durkheim and Weber

## Structure

- 19.0 Objectives
- 19.1 Introduction
- 19.2 Emile Durkheim's Contribution to the Sociology of Religion
  - 19.2.0 Definition of Religion - Beliefs and Rites
  - 19.2.1 Durkheim's Study of 'Totemism'
  - 19.2.2 Religion and Science
- 19.3 The Contributions of Max Weber
  - 19.3.0 The Religion of India
  - 19.3.1 The Religion of China
  - 19.3.2 Ancient Judaism
- 19.4 Durkheim and Weber — A Comparison
  - 19.4.0 Units of Analysis
  - 19.4.1 The Role of Religion
  - 19.4.2 Gods, Spirits and Prophets
  - 19.4.3 Religion and Science
- 19.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 19.6 Keywords
- 19.7 Further Reading
- 19.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 19.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you should be able to understand

- Emile Durkheim's views on religion
- Max Weber's contributions to the sociology of religion
- the ways in which the views of these authors differed.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Religion, as you are aware, is something to which human beings attach a great deal of importance. It includes a system of beliefs and practices, which help human beings shape their actions and orientations. It binds people with other followers, bringing about a feeling of identification and unity. Sometimes it even makes people unite against followers of a different faith. Religion helps people to come to terms with the tragedies and crises of human life by providing explanations for these. It is a social phenomenon intimately connected with other social systems. The subject of religion has been one of great interest to sociologists and anthropologists. The contributions of Durkheim and Weber are very important in this regard.

In the first unit of this Block, we tried to understand the distinctive methodologies of the founding fathers of sociology. In this unit, we will see how Durkheim and Weber elaborated their respective methodologies through their studies on religion.

In the first section (19.1), we will examine the contributions of Durkheim to the study of religion by going over some important points made by him in his classic work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912). The second section will briefly review Weber's main ideas pertaining to religion. In the third and final section, we will highlight the main points of difference in the approaches of Durkheim and Weber.

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## 19.2 EMILE DURKHEIM'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE SOCIOLOGY OF RELIGION

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Durkheim's work *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* is an important one. Its major ideas are discussed and debated by scholars and students even today. Before we go on to examine its major arguments, let us take up an important question. Why was Durkheim interested in the 'elementary forms' of religious life? Could he not have directed his attention to major religions like Hinduism, Islam and Christianity? Let us try to answer this question by taking a simple example from day-to-day life. If you can ride a bicycle, you will find it easier to balance on a motor-bike. Similarly, if the simplest form of religion is understood, it will be of immense use in understanding the complexities of 'organised' religions, in Durkheim's view. The most elementary or simple form of religion will be found in those societies with a correspondingly 'elementary' social organisation, namely, amongst the aborigines or primitive tribal communities. It is by understanding the aboriginal religion that Durkheim hoped to contribute to the understanding of complex systems of thought and belief. In the following sub-sections, we will try and see how he does this. Let us begin by examining how Durkheim defines religion.

### 19.2.0 Definition of Religion - Beliefs and Rites

To define religion, says Durkheim, we must first free the mind of all preconceived ideas of religion. Durkheim discards the notion that religion is concerned only with 'mysterious' or 'supernatural' phenomena, with gods, spirits and ghosts. He points out that religion is as concerned with the ordinary as the extraordinary aspects of life. The rising and setting of the sun, the regular patterns of the seasons, the growth of plants and crops, the birth of new life are as much a part of religious ideas as miracles and spectacular happenings. To define religion, he says, the various religious systems of the world must be examined in order to derive those elements, or characteristics, which they have in common. As Durkheim (1912: 38) puts it, "religion cannot be defined except by the characters which are found wherever religion itself is found".

According to Durkheim, all religions comprise two basic components, namely, beliefs and rites. Beliefs are the **collective representations** (about which you have studied in detail in Block 3 of this course) and rites are

determined modes of action, which are influenced by beliefs. As you have read earlier in Block 3 of this course, religious beliefs as studied by Durkheim presuppose the classification of all things into 'sacred' and 'profane'. There is an opposition between these two spheres which has to be carefully regulated through rites and ceremonies. The sacred is that which is set apart, considered holy and venerated or dreaded and avoided. The sacred is usually in a higher position, valued more than profane things, and its identity and power are protected by social rules. The profane, on the other hand, refers to the mundane, ordinary aspects of day-to-day existence. The sacred and profane are kept apart, says Durkheim, because they are heterogeneous (different), antagonistic (in conflict) and isolated (separated). Rites therefore exist to mediate between the two worlds. Let us take an example. Why are believers not allowed to wear their shoes inside a temple? Wearing shoes or chappals for walking is a routine, practical or profane act. The temple is considered a holy, pure place; it is sacred. The floor of the temple must therefore be protected from the polluting dirt of our shoes. The **sacred and profane** are kept apart.

Beliefs and rites, says Durkheim, unite to form religion. Beliefs are the moral ideas, the rules, the teachings and myths. They are the collective representations which exist outside of the individual, yet integrate the individual into the religious system. Through beliefs, human beings understand the sacred and their relationship to it. They can lead their lives accordingly.

Rites are the rules of conduct that follow from beliefs, which prescribe how human beings must behave With regard to sacred things. They can be positive, where the sacred is sought to be brought closer to the world of men, for example, through '*havan*' or sacrifice. Rites can be negative, which means the sacred and profane are sought to be kept apart, e.g. purification rites, fasts, penance or suffering. In Durkheim's view rites serve to sustain the intensity of religious-beliefs. They bring individuals together, strengthening their social natures. They are modes of expression of the collective conscience, which, as you have studied, refers to the commonly held values, beliefs and ideas of the community (see Giddens 1978: 84-89).

Defining religion in terms of beliefs and rites poses one problem. This definition would also include **magic**. Is there no difference between magic and religion? Following the ideas of the anthropologist Robertson-Smith, Durkheim holds that magic and religion are indeed different. Magic is a private, selfish practice, performed at the individual level. For example, if one wants to do better than one's neighbour, so one goes to the magician and by paying his/her fee, one asks him to cast a spell or perform '*jadoo-tona*' to kill your neighbour's cows or spoil his crops. Magic thus involves a bond only between the magician and his clients based on a selfish motive, in order to manipulate nature to suit individual purposes. Religion, on the other hand, is public and social. There are social bonds between followers, which unite them into a group leading a common life. Durkheim's (1912: 62) definition of religion taking into account these factors is as follows.

“A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden — beliefs and practices

which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them.”

(It must be clarified that by the term ‘Church’, Durkheim does not refer to the Christian **Church** alone. He uses it in the sense of a moral community or an organised group of followers of all faiths.)

Let us now see how Durkheim grapples with the understanding of elementary forms by considering the institution of **totemism** amongst the aborigines of Australia. But before that, why not check your progress?

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Complete the following sentences
  - a) Durkheim studied ‘elementary’ forms of religion because .....
  - b) According to Durkheim, all religions comprise .....
  - c) The ‘profane’ refers to .....
- ii) How does Durkheim distinguish between magic and religion? Answer in five sentences.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

### 19.2.1 Durkheim’s Study of Totemism

As has been mentioned earlier, Durkheim believes that to understand the more complex religions, one must understand first the simple forms. Durkheim maintains that totemism is the most simple form of religion. He chose to study totemism as practised by the aborigines of Central Australia. Ethnographic information on these groups was available in plenty. Their social organisation was the simplest known to sociologists and anthropologists. Totemism is linked with the social organisation of clans. The members of the clan believe themselves to have descended from some common ancestor — an animal, a plant or even some non-living object. The “common ancestor” is the “totemic object”. It is the totemic object that gives the clan its name and identity. But it is more than just a name, it is an emblem. It is often carved, engraved or designed on other objects belonging to the clan, even on the bodies of the clan members. This makes otherwise ordinary or common objects special. They are endowed with sacredness. Many taboos or ‘don’ts’ are attached to the totemic object. It cannot be killed or eaten, it must be treated with reverence. All things arranged in the clan are connected with and extensions of the totemic object. The clan members may not be related by blood, but they have a common name, a common emblem. **Clan exogamy** is thus an important rule. Religion and social organisation are thus intimately connected in such simple societies.

The totemic object and all that is concerned with it is considered sacred. Why? Durkheim maintains that it is not actually the animal or plant itself that is worshipped or held sacred, but a nameless and impersonal force which exists throughout the world and is diffused amongst all the material objects of the world. This force is described by various names “mana” by the Samoans, “wakan” by the Melanesians, “orenda” by some North American tribes. The totemic object is merely a symbol of the ‘totemic principle’ which is nothing but the clan itself. The clan is given a reality of its own. It is personalised and represented through the totemic object. In Durkheim’s view, ‘god’ is nothing but society **apotheosised** or glorified and given a different shape and form. Why is society worshipped? Durkheim says that it is physically and morally superior to individuals. It is ‘sui-generis’, with a reality of its own. Its power is feared, its authority is respected. When a soldier gives up his life to defend the flag of the country, he is not worshipping the flag itself, but what the flag stands for, namely, the nation.

Society exists in and through individual conscience. It demands our sacrifices, it strengthens and elevates the divine or sacred within each one of us. This is particularly evident during important religious ceremonies and festivals, which require the participation of the whole clan. Rituals such as festivals help to produce “**collective effervescence**” or a feeling of collective enthusiasm and involvement which strengthens social bonds and promotes social solidarity.

Briefly, members of a clan venerate a certain totemic object from which they claim descent. This object gives them their identity. But according to Durkheim, it is not the object itself that is being worshipped, but the clan itself. Religion is nothing but giving society itself a divine form because it stands outside of individuals, exerting physical and moral constraints on them. Worshipping society produces in its members a feeling of oneness, solidarity and enthusiasm, helping them to participate in the collective life and expressions of the society.

Having given interesting insights on primitive religion, how does Durkheim use it to understand complex systems of thought? You have just seen how he locates religion in its most ‘elementary’ form in a society with a correspondingly elementary social system. Following his logic, we can say that complex systems of thought will be found in modern, heterogeneous societies. Complex, modern societies, it is observed, are characterised by the development of science. Are religion and science drastically different? Let us first complete Activity 1 and then see what Durkheim feels about this in the following sub-section.

### Activity 1

Make a list of five beliefs and rites of any two religions practised in our country. Compare your list if possible with other students at your Study Centre.

## 19.2.2 Religion and Science

Durkheim maintains that scientific thought has its origins in religious thought. Both religion and science reflect on nature, human beings and



society. Both attempt to classify things, relate them to one another and explain them. Scientific thought is a more developed and refined form of religious thought. The terms used in modern science like force and power have a religious origin.

Durkheim writes that religious thought will ultimately give way to the advance of scientific thought. He points out that social sciences are in fact undertaking a scientific study of religion itself!

Both religious and scientific thought contribute to the collective representations of society. There cannot be any conflict between the two because both are directed towards seeking universal principles. Thus the goal of both systems of thought is to help human beings rise above the limitations of private, individual nature and lead a life which is both, individual and social. Individuals need society in order to be truly human, and religion and science both contribute to unifying individuals with society (see Jones 1986:149-152).

We have just seen how Durkheim focuses on the role of religion in forging social solidarity by unifying individuals in the worship of an entity far greater than themselves, namely, society itself. Durkheim's perspective has had a tremendous impact on sociologists and social anthropologists, particularly those in England and France. His nephew, Marcel Mauss was one of the leading social anthropologists who followed in the Durkheimian tradition. You can read more about him in Box 19.1

#### **Box 19.1 Marcel Mauss**

Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) was the nephew of Emile Durkheim. Born in Lorraine (France), he grew up with a close knit, pious and orthodox Jewish family. He himself was never a religious man, and broke away from the Jewish faith. He was very close to his uncle and studied philosophy under his supervision at Bordeaux. Durkheim took endless trouble guiding young Marcel's studies. The close relationship between uncle and nephew resulted in an intellectual collaboration yielding such important works as *Forms of Primitive Classification* (Durkheim and Mauss 1903). Mauss took a major part in editing the journal *Annee Sociologique* started by Durkheim. Working for the 'Annee', Mauss interacted and collaborated with a number of brilliant young scholars like Hubert, Beuchat and Fauconner and published some important articles on magic, religion, sacrifice, prayer, the concept of the self and so on.

*Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, by Hubert and Mauss (1899) analysed the religious practice of sacrifice as a means of communication between the sacred and profane worlds. The item or thing that is sacrificed is destroyed during the course of the ceremony.

*The Gift* (1925) is considered as Mauss's most influential work. Mauss focused on the systems of exchange of gifts and forms of contracts in archaic societies. The major hypotheses of this study are that (i) exchange, which includes the three obligations of giving, receiving and repaying, is common to all societies; (ii) the act of gift-giving maintains and strengthens social bonds of all kinds — cooperative, competitive and antagonistic. Mauss attempted to elaborate on the relation between patterns of exchange and the social structure.

The two World Wars brought tragedy in the life of Mauss. He lost a number of friends and colleagues in World War I. His beloved uncle, Durkheim, died grief stricken after the death of his son Andre in the War. The German occupation of France during World War II deprived him a second time of friends and colleagues and affected the balance of his mind. He never completed the books he had started work on and could not synthesise his many-sided and scattered work. He died in 1950, but left behind an important intellectual legacy. France and British anthropologists and sociologists, in particular were profoundly influenced by his work.

You will now read about Max Weber's contributions to the study of religion, but before moving on to Max Weber's views, let us complete Check Your Progress 2 to mark our understanding of the contents of this unit so far.

**Check Your Progress 2**

Answer the following questions in 2 sentences each.

- i) Why is clan exogamy a strict rule in totemic clans?

.....  
.....

- ii) Why is society worshipped, according to Durkheim?

.....  
.....

- iii) Why, in the view of Durkheim, there can be no conflict between religion and science?

.....  
.....

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### **19.3 THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF MAX WEBER**

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Max Weber's sociological study of religion is rooted in his conception of human beings as actors, ascribing meanings to the world around them. Weber's studies of religion focus on the ethos or ethics of religions of the world and their mutual interactions with other social sub-systems like polity and economy. There is thus a historicity in Weber's approach. You have studied in detail Weber's understanding of the effects of religion on economy in Unit 16 of Block 4 of this course. Weber, as you know, published a number of studies on religion, including *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and comparative studies on the religions of India, China and the religion of the Jews. In this section, we shall highlight these studies of world religions in order to bring out Weber's interest in studying religion in a historical and comparative way.

In this unit, we will not discuss *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Although this is an important work, you have been exposed to it in detail earlier. It shall also be taken up in Unit 21 of this Block when

we speak of Weber's theory of capitalism. However, you are advised to go back to Unit 16, Block 4 of this course, and have a look once more at the 'Protestant Ethic' thesis before moving on to the next sub-section.

Let us now touch upon some of the points Weber makes in his study of the world religion. We will begin with a review of his work on the religions of India.

### **19.3.0 The Religion of India**

Weber speaks of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism in *The Religion of India* which he wrote in 1916. Hinduism is to be understood in relation to the caste system. The caste system, which arose as a result of occupational specialisation which became hereditary over the centuries, was dominated by the Brahmin. It was the Brahmin caste that had access to the learning of the scriptures. This caste was the hereditary carrier of traditional ideas. The lower castes, particularly the Shudra faced a great number of socio-cultural disabilities. They were ritually 'impure' and were thus denied access to the scriptures. This automatically meant that they could not aspire to *moksha* or salvation, the Hindu ideal. The doctrine of '*karma*', according to Weber, is the central belief in Hinduism. A person's position in the present life is a consequence of good or evil deeds of '*karma*' in the past life. If the person's '*karma*' in this life is in accordance with his '*dharma*' or duty, he will be rewarded in future lives. The '*dharma*' of a Brahmin is to study the scriptures. The Kshatriya must defend his land and people, the Vaishya must engage in commerce, and the Shudra must serve the other castes. A person is born in a particular caste because of past '*karma*' and must dutifully carry out '*dharma*' in order to aspire to a better birth in the next life. The idea to aspire to was '*moksha*' or liberation from this cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It would be final freedom from the pain and uncertainty of life on earth.

Material prosperity was desirable, but it was temporary. It did not have permanent value. Spiritual prosperity, though, did have permanence. It could free an individual from the cycles of birth, death and rebirth. Pursuing spiritual goals would help in achieving '*moksha*'. Weber tries to show how it is this sort of 'other-worldly' ethic that worked against the rise of capitalism. Weber points out that medieval Indian cities were renowned centres of manufacture. Technology was at a fairly advanced level. Although material conditions were favourable, the Hindu religion made people de-emphasise material life.

Buddhism and Jainism, which tried to counter the rigidity of orthodox Hinduism, were according to Weber, pacifist or peace-emphasising religions. They were religions of contemplation and their followers were monks or people who rejected the world. The lay persons or ordinary followers could gain religious merit by offering alms to monks, but they could not achieve salvation through '*nirvana*' unless they gave up their occupations and became monks themselves.

The caste system, the religious beliefs of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism thus mutually reinforced each other and prevented the development of capitalism although medieval Indian cities were fertile ground for capitalism

to grow. India became a land of tradition, of a basically unshakeable social order (see Collins 1986: 111-118).

### 19.3.1 The Religion of China

Weber also wrote *The Religion of China* in 1916. Speaking of Confucianism, the traditional Chinese religion, Weber points out that like Protestantism, Confucianism too was marked by 'this worldly asceticism'. But whilst Protestantism sought to transform or attain mastery over the world, Confucianism emphasised harmony. The order of the world and the cosmos was to be maintained by carrying on the proper ceremonies that upheld the world order. Propriety in manners and behaviour was greatly stressed. The ruling classes, the Chinese 'mandarins' were the upholders of manners and morals. Maintaining social order meant that actively changing the world, an important aspect of capitalism, was discouraged. Thus, the Confucian ethic of propriety, restraint and harmony went against developing capitalism.

### 19.3.2 Ancient Judaism

Written between 1917 and 1919, this work of Weber is of crucial importance in understanding the changes that took place in the western world. Judaism is the seedbed from which the modern world-transforming religions of Islam and Christianity originated. As you have studied in Unit 16, Block 4 of this course, Judaism propagated the idea of creating a 'heaven on earth'. This idea has far-reaching implications. It encourages followers to actively transform the world and master it. The ethic of mastery over the environment is a key feature of modern western civilisation. The prophets of Judaism were ethical leaders who tried to unite their followers through their teachings. These prophets preached to the discontented and oppressed peasant classes of Palestine that the anger of God would destroy the land. They said that god was angry with the ruling classes living in the cities because of their sinful life-styles and their degenerate ways. Unless these groups were overthrown and a society that went according to the ways of god was established, Palestine could not hope to prosper. The existence of '**ethical prophets**' who preach a certain programme of action is a characteristic feature of religions like Islam and Christianity as well. Weber's work on Christianity and Islam could not be completed. His death in 1920 prevented him from realising his plan of putting together his findings on the great world religions and using them to find an answer regarding the birth and growth of capitalism.

#### Activity 2

Collect some information about Prophet Mohammad and Jesus Christ. Write a note of about two pages covering (a) their life-histories, (b) their teachings (c) the impact of their teachings.

You may have found this section a repetition of Unit 16, Block 4 of this course. But the purpose has been to bring out Weber's central concern in his study of religion, namely, highlighting the relationship between religious ideas and human activity. Remember, Weber tries to interpret human action in terms of its meaningfulness to the actors themselves. Why would an

untouchable not rebel against the caste system in ancient India? Weber's explanation would have been to show that it was the religious belief system that prevented the person from trying to transform the world. Similarly, it was the doctrine of 'pre-destination' and 'calling' that made the Protestant work hard and accumulate money. Weber's approach to the study of religion has been drawn upon by several American and Indian sociologists.

Weber's study of religion brings out the role of prophets. He also shows how religious beliefs are connected with particular strata of society. Thus Confucianism is primarily connected with the ruling class, the 'mandarins', Hinduism is linked with the Brahmin orthodoxy trying to perpetuate the caste system; and Judaism is linked with a discontented peasantry striving to overcome oppression.

Having gone over the central arguments of Durkheim and Weber, it will be interesting to compare their perspectives. This is exactly what we will do in the next section after completing Check Your Progress 3.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Complete the following sentences.
  - a) According to Weber, the central belief in Hinduism is .....
  - b) The Hindu ideal was aspiring towards .....
  - c) Capitalism did not develop in China because of the Confucian ideal of .....
  - d) The ethic of ..... is a key feature of modern western civilisation.
  - e) Weber tries to interpret human action in terms of its .....

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## 19.4 DURKHEIM AND WEBER — A COMPARISON

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Each thinker's methodology provides a certain framework with which he/she approaches substantive issues. In the first unit of this Block, you have seen how Durkheim stresses the exteriority of social facts, which he regards as 'things'. Society is 'sui-generis', it exists over and above the individual. Individuals are born and die, but society is more or less eternal. Society imposes certain constraints in order to make the individual a part of it. Weber focuses on the role of individuals as actors, orienting their behaviour-patterns in terms of their values and beliefs. It is the task of the sociologist to study these through "verstehen" or interpretative understanding. Durkheim's and Weber's studies of religion get their distinct foci or emphases as a consequence of their distinctive approaches to human beings and society.

Let us begin by looking at the different types of religious systems, located in very different social settings that they handle, i.e., their units of analysis.

### 19.4.1 Units of Analysis

As you have studied in the first section (19.2), Emile Durkheim studies religion in what he believes is its most elementary form. He focuses on tribal society where collective life is pervasive. Ideas are held in common by all individuals and there is an intensity of shared ideas and feelings. This is a society without written historical records. Religion and clan organisation overlap. Thus Durkheim emphasises the role of religion as a collective phenomenon which serves to strengthen social bonds.

Weber, on the other hand, studies the major features of the great world religions. He is interested in their historical roots and their capacity to guide and shape economic activity. These world religions are also seen as responses to the prevailing social situations. For instance, Buddhism and Jainism in India hit out against the caste system. Judaism was the religion of the oppressed Palestinian peasantry. Protestantism as you have seen in Unit 16, Block 4 of the course was a “protest” against the decadence of the orthodox Catholic Church. Thus, Durkheim’s emphasis on tribal religion visualises the role of religion in maintaining social order, Weber’s analysis looks at the creative role of religion in helping to shape new ways of thinking and acting.

### 19.4.1 The Role of Religion

Taking the above point further, we can see that Durkheim basically sees religion as an expression of the collective conscience. Worshipping the totem according to him is nothing but worshipping the clan itself. Ideas and beliefs cherished by the clan as a whole thus become part of the individual conscience. The separation between the sacred and the profane aspects of the world is mediated through certain rites. The participation of the whole clan in some important rites helps to bring about collective enthusiasm, linking individuals into social bonds and making them aware of the awesome power of society.

Weber, in contrast, wishes to understand religion in relation to economic, political and historical factors. How does it interact with other institutions of society? How does society shape and is in turn shaped by religious beliefs? Weber is interested in the unique culture patterns to be found in each society. He sees religion as part and parcel of a larger historical trend, namely, the move towards capitalism, industrialisation and **rationality**. He is concerned with the role of religion in making the world-view of individuals in different societies favourably or unfavourably inclined towards capitalism and **rationalisation**. We will take up this point in greater detail in Unit 21 of this Block.

You have seen how the units of analysis used by these thinkers differ. The role assigned to religion by both of them is also distinctive. Naturally, some of the concepts or categories they use also differ. Weber does not hesitate in using certain concepts that Durkheim strictly avoids. Let us examine this point further.

#### Activity 3

Locate the following on a world map: (a) India, (b) China, (c) Palestine (d) Australia.



### 19.4.3 Gods, Spirits and Prophets

Durkheim denies that religion is concerned with the mysterious, with gods and spirits. He holds that the object of worship is society itself, transformed and represented through certain symbolic objects. Weber does not hesitate to use the idea of gods and spirits. Remember, Weber is dealing with religions, which are of relatively recent origin as compared to the tribal religions. These religions discussed by Weber express certain personal qualities and display a certain level of abstraction. When individuals abstract, they engage in symbolic activity. Let us look at totemism in this respect. Durkheim argues that the totem is the symbol of the clan. Weber takes the example of a totem, which while worshipped as a symbol, is an animal that is sacrificially killed and eaten. The spirits and gods of the tribe are called to take part in the feast. Whilst eating the animal, clan members believe themselves to be united because the spirit of the animal enters them. They are united not merely by the totem as an emblem or a symbol, but they are united by sharing the substance of the sacred animal which is not merely flesh, but spirit.

Weber, unlike Durkheim, attaches great importance to prophets in propagating religious beliefs. Religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam are characterised by great ethical prophets who people revere as the representatives of god, or individuals who have directly spoken to god. They are the charismatic leaders like Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Mohammed who capture the imagination and fancy of the people.

Briefly, Durkheim denies that religion is basically concerned with spirits and gods. He maintains that it is society itself, which is worshipped in order to strengthen social bonds and make individuals who are born and who die feel the power and eternity of society. Weber speaks of religion in terms of its creation of abstractions. Thus spirits and gods are reflections of symbolic thought. The role of charismatic, ethical prophets in redefining and remaking religious beliefs is also accounted for.

Let us now compare the views of Durkheim and Weber on religion vis-à-vis science.

### 19.4.4 Religion and Science

You have seen how Durkheim views both religion and science as providing society with its collective representations. The classifications of science derive from those of religion. Thus there is no conflict or opposition between the two. Weber is not of this view. His comparative studies of world religion show how religious ethics in India and China prevented the growth of capitalism, which basically requires an ethic of mastery, of rational calculation. It is only the Protestant ethic, which provided the appropriate world-view for rational capitalism. Science, as Weber views it, is an expression of rationality and a challenge to the traditional and mystical claims of religion. Science provides **empirical** knowledge or verifiable factual information, which helps human beings to know and master the world. Thus science and religion, in Weber's view, exist in contrast to each other.

Comparing the views of these authors is not an easy task. They are dealing with such vastly different societies that their findings are bound to be different. But some points do emerge. Durkheim sees religion as a means whereby individuals acknowledge the physical and moral power of society. Religion is a way of classifying and ordering concepts and is thus the fore-runner of science. Weber studies religion in terms of its meanings for those who follow it, and how these meanings help them orient their actions in other social activities. Science arises as a challenge to religious ideas, driving out ghosts and spirits and replacing them with empirical observations and factual information. You can illustrate the difference between perspectives on religion, advanced by Durkheim and Weber as shown in figure 19.1

<b>EMILE DURKHEIM</b>	<b>MAX WEBER</b>
i) Studied primitive religion	Studied world religions
ii) Views religion as an expression of the collective conscience	Views religion in relation to political, economic and historical factors
iii) Strictly avoids using concepts like 'gods', 'spirit', 'prophets'	Makes use of these concepts
iv) Considers science as an extension of religion, sees no conflict between them	Considers science and religion in contrast to each other

**Fig. 19.1 Perspectives on religion**

**Check Your Progress 4**

- i) Complete the following sentences.
  - a) Durkheim sees the role of religion in ..... whilst Weber sees it in .....
  - b) ..... are examples of ethical prophets.
  - c) Spirits and gods according to Weber are reflections of .....
  - d) Science, as Weber views it, is an expression of ..... and a challenge to .....
  - e) Science, according to Weber replaces ghosts and spirits with .....

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**19.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit, we have tried to see how Emile Durkheim and Max Weber dealt with religion as a social phenomenon. We first tried to understand the views of Durkheim. We saw how and why he studied 'elementary forms' in simple societies. We examined how he arrived at his definition of religion,

how he understood totemism as an expression of clan worship and how he saw the continuity between religious and scientific thought.

Next we dealt with the work of Max Weber. We did not separately examine his 'Protestant ethic' thesis but we did make references to it. We saw how he treated the religions of India, China and ancient Palestine. We saw how his studies established links between religion and other social sub-systems, particularly in the context of the emergence of capitalism.

Finally, we compared the views of Durkheim and Weber in terms of the kinds of societies that they studied, the role they ascribed to religion, the concepts they used in their studies and their conflicting views on religion and science.

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## 19.6 KEYWORDS

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<b>Apotheosis</b>	Glorification, raising to a divine level
<b>Calling</b>	Regarding work as more than just an economic necessity, but a religious duty
<b>Church</b>	In the sense that Durkheim uses it, Church refers to a unified moral community sharing the same religious beliefs and practises
<b>Clan exogamy</b>	A kinship rule, which forbids marriage within the clan. Marriage partners must be members of another clan.
<b>Collective effervescence</b>	A collective feeling of enthusiasm and excitement, which serves to strengthen bonds between individuals who feel proud to be members of the same society.
<b>Collective representations</b>	Durkheim uses this term to denote the ideas, thoughts and concepts of a group which result from shared perceptions, e.g., ideas of beauty, truth, right, wrong etc.
<b>Ethical prophets</b>	These are persons who give people a powerful message, usually a religious one. They usually call for an overthrow of an existing social order, which they regard as evil and give their followers an alternative which they often claim has been revealed to them by god. Religions like Judaism, Islam and Christianity are 'prophetic' religions.
<b>Empirical</b>	Based on observed facts
<b>Magic</b>	An activity through which individuals try to manipulate nature for positive or negative reasons. It is found in almost all simple societies and persists even in more complex ones.

<b>Pre-destination</b>	The Calvinist (Protestant) belief that individuals are 'elected' to go to heaven not because of their own efforts, but due to the will of god which can neither be known nor influenced.	<b>Religion: Durkheim and Weber</b>
<b>Rationality/rationalisation</b>	Rationality in Weber's usage refers to a unique trend in Western Europe. It refers to the attempt at making human life more controlled by making it methodical and regularised. Human beings no longer see themselves as victims of the environment but as masters or controllers of it.	
<b>Sacred and profane</b>	The two polar opposites into which the world is divided, according to Durkheim. The 'sacred' refers to holy, pure, superior things; the 'profane' refers to ordinary, mundane ones.	
<b>Totemism</b>	A religion in which an animal, plant or some object is held as sacred and from which the group claims descent.	

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## 19.7 FURTHER READING

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Aron, Raymond 1970. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Vols. 1 and 2, Penguin Books: London, (see the sections on Durkheim and Weber).

Collins, Randall 1986. *Max Weber: A Skeleton Key*. Sage Publications: Beverly Hills.

Jones, Robert Alun 1986. *Emile Durkheim: An Introduction to Four Major Works*. Sage Publications: Beverly Hills.

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## 19.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i)
  - a) this would help him understand the complex, organised religions
  - b) beliefs and rituals
  - c) mundane, ordinary aspects of day-to-day existence.
- ii) Durkheim distinguishes between magic and religion by pointing out that magic is a private, selfish practice. It is performed at the individual level for some selfish interests. Nature is sought to be manipulated for individual gains. The bond is only between the magician and the client. In religion, on the other hand, people are united by their faith. Religion is public and social, and followers lead a common life.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Members of the clan believe themselves to have descended from a common ancestor. They may not be blood relatives, but they share the same name and totem. Hence they cannot inter-marry.
- ii) Society exerts physical and moral force and authority on the individuals. It is 'sui-generis' and has a reality of its own. Hence it is worshipped.
- iii) Both religion and science contribute to the collective representations of society. Both seek universal principles which will help people lead lives that are both, individual and social. Since religion and science both seek the same goals, they cannot be in conflict.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i)
  - a) the doctrine of karma
  - b) *moksha*
  - c) harmony
  - d) mastery over the environment
  - e) meaningfulness to actors

### **Check Your Progress 4**

- i)
  - a) maintaining social order, helping to shape new ways of thinking and acting.
  - b) Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Mohammed
  - c) Symbolic thought
  - d) rationality, traditional and mystical claims of religion
  - e) empirical observations and factual information.

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# UNIT 20 DIVISION OF LABOUR —

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## DURKHEIM AND MARX

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Division of Labour –  
Durkheim and Marx

### Structure

- 20.0 Objectives
- 20.1 Introduction
- 20.2 Socio-Economic Setting and Meaning of ‘Division of Labour’
  - 20.2.0 Socio-economic Setting
  - 20.2.1 Meaning of Division of Labour
- 20.3 Durkheim’s Views on Division of Labour
  - 20.3.0 Functions of Division of Labour
  - 20.3.1 Causes of Division of Labour
  - 20.3.2 Abnormal Forms of Division of Labour
- 20.4 Marx’s Views on Division of Labour
  - 20.4.0 Social Division of Labour and Division of Labour in Manufacture
  - 20.4.1 Implications of Division of Labour in Manufacture
  - 20.4.2 Marx’s Remedy - Revolution and Change
- 20.5 A Comparison
  - 20.5.0 Causes of Division of Labour
  - 20.5.1 Consequences of Division of Labour
  - 20.5.2 Solutions to the Problems Related to Division of Labour
  - 20.5.3 Durkheim’s ‘Functional Model’ of Society and Marx’s ‘Conflict Model’
- 20.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 20.7 Key Words
- 20.8 Further Reading
- 20.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 20.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- describe Emile Durkheim’s views on division of labour as expressed in his work *The Division of Labour in Society*
- outline Karl Marx’s views on division of labour
- compare the distinct views of Durkheim and Marx on division of labour.

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## 20.1 INTRODUCTION

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In this unit, you are going to study the similarities and differences in the manner in which Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx treated the process of “division of labour”.



To begin with, we will briefly describe the socio-economic setting in which Durkheim and Marx expressed their views. We will then explain the concept of division of labour. This will be the first section (20.2).

In the second section (20.3) we will study the views of Emile Durkheim on division of labour which he put across in his Ph.D. thesis entitled *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893).

We will go on to study Karl Marx's analysis of the topic in the third section (20.4).

Finally in the fourth section (20.5), we will compare and contrast the positions of these founding fathers.

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## **20.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC SETTING AND MEANING OF DIVISION OF LABOUR**

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In the following sub-sections we shall first describe the socio-economic setting in which Durkheim and Marx worked. This will help us understand their views better. We shall then see exactly what is meant by the term 'division of labour'. What does it involve? Why is it practised? These are some of the points we will tackle in this section.

### **20.2.0 Socio-Economic Setting**

Durkheim and Marx lived in an age in which Europe was experiencing the 'Industrial Revolution'. As we have studied earlier in this course, the Industrial Revolution was characterised by a shift in the technique of production. Small-scale, domestic production of commodities gave way to large-scale mass production in factories.

Change took place not just in the economic sphere. Cities and their populations grew and so did the incidence of poverty, crime and other social problems. Social stability and order were under threat. The traditional, feudal society was crumbling and the modern, industrial world was coming into being.

The social context in which Durkheim and Marx lived was such that they had to evolve or work out explanations for what they saw in the society around them. We shall see the very distinct manner in which they approached the process of division of labour. This was a process, which was becoming conspicuous with the advance of industrialisation.

Let us now understand what division of labour means.

### **20.2.1 Meaning of Division of Labour**

By the phrase of 'division of labour' we mean the splitting up of an activity into a number of parts or smaller processes. These smaller processes are undertaken by different persons or groups of persons, thereby speeding up the performance of the activity. Let us take an example. You want to make a shirt. It will take you quite some time to do the entire job yourself. If, however, some friends decide to join you, the job can be simplified. One person may do the cutting, another may do the machine-stitching, a third

may do the finishing stitches by hand. This will save you a great deal of time and energy. You and your friends can probably make many more shirts in the same time it would take you alone to make a single shirt. You have divided labour and hence saved time and increased productivity. Division of labour implies specialisation, (i.e., each person becoming an expert in his or her task) saving time and saving costs and at the same time increasing productivity.

The concept of division of labour was systematically discussed by the Scottish economist Adam Smith in his work *Wealth of Nations* (1776). Smith felt that the division of labour was the primary source of economic progress. It was the vehicle through which economic development would advance. You may read more about Adam Smith in Box 20.1.

### **Box 20.1 Adam Smith**

Adam Smith is regarded as one of the pioneers of modern economics. He was born in 1723 in Kirkcaldy, a small town near Edinburgh, Scotland. After his early schooling in Kirkcaldy, Adam Smith went on to the University of Edinburgh where he was awarded an M.A. in 1740. He then went to Oxford. In 1751, Smith was appointed a professor of moral philosophy in the University of Glasgow. During his tenure, which lasted until 1763, Smith produced his first book, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759).

Smith began work on his, magnum opus, *The Wealth of Nations* after a two-year stay in Europe. There, he met a number of philosophers, notably the great Frenchman Voltaire, all of whom exerted a profound impact on him. *The Wealth of Nations* was published in March 1776. In this book, he tried to study the history, causes and limitations of economic “progress” or development. Adam Smith saw the basic source of development in the individual’s desire to improve economic status. Smith identified division of labour as the process which helped accelerate economic development. Smith used an impressive collection of economic data, which he gathered from his wide readings and sharp observations. Some of this data is referred to by economists even today. *The Wealth of Nations* remains one of the most important works in social science because it was one of the first attempts to study comprehensively the competitive, individualistic world of industrial capitalism. This book also contained an evaluation and sharp criticism of existing society and government. Smith strongly opposed government intervention in economic matters. In his opinion, human beings should be free to pursue their economic goals. This would lead not just to personal gains, but the benefit of society as a whole.

After the publication of this book, Smith settled in Edinburgh. He died on July 17th, 1790. He is remembered as one of the important figures in the history of economic thought.

We have so far discussed the meaning of the term in an economic sense. Division of labour has a social side as well. It is the social aspect of this phenomenon that Emile Durkheim examines in *The Division of Labour in Society*. Let us now describe the main points made in this work.

## Check Your Progress 1

- i) Fill up the blanks in the following sentences.
  - a) The Industrial Revolution marked a change from..... production of commodities to .....production in factories.
  - b) ..... was becoming more conspicuous with the advance of industrialisation.
  - c) ..... said that division of labour was the primary source of economic development
- ii) State whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F)
  - a) Division of labour leads to wastage to time. (T/F)
  - b) Durkheim wanted to study the economic aspect of division of labour T/F
  - c) Division of labour leads to specialisation T/F

---

### 20.3 DURKHEEVTS VIEWS ON DIVISION OF LABOUR

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Durkheim's major concern as a sociologist as we have already seen in Unit 18 of this Block is the theme of social order and integration. What holds society together? What keeps it in an integrated whole? Let us first see what Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, Durkheim's predecessors had to say about it.

Auguste Comte suggests that it is social and moral **consensus** that holds society together. Common ideas, values, norms and mores bind individuals and society together.

Herbert Spencer puts across a different view. According to Spencer, it is an interplay of individual interests that holds society together. It serves the selfish interests of individuals to strive for integration. Thus social life is possible.

Durkheim was at variance with these views. If, as Comte suggests, it is moral consensus that holds society together, then would not modern industrial society crumble? After all, modern society is characterised by heterogeneity, mobility, and diversity in activities and values. It is a society where individualism is valued. Spencer's suggestion that selfish interests hold society together was also found to be faulty by Durkheim. If indeed, individual interests hold sway, the resulting competition and antagonism would break the backbone of society. Each would struggle for his own profit even at the expense of the other. Conflict and tension would bring about social disintegration.

The question that arises is, is individualism the natural enemy of social integration and solidarity? Would the Industrial Revolution lead to nothing but the destruction of social bonds? Durkheim thinks otherwise.

According to him, the basis or focus of social integration differs in pre-industrial and post-industrial societies. He demonstrates how the process of occupational specialisation or division of labour helps to integrate societies where heterogeneity, differentiation and complexity are to be found. These societies, as you have already studied in Block 3 are those based on organic solidarity. In the following sub-sections we will see how Durkheim studies division of labour in terms of

- 1) the function of division of labour
- 2) the causes underlying division of labour
- 3) deviations from the normal type of division of labour, i.e. abnormal forms.

### **20.3.0 Functions of Division of Labour**

As you have already studied, Durkheim classifies human societies into

- i) those based on ‘mechanical solidarity’ and
- ii) those based on ‘organic solidarity’.

#### **i) Mechanical Solidarity**

As you know, mechanical solidarity refers to a solidarity of resemblance or likeness. There exists a great deal of homogeneity and tightly-knit social bonds which serve to make the individual members one with their society. The collective conscience is extremely strong. By collective conscience we mean the system of beliefs and sentiments held in common by members of a society which defines what their mutual relations ought to be. The strength of the collective conscience integrates such societies, binding together individual members through strong beliefs and values. Violation of or deviation from these values is viewed very seriously. Harsh or repressive punishment is given to offenders. Once again, it must be pointed out that this is a solidarity or unity of likeness and homogeneity. Individual differences are extremely limited and division of labour is at a relatively simple level. Briefly, in such societies, individual conscience is merged with the collective conscience.

#### **ii) Organic Solidarity**

By organic solidarity, Durkheim means a solidarity based on difference and complementarity of differences. Take factory, for example. There is a great deal of difference in the work, social status, income, etc. of a worker and a manager. Yet, the two complement each other. Being a manager is meaningless without the cooperation of workers and workers need to be organised by managers. Thus they are vital for each other’s survival.

Societies based on organic solidarity are touched and transformed by the growth of industrialisation. Thus, division of labour is a very important aspect of such societies. A society based on organic solidarity is thus one where heterogeneity, differentiation and variety exist. The growing complexity of societies reflects in personality types, relationships and

problems. In such societies, the strength of the collective conscience lessens, as individual conscience becomes more and more distinct, more easily distinguished from the collective conscience. Individualism becomes increasingly valued. The kind of grip that social norms have on individuals in mechanical solidarity loosens. Individual autonomy and personal freedom become as important in organic solidarity as social solidarity and integration in societies characterised by mechanical solidarity.

Does this mean that modern society has nothing to integrate it? Division of labour, says Durkheim, is the process that will help keep society integrated. How? Well, as we have already seen, division of labour implies working together at certain tasks, in other words, it implies cooperation. As work becomes more and more divided, two consequences can be seen. On the one hand, each individual becomes specialised in his field. He can exercise his initiative and creativity in his special field. On the other hand, each individual grows to depend more intimately on society. Cooperation and complementarity are the watchwords of such a society. The kind of solidarity produced, namely organic solidarity, is of a higher order than mechanical solidarity. It allows individuals to exercise their freedom and initiative even while binding them to each other and to society. Thus, the process, which helps the growth of both, individualism and social integration, is division of labour. At this point it is a good idea to complete Activity 1 in order to appreciate the concept of division of labour. We would then look at Durkheim's answer to the question posed above.

### **Activity 1**

How is labour divided in the household? Write a note of about two pages covering the following points (i) nature and allocation of tasks, (ii) the extent to which division of labour helps or hinders smooth functioning of the household.

Let us now examine in this case the causes of division of labour as described by Durkheim.

### **20.3.1 Causes of Division of Labour**

What leads to the process, of division of labour or, what are the causal factors? Durkheim provides a sociological answer to this question. According to him, division of labour arises as a result of increased material and moral density in society. By material density Durkheim means the sheer increase in the number of individuals in a society, in other words, population growth. By moral density he means the increased interaction that results between individuals as a consequence of growth in numbers.

The growth in material and moral density results in a struggle for existence. If, as in societies characterised by mechanical solidarity, individuals tend to be very similar, doing the same things, they would also struggle or compete for the same resources and rewards. Growth of population and shrinking of natural resources would make competition more bitter. But division of labour ensures that individuals specialise in different fields and areas. Thus they can coexist and, in fact complement each other. But does this ideal state of affairs always prevail? Let us see what Durkheim says.

### 20.3.2 Abnormal Forms of Division of Labour

If division of labour helped societies achieve integration and a newer, higher form of solidarity, why was European society of that time in such a chaotic state? Was division of labour creating problems? What had gone wrong?

According to Durkheim, the kind of division of labour that was taking place was not the 'normal'-type that he wrote about. Abnormal types or deviations from the normal were being observed in society. Briefly, these included

#### 1) **Anomie**

This term means a state of normlessness. Material life changes rapidly, but rules norms and values do not keep pace with it. There seems to be a total breakdown of rules and norms. In the work sphere, this reflects in conflicts between labour and management, degrading and meaningless work and growing class conflict.

To put it simply, individuals are working and producing but fail to see any meaning in what they are doing. For instance, in a factory assembly-line workers have to spend the whole day doing boring, routine activities like fixing screws or nails to a piece of machinery. They fail to see any meaning in what they do. They are not made to feel that they are doing anything useful, they are not made to feel an important part of society. Norms and rules governing work in a factory have not changed to the extent that they can make the worker's activities more meaningful or show the workers that society needs and values them.

#### 2) **Inequality**

Division of labour based on inequality of opportunity, according to Durkheim, fails to produce long-lasting solidarity. Such an abnormal form results in individuals becoming frustrated and unhappy with their society. Thus tensions, rivalries and antagonism result. One may cite the Indian caste system as an example of division of labour based on inequality. People have to do certain kinds of work not because of their capacity but because of their birth. This can be very frustrating to those who want to do more satisfying or rewarding jobs, but cannot have access to proper opportunities.

#### 3) **Inadequate organisation**

In this abnormal form the very purpose of division of labour is destroyed. Work is not well organised and coordinated. Workers are often engaged in doing meaningless tasks. There is no unity of action. Thus solidarity breaks down and disorder results. You may have observed that in many offices, a lot of people are sitting around idly doing little or nothing. Many are unaware of their responsibilities. Collective action becomes difficult when most people are not very sure of what they have to do. Division of labour is supposed to increase productivity and integration. In the example discussed above, the opposite takes place (see Giddens 1978: 21-33).



So far in this unit, we have seen how Durkheim views division of labour not just as an economic process but a social one. Its primary role, according to him, is to help modern industrial societies become integrated. It would perform the same function for organic solidarity that the collective conscience performed in mechanical solidarity. Division of labour arises as a result of the competition for survival brought about by growing material and moral density. Specialisation offers a way whereby various individuals may coexist and cooperate. But in the European society of the time, division of labour seemed to be producing entirely different and negative results. Social order seemed to be under serious threat.

Durkheim however describes this as deviations from the normal type. He terms these as (1) **anomie**, wherein new rules and norms governing division of labour do not arise, (2) inequality, which results in discontent, tension and conflict and (3) inadequate organisation, which makes division of labour meaningless, producing disunity and disintegration.

Let us now move on to the next section and study the views of Karl Marx on division of labour. But before that, do check your progress.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) State whether the following statements are true or false
  - a) Auguste Comte explained social integration in terms of individual interests. T/F
  - b) Durkheim agreed that moral consensus was what held modern industrial society together. T/F
  - c) According to Durkheim, individualism and social integration were natural enemies. T/F
  - d) The collective conscience becomes stronger in organic solidarity according to Durkheim. T/F

- ii) Answer the following in about five sentences each.
  - a) Why is organic solidarity of a higher order than mechanical solidarity, according to Durkheim?  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....  
.....
  - b) How do material and moral density lead to division of labour?  
.....  
.....  
.....

- .....
- .....
- c) What did Durkheim mean by “anomie”?
- .....
- .....
- .....

---

## 20.4 MARX’S VIEWS ON DIVISION OF LABOUR

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In the following sub-sections we shall try to understand

- i) the distinction made by Marx between social division of labour and division of labour in industry or manufacture.
- ii) the implications of division of labour in manufacture.
- iii) Marx’s remedy to the problems created by division of labour, namely, revolution and change.

### 20.4.0 Social Division of Labour and Division of Labour in Manufacture

Let us first try to understand what Marx means by division of labour. In this analysis of the topic in the first chapter of ‘Capital’, Volume 1, Marx pin-points two types of division of labour, namely, social division of labour and division of labour in manufacture.

- 1) **Social division of labour:** This exists in all societies. It is a process that is bound to exist in order that members of a society may successfully undertake the tasks that are necessary to maintain social and economic life. It is a complex system of dividing all the useful forms of labour in a society. For instance, some individuals produce food, some produce handicrafts, weapons and so on. Social division of labour promotes the process of exchange of goods between groups, e.g., the earthenware pots produced by a potter may be exchanged for a farmer’s rice or a weaver’s cloth (see Figure 20.1: Social Division of Labour). Such exchanges spur on or provide an impetus to specialisation.

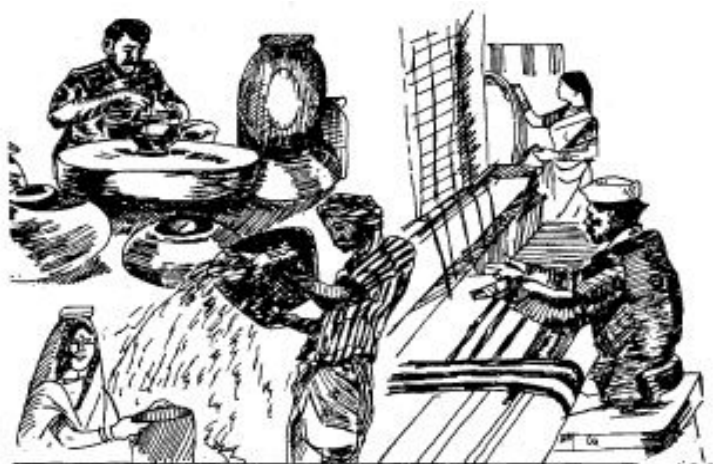


Figure 20.1 Social Division of Labour

- 2) **Division of labour in industry or manufacture:** This is a process, which is prevalent in industrial societies where capitalism and the factory system exist. In this process, manufacture of a commodity is broken into a number of processes. Each worker is limited to performing or engaging in a small process like work in an **assembly line** (see Figure 20.2: Division of Labour in Manufacture). This is usually boring, monotonous and repetitive work. The purpose of this division of labour is simple; it is to increase productivity. The greater the productivity the greater the **surplus value** generated. It is generation of surplus value that motivates capitalists to organise manufacture in a manner that maximises output and minimises costs. It is division of labour, which makes mass production of goods possible in modern, industrial societies. Unlike social division of labour where independent producers create products and exchange them with other independent producers, division of labour in manufacture completely divorces the worker from his product. Let us examine this point in more detail by trying to understand the implications of division of labour in manufacture.



Figure 20.2 Division of Labour in Manufacture

### 20.4.1 Implications of Division of Labour in Manufacture

#### 1) Profits accrue to the capitalist

As earlier described, division of labour in manufacture help to generate more and more surplus value leading to capital accumulation. Marx tackles a crucial question, namely, who takes away the profits? Not the workers, says Marx, but the capitalists. Not those who actually produce, but those who own the means of production. According to him, division of labour and the existence of private property together consolidate the power of the capitalist. Since the capitalist owns the means of production, the production process is designed and operated in such a way that the capitalist benefits the most from it.

## 2) **Workers lose control over what they produce**

According to Marx with division of labour in manufacture workers tend to lose their status as the real creators of goods. Rather, they become mere links in a production chain designed and operated by the capitalists. Workers are separated from the products of their labour; in fact, they hardly ever see the end result of their work. They have no control over its sale and purchase. For example, does a worker in an assembly line in a factory producing washing-machines really get to see the finished product? He/she might see it in an advertisement or at a shop window. The worker will not be able to sell it or afford to buy it, having been merely a small part of the production of that machine. The actual control over it is exercised by the capitalist. The worker as an independent producer no longer exists. The worker has become enslaved by the production process.

## 3) **Dehumanisation of the Working Class**

The capitalist system characterised by division of labour is one where workers stop being independent producers of goods. They become suppliers of labour-power, which is needed for production. The worker's individual personality needs and desires mean nothing to the capitalist. It is only the worker's labour-power which is sold to the capitalist in exchange for wages that concerns the capitalist. The working class is thus stripped of its humanness and labour-power becomes a mere commodity purchased by the capitalist, in Marx's view.

## 4) **Alienation**

One of the important concepts developed by Marx in understanding the realities of the industrial world is that of alienation. You have already studied this in Block 2.

The process of production and division of labour is one which forces the worker to do boring, tedious, repetitive work. The worker is robbed of all control over his/her work. The worker becomes alienated from the products he/she is creating, from the production process he/she is a part of, from fellow workers and from society at large (see Kolakowski, 1978: 281-287).

### **Activity 2**

Observe the process of division of labour in a factory or a cottage industry. Jot down your findings in about two pages and compare them, if possible with the other students at your Study Centre.

## **20.4.2 Marx's Remedy - Revolution and Change**

Can the problems of loss of control, dehumanisation and alienation be countered? For Marx it is the abolition of private property, and the establishment of a classless society is the way out. Are labourers forced to be enslaved by the production process? Is division of labour forever to be imposed on them, restricting their creativity and control over their work?

Marx holds that social division of labour has to exist in order that the material conditions of human life may be met. But it is division of labour

in production that has to be reorganised. It is only when private property is abolished through the revolution of the proletariat that the workers can gain freedom from the alienative division of labour that has been thrust upon them.

The establishment of a communist society according to Marx will enable workers to own and control the means of production. The reorganised production process will enable each individual to realise his/her potential and exercise creativity. Marx and Engels describe their vision in the following words:

“In communist society where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, herdsman or critic” (*German Ideology*, Vol. I, Sect. IAI).

In the above discussion, we saw how Marx distinguished between social division of labour and division of labour in manufacture. Social division of labour is essential for the basis of material life in all societies. Division of labour in manufacture, however, comes into existence with the development of industrialisation and capitalism.

The existence of division of labour in manufacture has the following implications, namely,

- 1) Profits accrue to the capitalist.
- 2) Workers lose control over what they produce.
- 3) Dehumanisation of the working class takes place.
- 4) Alienation takes place at all levels.

In order to handle these problems, Marx preaches the ‘revolution of the proletariat’, which will do away with private property and transfer the ownership of the means of production in the hands of the workers. This will result in the production process being designed and operated by the workers themselves, enabling workers to give scope to their creativity, and excel at a variety of tasks. They will not be forced into a boring exploitative routine.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Answer the following questions in three lines each.
  - a) What did Marx mean by “social division of labour?”

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- b) “Workers lose control over their products as a result of division of labour in manufacture.” Explain this statement.

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ii) Tick the correct alternative.

- a) According to Marx, the working class becomes dehumanised because

- i) machines are introduced in factories.
- ii) the working class is regarded only as a supplier of “labour power”.
- iii) workers cannot buy the goods they produce.

- b) Workers become alienated from production because

- i) they are engaged in monotonous work.
- ii) they do not share the profits and have no control over their production.
- iii) they sell their labour-power for wages.

- c) The communist revolution would result in

- i) complete abolition of division of labour.
- ii) no change in division of labour in manufacture.
- iii) a production process designed and operated by the workers themselves.

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## **20.5 A COMPARISON**

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We have separately studied the views of Durkheim and Marx on division of labour. Let us now compare their views. To make this comparison easier, we shall compare their views on division of labour under the following headings viz.

- i) Causes of division of labour
- ii) Consequences of division of labour
- iii) Solutions to the problems related to division of labour
- iv) Durkheim’s ‘Functional’ model of society and Marx’s ‘Conflict’ model.

### **20.5.0 Causes of Division of Labour**

Both, Durkheim and Marx make a very clear distinction between division of labour in simple societies and complex industrial societies. Division of labour is an inevitable and necessary aspect of the socio-economic life of



any society. But they are more concerned and interested in the division of labour that takes place in industrial societies.

Durkheim explains division of labour in industrial societies as a consequence of increased material and moral density. As we have studied earlier, he looks at specialisation or division of labour as a means through which competition or the struggle for existence can be eased. Specialisation is what makes it possible for large numbers of people to live and work together without fighting, because each has a distinct part to play in society. It makes team-work and coexistence possible.

Marx too considers division of labour in manufacture a feature of industrial society. But unlike Durkheim, he does not see it as a means of cooperation and coexistence. Rather, he views it as a process forced upon workers in order that the capitalist might extract profit. He sees it as a process closely linked with the existence of private property. The means of production are concentrated in the hands of the capitalist. Therefore, the capitalist has to design a production process that will result in maximum profit. Hence, division of labour is imposed on workers. They sell their labour-power to the capitalist for wages. They are reduced to doing monotonous, boring and unimaginative activities so that productivity increases and the capitalist's profits increase.

Briefly, Durkheim says the causes of division of labour lie in the fact that individuals need to cooperate and do a variety of tasks in order that industrial society may survive. According to Marx, division of labour is imposed on workers so that the capitalists may benefit. Durkheim stresses cooperation, whilst Marx stresses exploitation and conflict.

### **20.5.1 Consequences of Division of Labour**

Following from their differing views on the causes of division of labour in modern industrial societies, Durkheim's and Marx's perceptions on the consequences of division of labour too are bound to be different. Durkheim, as earlier mentioned, sees division of labour as a process that would help individuals coexist and cooperate. We have already studied how he views division of labour as being a force of social integration promoting organic solidarity. In a "normal" situation, division of labour contributes to social integration by giving each individual a specialised activity to perform. Each can develop his/her powers of creativity and innovation in his or her specialised task. At the same time, each would depend more and more on others doing **complementary** activities. Thus social bonds would become more firm, more enduring.

Anomic division of labour based on inequality and inadequate organisation are pathological or abnormal forms, according to Durkheim. They are not caused by division of labour as such. They are the result of society being in a state of flux. Norms, rules and regulations governing new economic relations have not yet come into being. The economic sphere is changing rapidly, but new norms regulating it have not yet emerged properly.

Marx on the other hand sees division of labour as a process imposed on workers by capitalists. Its consequences, as we have already studied, are that it leads to dehumanisation of the work force. Alienation results. Workers

are reduced to things. Their creativity, their control over their creation is taken away. Their labour becomes a commodity that can be bought and sold at the market place. Thus they become mere parts of the production process rather than the producers themselves. Their personalities, their problems mean nothing to their employers. They are regarded as nothing more than work-machines. Thus they are literally dehumanised. Being part of a system they cannot control, they suffer from alienation at all levels; from their work, their fellow-workers and the social system itself.

Briefly, Durkheim sees division of labour as a process that can be the basis of integration. Marx sees it as a process bringing about dehumanisation and alienation, separating the creators from their creation. The workers become slaves of the system of which they should have been the masters.

### **20.5.2 Solutions to the Problems Related to Division of Labour**

As we have seen earlier, Durkheim sees division of labour as a process, which under normal circumstances will bring about social integration. The pathological or abnormal forms of division of labour that prevail in society have to be solved in order that division of labour might perform its integrative functions.

Anomie according to Durkheim can be handled by making workers conscious of their role in society. By making them feel organically linked and involved with the life of society, the frustration of doing “meaningless” work can be eased. Meaninglessness will then be changed into an awareness of the significance of their productive roles.

According to Marx, capitalism itself is the problem. Division of labour brings about dehumanisation, alienation and loss of control. The way out is through revolution, through which workers gain control over the means of production. They will then organise and operate the production process in such a manner that dehumanisation and alienation will become things of the past.

### **20.5.3 Durkheim’s ‘Functional Model’ of Society and Marx’s ‘Conflict Model’**

Durkheim’s study of division of labour brings out his **functional model of society**. Social institutions and processes are viewed by him in terms of the contributions they make to keeping a society alive. You have studied this in Unit 18 of this Block. Durkheim tries to give an explanation to the question of order. Remember, he lived at a time when social order seemed to be under threat. His task therefore was to demonstrate that the changes that were taking place would not destroy society but contribute to integrating the new society that was emerging. Durkheim does not merely look at the economic aspect of division of labour but rather its social aspect, its contribution to social integration.

Marx responds quite differently to the challenges thrown up by industrialisation. He does not share Durkheim’s view that society is basically in a state of equilibrium and that social institutions and processes exist

only because they help to integrate society. Marx views human history as a history of class struggle, or a series of struggles between the oppressors and the oppressed. Capitalism is a phase in human history marked by the struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The system of production that exists under capitalism is designed to exploit the workers. The interests of the workers conflict with those of the capitalists. The revolution of the proletariat, Marx believes, will overthrow the old system and bring in the new. Contradictions, conflict and change are the key-words in Marx's understanding of society.

Briefly, Durkheim sees society as a system held together by the integrative contributions of its various institutions. Marx sees history as a series of struggles between the 'haves' and 'have-nots'. This leads to conflict and change. This is the main difference in their approaches.

**Check Your Progress 4**

- i) Arrange the serial numbers of the following statements under the appropriate headings:

**DURKHEIM'S VIEWS**

**MARX'S VIEWS**

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- a) Division of labour is exploitative.
- b) Division of labour leads to cooperation.
- c) Division of labour is conducive to social integration.
- d) Division of labour strips the worker of all control.
- e) Division of labour is a feature of the modern capitalist world.
- f) The problems of the industrial world are abnormal forms.
- g) The problem of the industrial world is capitalism itself.
- h) Division of labour based on inequality will create problems in society.

- ii) Distinguish between Durkheim’s functionalism and Marx conflict model in their treatment of the topic ‘division of labour’. Answer in eight lines.

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## 20.6 LET US SUM UP

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We first studied the meaning of the term “division of labour”. We then studied the views of Emile Durkheim on division of labour. These views were put across in his work *Division of Labour in Society*. The main points expressed in this book were organised under the following headings

- 1) Functions of division of labour
- 2) Causes of division of labour
- 3) Abnormal forms.

We then dealt with the views of Karl Marx on division of labour. We saw the difference he made between social division of labour and division of labour in manufacture. We studied the implications of division of labour in manufacture, namely, how

- 1) profits accrue to the capitalist.
- 2) workers lose control over what they produce.
- 3) dehumanisation of the working class takes place.
- 4) alienation takes place at all levels.

We then described Marx’s remedy for this situation, namely, revolution which would establish a communist society where each individual could develop his/her creative powers.

Finally, we compared the views of Durkheim and Marx under the following headings

- 1) Causes of division of labour
- 2) Consequences of division of labour
- 3) Solutions to the problems related to division of labour
- 4) Durkheim’s functional model of society and Marx’s conflict model.

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## 20.7 KEYWORDS

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<b>Assembly line</b>	A feature of the modern factory system wherein workers assemble or put together the various parts of a commodity or perform certain operations on it. Each has a specific task to do. This speeds up production.
<b>Anomie</b>	This term is used by Durkheim to convey a situation in which the individual does not feel integrated in society. Social norms and values seem unclear and unintegrated and the individual does not feel morally involved with the affairs of society.
<b>Complementary</b>	Something that helps, supports e.g. the role of a nurse is complementary to that of a doctor.
<b>Consensus</b>	Agreement amongst the members of society regarding social norms, values, allocation of roles and rewards. Consensus helps to maintain social order.
<b>Conflict model of society</b>	This is a way of looking at society which stresses on the tensions which mark society, rather than social order. According to Marx, the social relations of production are the basis of tensions and conflict.
<b>Functional model of society</b>	This way of looking a society stresses on social order and studies how different social institutions and sub-systems function or contribute to maintaining social order.
<b>Heterogeneous</b>	Opposite of 'homogeneous': This means variety, different types, e.g. India has a heterogeneous population, i.e. a variety of races, languages, religions, customs, etc.
<b>Surplus value</b>	When a worker applies his labour power to raw materials, they are converted into commodities. A certain value is added by the worker to the materials. The value created is greater than what is paid to the worker as wages. This difference between the value created and the wage received is called 'surplus value'. Marx says this surplus value is appropriated by the capitalist.

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## 20.8 FURTHER READING

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Aron, Raymond 1970. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Vols. 1 and 2. Penguin Books: London, (see the sections on Marx and Durkheim)

Bottomore, Tom (Ed.) 1983. *Dictionary of Marxist Thought*. Blackwell: Oxford.

Giddens, Anthony 1978. *Durkheim*. Harvester Press: Hassocks

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## 20.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) a) Small-scale, domestic large-scale, mass
- b) Division of labour
- c) Adam Smith
- ii) a) F
- b) F
- c) T

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) F
- b) F
- c) F
- d) F
- ii) a) mechanical solidarity is a solidarity of resemblance. Organic solidarity is based on differences and complementarity of differences. Thus individuals can be innovative and at the same time need to depend on each other and on society. So individualism and social integration can exist together. Durkheim therefore feels that organic solidarity is a higher form of solidarity.
- b) Material and moral density help the members of a society come into close contact with each other. A struggle for existence and for scarce resources may come about. In order that they may coexist, individuals specialise in separate fields and division of labour takes place. Thus material and moral density lead to division of labour according to Durkheim.
- c) Anomie, according to Durkheim, is 'pathological' or abnormal. It refers to a situation where norms and rules seem to have broken down. In the sphere of work, for example, individuals have to work and produce but there are no new norms governing them. They fail to see any meaning or purpose in their activity.



### Check Your Progress 3

- i) a) Social division of labour is a complex system of dividing all the useful forms of labour in society. Some people may produce food, others handicraft etc. It promotes exchange of goods and is necessary to maintain social and economic life.
- b) Division of labour in manufacture makes the worker a small part of the production process. The worker does not have anything to do with the product. He/she cannot sell it and often cannot buy it, and thus becomes a slave, not a master of the process of production of goods.
- ii) a) ii b) i c) iii

### Check Your Progress 4

i)

Durkheim's Views	Marx's Views
b)	A0
c)	d)
e)	e)
f)	g)
h)	

- ii) By Emile Durkheim's "functional" model of society we mean the way in which he studied the contributions of social institutions and processes in maintaining social integration. In keeping with this model, he studied division of labour not just as an economic process but as a social one. He tried to show how it contributed to social integration.

Karl Marx, on the other hand saw society in terms of contradictions, conflict and change. Human history is marked by the oppression of one group by another. Division of labour is one of the processes through which capitalists oppress workers. This reflects his 'conflict' model of society.

## Structure

- 21.0 Objectives
- 21.1 Introduction
- 21.2 Karl Marx on Capitalism
  - 21.2.0 Capitalism — A Stage in Human History
  - 21.2.1 Main Features of Capitalism
  - 21.2.2 Capitalism and Class Conflict
- 21.3 Max Weber on Capitalism
  - 21.3.0 Weber on Rationality
  - 21.3.1 Rationalisation and Western Civilisation
  - 21.3.2 Traditional and Rational Capitalism
  - 21.3.3 Pre-conditions for Rational Capitalism — In What Sort of Socio-economic Milieu can Capitalism Develop?
  - 21.3.4 Factors Contributing to the Growth of Rational Capitalism
  - 21.3.5 The Future of the Rationalised Western World: The ‘Iron Cage’
- 21.4 Marx and Weber — A Comparison
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  - 21.4.1 The Emergence of Capitalism
  - 21.4.2 Consequences of Capitalism and Remedy for Change
- 21.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 21.6 Keywords
- 21.7 Further Reading
- 21.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 21.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you should be able to

- summarise the views of Karl Marx on capitalism as a stage in history
- outline Max Weber’s views on capitalism
- understand the similarities and differences in their analysis of capitalism.

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## 21.1 INTRODUCTION

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All through this course, you have been familiarised with the socio-economic context, in which the ‘founding fathers’ of sociology have worked and produced their enduring contributions to our subject.

You have seen how the period of history, in which they lived and worked, was marked by tremendous social change. The challenges and problems

of the rapidly changing world reflect in the way they handled various issues and topics.

In Unit 20 we saw how Emile Durkheim and Max Weber tackled the topic of 'division of labour'. In this unit, we shall try and understand how Karl Marx and Max Weber treated or understood capitalism.

In the first section (21.2), we shall outline the views of Karl Marx. In the next section (21.3), we shall see how Max Weber approached the issue. In the final section (21.4), we shall try and see how their ideas converged and diverged.

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## **21.2 KARL MARX ON CAPITALISM**

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As you have already studied in Block 2, Karl Marx maintains that economic activity and the economic structure is the basis on which social life rests. The economic base or infrastructure comprises a certain mode of production and certain forces and relations of production. The mode of production is not the same everywhere and at all times; it changes during the course of human history. Marx and Engels outline certain stages of world history each characterised by a distinctive economic formation. It is this economic formation that shapes other social sub-systems, which are termed as superstructure like the political structure, religion, values and culture. In German Ideology, Marx and Engels broadly outline four stages of history. These are (i) the primitive communal stage, (ii) the ancient stage based on slavery, (iii) the feudal stage, (iv) the capitalist stage. The study of human history in terms of stages each with its own distinct mode of production forms the basis of the Marxian theory of historical materialism.

As just mentioned each of these stages has a mode of production peculiar to itself. Each stage follows logically from the previous one. This is because each stage contains certain inner contradictions or tensions. These contradictions eventually break the system down and a new stage emerges from the womb of the old.

### **21.2.0 Capitalism: A Stage in Human History**

The stage of capitalism, according to the Marxist interpretation of history, is a natural outcome of the contradictions within the feudal system. The feudal order was marked by the oppression of 'serfs' by the feudal lords. The tensions within the system lead to the breakdown of feudalism freeing large numbers of tenants from the feudal lands. The growing towns absorbed these people. A labour force thus became available for product manufacture. The development of new machines, the birth of the factory system and the mass production of goods consolidated the new economic system called 'capitalism'.

The point that must be stressed is that Marx views capitalism from a historical perspective. Marx does not consider individual members of society as the focus of his theory. He speaks in terms of the whole society. To him, capitalism is a stage in the development of human society, which arises from the contradictions of an earlier stage. It is a stage that will generate its own contradictions too, as we shall see later. The contradictions

inherent in capitalist society will set the stage for the development of Marx's ideal society, the communist society which will be free of the contradictions and tensions of the earlier stages.

### 21.2.1 Main Features of Capitalism

Tom Bottomore (1973) in His *Dictionary of Marxist Thought* sets down some of the main features of capitalism. As a mode of production, capitalism is characterised by the following features.

#### 1) **Production for sale rather than for self-use**

By this we mean a shift from a subsistence economy. In most pre-capitalist economies, production is undertaken for direct consumption. For instance, in agricultural economies, farmers grow crops for their own use, only a small surplus is available for sale. This is because technology is not so advanced and domestic or family labour is used for farming. Such is not the case in a capitalist economy. Here, a large number of workers gather together in a factory. With the help of machines and through division of labour, goods are produced on a mass scale. They are produced for sale in the market. For instance in a factory producing soap, the output is not for the self-use of the producers. It is for sale in the market.

#### 2) **The existence of a market where labour-power is bought and sold**

According to Marx, workers are regarded only in terms of their labour-power. The capitalist or owner hires their labour-power by paying them wages. Workers can sell their labour power or withhold it because they are legally free. Unlike in the earlier stages of human history, workers are not forced to work like slaves or serfs. Sheer economic need forces them to work. They must either work or starve. So, although they are legally free to enter or not enter into contracts with the capitalist, they are not free from hunger, which forces them to sell their labour.

#### 3) **Exchange takes place through money**

As we have seen in point (1) production is undertaken for sale, and sale is transacted through the use of money. Money is the social bond that ties together the various elements in the capitalist system. Hence the role of banks and financial institutions becomes important in the system.

#### 4) **The capitalist controls the production process**

Not only does the capitalist control the hiring and firing of workers, but also decides how production is to be carried out. He decides what is to be produced, the composition of raw materials and machines, and the manner in which the output is to be marketed.

#### 5) **The capitalist controls financial decisions**

This is related to the earlier point. Decisions regarding pricing of the product, wages of the workers, the amount of financial investment and so on are taken by the capitalist.

## 6) **Competition**

Since the whole idea of capitalism is production for sale, there is bound to be competition between capitalists. Whose products will sell the most in the market? Whose profits will be the maximum? This leads to a situation in which each tries to outdo the other. The consequences could be innovation or the use of the latest technology. Competition could also result in the formation of ‘monopolies’ or ‘**cartels**’, where a single producer or group of producers try to dominate the market by pushing or forcing out competitors.

This leads to further concentration and centralisation of capital in a few hands.

Capitalism thus is a system, which according to Marx symbolises the most acute form of exploitation, inequality and **polarisation of classes**. By this is meant that the social distance between the owners of the means of production (i.e., the bourgeoisie) and the working class (the proletariat) becomes greater and greater. The concept of class conflict is very important in Marx’s understanding of capitalism. In order to enhance your understanding of the main features of capitalism, it is a good idea to complete Activity 1.

### **Activity 1**

Go over the sub-section on the main features of capitalism (21.2.2) carefully. Can you observe these features in your society? To what extent? Write down your observations in about one page and compare your note, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

## **21.2.2 Capitalism and Class Conflict**

According to Marx, the history of human society is the history of class struggle. Each stage in human history is marked by a division of society into two groups, the ‘haves’ and the ‘have-nots’, those who dominate and those who are oppressed.

The very foundations on which capitalism survives, namely, the existence of private property, mass production of commodities under the factory system for profit and the existence of a working class that is forced to sell its labour-power in the market, leads to polarisation of classes.

As capitalism progresses, these class divisions become wider. The interests of the bourgeoisie and proletariat become more and more separate. The proletariat becomes unified. After all, they share the same problems and begin to seek the same solutions. A ‘class in itself’ becomes a ‘class for itself’. The revolution of the proletariat will, according to Marx, bring in a new stage of history, ‘communism’, where the owners of the means of production will be the workers themselves. The contradictions of capitalism will be overcome and a new social order will be born.

Briefly, Karl Marx views capitalism as one of the stages in human history, which emerges out of the contradictions of the previous stage. Capitalism

too, is beset with inner contradictions. It is a stage in which class conflict is at its greatest intensity. After all, the means of production are concentrated in a few hands. The labour force is considered only in terms of its labour-power, which can be bought and sold for a price namely, wages. The inequalities of the system lead to polarisation of classes.

The proletariat comes to realise that they have common interests and common problems and will seek solutions to these problems. The proletariat will not just remain a “class in itself” but become a “class for itself”. Their liberation will be through revolution. The revolution of the proletariat will usher in a new stage, communism, where the means of production will be in the hands of the workers themselves.

Let us now complete check your progress 1 and then study Weber’s views on capitalism.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) State whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F).
  - a) According to Marx the stage which followed the primitive communal stage was the capitalist stage. T/F
  - b) The capitalist stage is the only stage characterised by inner contradictions. T/F
  - c) The capitalist economy is a subsistence economy. T/F
  - d) Labourers in the capitalist system are obliged to work like the slaves and serfs. T/F
  - e) As capitalism progresses, classes start coming closer together. T/F
- ii) Answer the following in three sentences each.
  - a) Why did Karl Marx preach the ‘revolution of the proletariat’?  
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.....
  - b) Why do banks and financial institutions become important in the capitalist stage?  
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.....
  - c) Why does ‘polarisation of’ classes’ take place under capitalism?  
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## 21.3 MAX WEBER ON CAPITALISM

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The following sub-sections on Max Weber's analysis of capitalism will make clear how Max Weber takes an independent and more complex view of capitalism. Weber speaks of a special kind of capitalism, namely, 'rational capitalism'. Rational capitalism, according to him, is a uniquely western development (by the west we refer to West Europe and North America). This is because the idea of rationality and the process of rationalisation too are distinctively western.

It is important to bear the link between 'rationality' and 'rational capitalism' constantly in mind. For this purpose we will now discuss Max Weber's views on rationality.

### 21.3.0 Weber on 'Rationality'

To understand Max Weber's ideas regarding capitalism, it is important to first review his understanding of rationality. The growth of 'rationality' in the western world is closely connected with capitalism as you shall soon see. What did Weber mean by rationality and rationalisation? As you have already studied in Unit 17 of Block 4, rationality is a product of the scientific specialisation which is an important feature of western culture. It involves gaining mastery or control of the external world. It involves the organisation of human life in such a manner that greater efficiency and productivity can be attained.

Briefly, rationalisation means an attempt by humans to control the environment by organising and coordinating human activities in a certain regular and predictable manner. Events are not left to chance or to nature. Human beings have gained such a degree of understanding about the world around them that nature is no longer regarded as 'mysterious' or 'incalculable'. Through the use of science and technology, written rules and laws, human activity is systematised. Let us take an example from our day-to-day life. There is a vacancy in an office. One manner of filling the vacancy would be to appoint one's friend or relative. But this is not 'rational' in the Weberian sense. Another way would be to advertise in the newspapers, hold a competitive examination and an interview and select the candidate with the best result. In this method, certain rules and codes have been applied. A certain regularisation, which the first method did not have, has been introduced. Weber would call this an example of rationalisation.

### 21.3.1 Rationalisation and Western Civilisation

According to Weber, rationalisation has been the most distinctive feature of western civilisation. It is rationality, which marks out a number of distinct traits or features, which are not to be found at one and the same time anywhere else in the world. These features include

- 1) **Science**, a body of verifiable knowledge well developed in the west.
- 2) **A rational** state with specialised institutions, written laws and a constitution, which regulates political activity.

- 3) **Art** like western music, for example which has a system of notation, simultaneous use of a number of instruments and so on which are not be observed to the same extent in other systems of music. You may read more about Weber's analysis of rationality in western music in Box 21.1
- 4) **Economy** which is characterised by rational capitalism. We will study this in detail in the following sub-section.

Rationality, as you can see, is not just restricted to a few aspects of human life. Rather, it penetrates and influences all areas of life. It is the most distinctive characteristic of western society (see Freund, 1972:17-24).

#### **Box 21.1: Rationalisation to Western Music**

In 1911 Weber wrote a little book entitled *The Rational and Social Foundations of Music*. In it, he analysed the development of western music in terms of its growing rationality. The scale in modern western music is divided into 'octaves' of twelve notes each. Tones have similar sounds at higher and lower octaves. This makes it possible for melodies to move back and forth in a cycle. Western music is also marked by 'polyvocality', i.e. a number of voices and/or instruments play the same tones together. According to Weber polyvocality which reflects in the 'orchestra' makes western music an organisation. Musicians have distinct roles, which are rationally combined and coordinated. Music thus becomes bureaucratised. Another feature is that western music is formally written down by using a system of notation. Composers write down their compositions and receive recognition for their work. They are acknowledged as creative artists and become role models for other musicians who try to equal and surpass them. Thus, western music is organised and methodical, dynamic and competitive. Composers are the entrepreneurs in the world of music

Let us now study how, according to Weber, 'rationalised economy' or 'rational capitalism' differed from other economic systems and how Weber described the socio-economic setting which would be conducive for the growth of capitalism.

### **21.3.2 Traditional and Rational Capitalism**

In Unit 16 of Block 4 you have briefly studied the difference between 'traditional' capitalism and 'rational' capitalism. Does capitalism merely mean a system for the creation of profit? Is greed or desire for wealth the only characteristic of capitalism? In that case, capitalism existed in most parts of the world. It existed amongst the merchants of ancient Babylon, India and China and Medieval Europe with its powerful merchant guilds. But it was not 'rational' capitalism.

In traditional capitalism, most households are self-sufficient and produce for self-consumption the basic necessities of life. Traditional capitalists mostly trade in luxury goods. Their markets are thus restricted to a few products and a small, select group of clients. Overseas trade is a risky business; in their hunger for profits, traditional capitalists sell goods at

exorbitant rates. Business is a gamble. If successful, the gains are great and so are losses if business fails.

Modern or rational capitalism is not restricted to the production and sale of just a few luxurious or rare commodities. It includes everything; all the ordinary goods in everyday use from bread to cloth to utensils and tools. Unlike traditional capitalism, rational capitalism is dynamic and constantly expanding. New innovations, new methods of production and new products are constantly being invented. Rational capitalism depends on mass production and distribution. Goods must be exchanged in a predictable and repeatable way. Business is no longer seen as a gamble. The modern capitalist does not sell a few products to a few people at a high cost. The idea is to have plenty of customers buying plenty of goods which all can afford.

In short, traditional capitalism is restricted to a few producers, a few commodities and a few clients. The element of risk is high. Business is a gamble. Rational capitalism on the other hand, aims at making all goods marketable. It involves mass production and distribution. Business becomes methodical and regular. In the above discussion, we studied the difference between traditional and rational capitalism. What sort of socio-economic milieu can rational capitalism flourish in? Let us now complete check your progress 2 and then study the main characteristics or pre-conditions necessary for the development of rational capitalism.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

i) Answer the following questions in four sentences each.

a) What does Weber mean by the term “rationalisation”?

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.....

b) How business was conducted by traditional capitalists?

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### **21.3.3 Pre-conditions for Rational Capitalism — In What Sort of Socio-economic Milieu can Capitalism Develop?**

The basic principle underlying modern capitalism, according to Weber, is the rational organisation of productive enterprises, which supply society with its everyday wants. In this sub-section, we shall see what preconditions or socio-economic milieu is necessary for the development of rational capitalism.

- 1) Private ownership of material resources necessary for production (e.g. land, machines, raw materials, factory buildings etc.): The ownership of the means of production by private producers enables these producers to organise a business or enterprise. They can assemble the means of production and initiate the process of production of commodities because they own the means of production.
- 2) Free market: There should be no restrictions on the flow of trade. The political situation should be more or less peaceful. This will allow economic activity to go on undisturbed.
- 3) Rational techniques of production and distribution of goods: This includes the use of machines to speed up production and the application of science and technology in production and distribution of commodities so that a greater number and variety of goods may be produced with maximum efficiency.
- 4) Rational legislation: There should be a system of laws, which apply to all the members of society. This would simplify the making of economic contracts. Each individual would have certain legal obligations and rights, which would be codified or written down.
- 5) Free labour force: Labourers have the legal freedom to work where and when they want to. Their relationship with the employers is contractual, not obligatory. However, though legally free, Weber like Marx is aware that economic compulsions and sheer hunger will make them work. Their “freedom” is thus formal freedom only. In practice, necessity dictates that they work.
- 6) Commercialisation of the economy: To make rational capitalism possible, there must be opportunities for everyone to participate in an enterprise. Individuals can buy stocks, shares bonds etc. and thus become part of the enterprise.

Briefly, rational capitalism is an economic system, which requires that the means of production be privately owned and controlled. With the help of rational technology, goods are produced and freely traded in the market. Workers enter into contracts with their employers, as they are legally free. As all individuals are governed by a common legal system, the making of business contracts is made easy. This system is thus qualitatively different from any other that existed before it.

Let us now study how Weber explains the rise of the rationalisation of the economic system. What leads to the development of rational capitalism? You have seen, in the earlier section, how Karl Marx explains the rise of capitalism. Marx explains it in terms of a change in the mode of production. Does Max Weber view it in basically economic terms? Does he take into account other factors like cultural and political ones? As we shall see in the next sub-section, Weber views capitalism as too complex a phenomenon to be explained away by a single factor. The development of rational capitalism is spurred on by multiple factors, all acting and reacting with each other and producing a certain blend of features, which characterise rational capitalism. We shall be considering the economic, political and cultural or religious factors, which Weber discusses.

### 21.3.4 Factors Contributing to the Growth of Rational Capitalism

It is a common misconception held by some students and scholars that Weber neglects economic factors in his discussion of capitalism. This is not correct. It is only that he does not emphasise economic factors to the extent that Marx does. Let us briefly highlight Weber's view on the role of economic and political factors in the growth of capitalism.

- i) **Economic Factors:** Weber mentions the gradual separation in Europe between the 'household' and 'trade' or business. The process of small-scale domestic production of items for self-consumption gives way to mass production in factories. The spheres of household activity and work become distanced. The growth of transport and communication also contributes to rationalisation of the economy. The use of a common currency and the practice of **book-keeping** make economic transactions easier.
- ii) **Political Factors:** The rise of modern western capitalism is closely connected with the growth of the bureaucratic rational-legal state. The idea of citizenship assumes prominence. Citizens are given certain legal rights and obligations. The **bureaucratic state** helps to break down feudalism and to free land and labour for the capitalist market. The bureaucratic state helps to pacify and politically control large territories. This provides a climate of relative political peace for business to be conducted smoothly. Rationalisation finds full expression in the rise of the bureaucratic state, which in turn contributes to the growth of rational capitalism.

In the above discussion, we have seen how Weber tries to describe the rise of rational capitalism in terms of economic and political factors. We have seen how the shift from domestic to factory production, widespread use of currency, communication and technology helps to shape the new economic system. We have also seen how the bureaucratic state provides certain legal rights and safeguards and a favourable political environment in which business can prosper.

But these explanations alone are not adequate, according to Weber. Human behaviour according to him is a reflection of the meanings human beings ascribe and ideas human beings have about their situation. Underlying human action is a certain ethos, a certain world-view, in keeping with which humans orient their activities. What was the **ethos** of the earliest Western capitalists? How did they view the world around them and how did they locate their own positions in it? Weber found out an interesting statistic, namely, that the majority of leading businessmen, professionals and bureaucrats of that time were Protestants. This led him to speculate on whether the teachings of Protestantism had any bearing on economic behaviour. His famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* has already been discussed in detail in Unit 16, Block 4. Let us now first complete Activity 2 and then review the role of religious beliefs in shaping economic behaviour.

### Activity 2

Read the above section carefully. Jot down the points of similarity that you observe between Weber's and Marx's understanding of the impact of economic factors on the development of capitalism. Write a note of about one page and compare it, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

- iii) **Religious/Cultural Factors - The Protestant Ethic Thesis:** At the very outset it must be pointed out that the "Protestant ethic" and the "spirit of capitalism" (by which Weber referred to an ideal type of the main features of capitalism) do not have a **mechanical or monocausal relationship**. The Protestant ethic according to Weber is one of the sources that bred rational capitalism.

Calvinism, one of the Protestant sects that Weber spoke of, referred to 'predestination'. This refers to the belief that certain individuals were 'elected' by god to attain salvation. This led to a rejection of the **sacraments** by its followers. Rituals and prayers stopped being so important. The doctrine of predestination created an enormous amount of anxiety and loneliness. The early Protestants sought signs of their election by god by striving for professional success. The notion of **calling** resulted in relentless pursuit of hard work and optimum use of time. Individuals led a highly disciplined and organised lifestyle. Constant self-control through systematic effort of will resulted in the rationalisation of individual conduct. This reflected in the way business was conducted. Profits were not wasted on worldly pleasures. They were reinvested so that they could be purposefully used to further expand business. Thus, the **this-worldly asceticism** that Protestantism preached led to rational organisation of every-day affairs. Asceticism or rigorous discipline and self-control were no longer restricted to monks or priests. It became the "mantra" of ordinary human beings who sought to discipline both themselves and the environment. The idea of mastery over the environment was an important idea, which characterised capitalism. In this manner, the ethos or world-view promoted by the Protestant ethic helped to shape rational capitalism. (The distinction between this-worldly asceticism and other worldly asceticism has earlier been made clear to you.)

### 21.3.5 The Future of the Rationalised Western World: The 'Iron Cage'

As we have seen in the above discussion, Weber views rationality as a key process of western civilisation. The rationalisation of economy, polity, cultures and day-to-day existence has important implications. Rationalisation leads to **disenchantment of the world**. Because science seems to have answers for almost everything, human beings lose their reverence and awe for the world. Rationalisation of day-to-day life traps human beings into routines. Life becomes mechanical, predictable and systematic and hence dull. This can have the effect of making human beings less creative and reluctant to break routines and schedules. Human beings get caught in a prison of their own making, an iron cage from which there seems to be no escape. Rational capitalism and its partner, the rational bureaucratic state,



perpetuate a certain life-style in which the roles of human beings are robbed of creativity and adventure. The world around us loses its charm. It reduces humans to automatons. Basically, it is an alienative system.

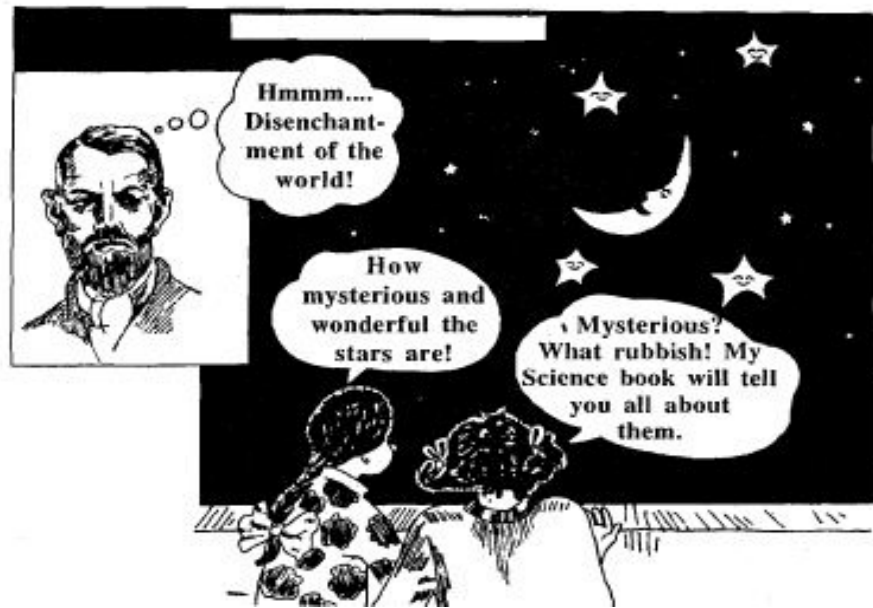


Figure 21.1: Weber's Vision of Future

We have just studied how Max Weber tried to explain the rise of the complex phenomenon known as rational capitalism. Weber did not restrict his explanation to just economic or political factors. He did not discount or neglect these factors, but he did emphasise the importance of the psychological motivations underlying the development of rational capitalism. These motivations resulted from the changing worldview. Human beings no longer viewed themselves as the passive victims of the whims of nature. They adopted an ethic of mastery or control both over the outside world and their inner selves. The message preached by Protestant sects like the Calvinist sect had a major role to play in shaping this changing world-view. The notions of pre-destination and calling made followers anxious to prosper on earth and master it. This helped to develop an economic ethic, which emphasised rational conduct of both, personal life and business, viewing work not as a burdensome necessity but a sacred duty. The notion of calling helped to build up the disciplined army of labour so necessary for capitalism to flourish. Weber's multi-layered analysis thus tries to study the growth of capitalism in terms of changing material and political conditions as well as changing values and ideas.

Weber paints a gloomy picture of the future. Rationality which reflects in economic and political structures will make life routinised and monotonous. Because human beings have explanations for almost everything, life ceases to be interesting and exciting. Human beings will thus be trapped in an iron 'cage' of their own making.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Answer the following in four sentences each.
  - a) Why was rational legislation necessary for the development of rational capitalism?

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b) How did the notion of ‘predestination’ influence the way in which Protestants worked?

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.....

ii) State whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F)

- a) The rise of the bureaucratic state was the single most important factor in the emergence of capitalism, according to Weber. T/F
- b) The idea ‘predestination’ made most Protestants lead a life devoted to prayer and the sacraments. T/F
- c) According to Weber, the rationalised Western world freed human beings from dull routines. T/F

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## 21.4 MARX AND WEBER-A COMPARISON

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We have just examined the views of Karl Marx and Max Weber on the phenomenon known as capitalism. You will have noticed many similarities and differences in their respective approaches. Let us now very briefly try to compare their views.

### 21.4.0 Difference in Approach

In Unit 18 this Block, you studied how the methodology of these thinkers differed. Karl Marx, as you studied earlier, takes society as his unit of analysis. We have used the term social realism to describe this approach. In keeping with this, Marx describes capitalism as one of the historical stages through which society passes.

Weber, on the other hand, studies society in terms of meanings attributed or given by individuals to the world around them. He attempts an **interpretative understanding** of social phenomena. He tries to understand social reality by seeing it from the point of view of the participants in that reality. As you have studied above, he understands capitalism in terms of the psychological motivations of individuals, by interpreting their world-view and the meanings they attach to their activities.

### 21.4.1 The Emergence of Capitalism

Marx sees the emergence of capitalism in terms of a shift in mode of production. To him, the economy or the material world is the infrastructure

or base, which moulds the other sub-systems like culture, religion, polity and the like. So a change in the system is seen primarily as a change in economic system. The emergence of capitalism is thus explained in terms of a changed mode of production which results from the contradictions within the earlier historical stage, in this case, feudalism.

Weber's analysis is much more complex. As you have studied, he does not ignore economic factors in the emergence of rational capitalism. But to him, the problems of meanings, motivations and world-view of individuals are important. World-view, values, beliefs, sentiments help to guide action, including economic action. So, in order to understand why and how rational capitalism emerged, Weber thinks it important to understand the value system that makes it possible. His book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as you have studied earlier reflects this outlook.

Some people say that Weber's work is the exact opposite of Marx's work. They say that while Marx put economy before religion, Weber put religion before economy. This is a rather **simplistic** way of seeing their work. It is more appropriate to say that Weber's analysis complements that of Marx by introducing new dimensions and new angles with which to view as complex a phenomenon as capitalism.

### **Activity 3**

'Marx put economy before religion and Weber put religion before economy'. Do you agree with this statement? Discuss if with your fellow-students and write a note of about a page to support your view.

## **21.4.2 Consequences of Capitalism and Remedy for Change**

For Karl Marx, capitalism symbolises exploitation, dehumanisation and alienation of the working class. It is a system based on inequality and will ultimately break down. This break-down will be brought about by its own inner contradictions. The proletariat will bring about a revolution and thus a new stage of human history, namely, communism will be born.

For Weber too, rational capitalism is basically alienative for human society. Rational capitalism and the rational bureaucratic state go hand in hand. Human life gets routinised, human beings experience disenchantment of the world. But Weber is pessimistic about the future. Unlike Marx, he does not think revolution or collapse of the system very likely. This is because rationality, the basic idea, which supports capitalism, is very necessary for all human activity in the modern world. The progress of science and technology and the human quest to gain control over nature and the world are processes that cannot be reversed. Hence revolutions and rebellions cannot fundamentally change the direction in which society is moving.

While Marx emphasises the irrationality and contradictions in capitalism, which will, according to him, lead to change, Weber speaks of its rationality. It is this very rationality however, which imprisons human beings in its iron-cage.

As we have seen above, Marx and Weber consider capitalism using different approaches. Marx studies it in terms of the historical stages which society passes through. Capitalism emerges as a result of contradictions in the earlier stage bringing about a new mode of production.

Weber too, emphasises economic factors like Marx. But his understanding of capitalism is more complex, taking into account value-systems and beliefs, in keeping with his interpretative understanding of social phenomena. Both thinkers point out that capitalism has negative consequences for human society. However, their vision of the future is very different. Marx preaches revolution and change but Weber has not such hopes. This brings out the major point of distinction. To Marx, capitalism is rooted in irrationality, to Weber it is a reflection of rationality.

**Check Your Progress 4**

- i) Fill in the blanks with suitable words.
  - a) Marx takes ..... as his unit of analysis. This approach is known as .....
  - b) Weber attempted an ..... understanding of social phenomena.
  - c) Whilst Weber spoke of the rationality underlying capitalism, Marx spoke of ..... and .....
  - d) For Marx, the economy was the base or ..... which shaped the .....

- ii) Compare the different ways in which Marx and Weber described the emergence of capitalism. Answer in seven sentences.

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**21.5 LET US SUM UP**

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In this unit, we have studied how Karl Marx and Max Weber studied capitalism, the economic system that came into existence in their times.

In the first section, we went over some of the salient points made by Marx. We saw his treatment of capitalism as a stage in human history. We described the main features of capitalism as outlined by Tom Bottomore. We saw how Marx described class polarisation which would bring about the revolution of the proletariat and the destruction of capitalism.

In the next section, we studied in more detail the points made by Max Weber regarding capitalism. We saw how rationality, which was a distinctive idea in western civilisation, marked all spheres of life. We studied rationalisation of the economy, which reflected in ‘rational capitalism’. We studied the distinction between traditional and rational capitalism. We described how Weber traced the emergence of Western capitalism by considering economic, political and cultural/religious factors. We then briefly touched upon Weber’s views on the future of western civilisation.

In the final section, we briefly compared the views of the two thinkers. We saw how their approaches to the issue, their treatment of its origins and their views of the future differed. We concluded that both regarded capitalism as an alienative system.

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## 21.6 KEYWORDS

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<b>Book-keeping</b>	Accounting, maintaining a record of costs and profits.
<b>Bureaucratic rational legal state</b>	A characteristic feature of modern societies. It is marked by codified laws and rational organisation of government.
<b>Calling</b>	“Following a profession or doing work as a sacred duty which god has “called” an individual to do.
<b>Cartel</b>	A group of industrialists who have come together to monopolise or gain complete control over the market.
<b>Disenchantment of the world</b>	Loss of reverence for the world. Human beings are no longer charmed or fascinated by the world. Since they can master it, they no longer find it exciting or attractive.
<b>Ethos/Ethic</b>	A system of beliefs, values. A world-view
<b>Interpretative understanding</b>	Weber’s method of “verstehen” or interpretative understanding was to study social phenomena by trying to understand them from the point of view of the participants.
<b>Mechanical or monocausal relationship</b>	Based on a single cause. For instance, ‘“heat makes water boil” is a monocausal explanation. Heat is the only causal factor.

<b>Polarisation of classes</b>	Classes seem to be at opposite ends of a scale, or polar opposites. Their interests, their ideas, their material conditions are completely opposed to each other.
<b>Sacrament</b>	Religious texts, e.g., The Bible, the Vedas etc.
<b>Simplistic</b>	Too easy, too obvious, neglecting deeper aspects. For instance, saying that “all drug-addicts come from broken homes” is a simplistic explanation. It neglects other factors like peer influence, poverty etc.
<b>Stocks, shares and bonds</b>	Companies or enterprises invite the public to participate in business by issuing shares, stocks and bonds. These are means by which individuals buy a small share of the company and thus enjoy a small share of the profits known as dividend.
<b>This-worldly asceticism</b>	Asceticism applied to worldly affairs or rigorous self-discipline in day-to-day life. This was the characteristic attitude of the early Protestants according to Weber. He contrasted it with other-worldly asceticism in religions like Hinduism. Here, individuals discipline themselves in order to renounce the world through penance, austerities etc.

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## 21.7 FURTHER READING

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## 28.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

i) a) F



- b) F
  - c) F
  - d) F
  - e) F
- ii) a) Marx said that the revolution of the proletariat would usher in a new social order, communism. The workers would own and control the means of production. In this way, the contradictions of the earlier stages would overcome.
- b) In the capitalist stage, commodities are exchanged for money. Money becomes the social bond in the capitalist system. Hence banks and financial institutions have an important role to play.
- c) Capitalism is a stage marked by a great deal of inequality. The capitalists own and control the means of production while the workers are forced to sell their labour power. The distance between these two classes becomes greater and greater leading to polarisation.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) a) By the term rationalisation, Max Weber meant the organisation of both the external world and human life itself. The external world was to be mastered and human activity was to be coordinated in such a manner as to result in greater efficiency and productivity. Nothing was left to chance or nature.
- b) Traditional capitalists treated business as a gamble. The products they sold were limited in range and often very expensive. Their clients were few. Overseas trade being very risky, business too was a very risky and uncertain affair.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) a) Rational legislation implies a legal system common to all. It means codification or writing down of rules and laws pertaining to individual rights and obligations. This makes it easier to enter into business contracts and helps in the growth of rational capitalism.
- b) The notion of predestination created a great deal of anxiety and insecurity in the minds of followers. They sought signs of their election not through prayers and rituals but through professional success. To be successful on this earth, they worked hard and reinvested their profits back into business so that they could be productively used.
- ii) a) F
- b) F
- c) F

## Check Your Progress 4

- i)
  - a) society, social realism
  - b) interpretative
  - c) irrationality, contradictions
  - d) infrastructure, superstructure
- ii) Karl Marx described the emergence of capitalism in terms of a changing mode of production. The contradictions in the previous stage, i.e. feudalism, would lead to the emergence of a new economic system, capitalism. Thus his explanation was basically an economic one. Weber, though he did not neglect the role of economic factors, also spoke of political and religious factors. He maintained that it was important to understand the psychological motivations and world-view, which made capitalism possible. Thus, Weber's description is multi-layered and more complex.

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# UNIT 22 CONCEPT OF CULTURE AND FUNCTION - MALINOWSKI

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## Structure

- 22.0 Objectives
- 22.1 Introduction
- 22.2 Precursors of Malinowski
  - 22.2.0 Evolutionists
  - 22.2.1 Diffusionists
  - 22.2.2 Birth of Social Anthropology
- 22.3 Concern with Data Collection
- 22.4 Culture as a Functioning and Integrated Whole
  - 22.4.0 Malinowski's and Tyior's Definitions of Culture
  - 22.4.1 Techniques for Studying Culture
- 22.5 Theory of Needs
  - 22.5.0 Biological Impulses
  - 22.5.1 Types of Needs
- 22.6 The Concept of Function as Developed by Malinowski
- 22.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 22.8 Keywords
- 22.9 Further Reading
- 22.10 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 22.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you should be able to

- discuss evolutionist and diffusionist approaches to the study of human institutions
- outline the early twentieth century sociologists' concern with the collection of first-hand information about society and its institutions
- describe Malinowski's concept of culture and techniques of studying the various aspects of culture
- define the concept of needs, types of needs as explained by Malinowski
- discuss the term 'function' and its application by Malinowski to analyse his field data from the Trobriand Islands.

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## 22.1 INTRODUCTION

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After going through the growth of classical sociology in earlier blocks of this course, we have now come to the point when in the early twentieth

century sociology entered the phase of contemporary development. This phase began with the emergence of the functionalist school.

Explaining the concept of functionalism in simple terms, we can say that even early sociologists, like Comte and Spencer, spoke about a functional relation between political, economic, religious, and moral phenomena. They argued that changes in any one of these spheres would bring out corresponding changes in other spheres. They asserted that discovering these correspondences or interrelationships between the various social phenomena was the aim of sociology. Later, Durkheim in France and many other writers (specially the Victorian anthropologists of the nineteenth century Britain) wrote voluminous books. These books claimed to show the laws of origin and function of social institutions. This idea of studying social phenomena in terms of their functions was transmitted to modern sociology through early developments in British social anthropology during the 1920s and 1930s. Bronislaw Malinowski, a brilliant Polish scientist turned anthropologist, founded the functionalist school in Britain. This marked a turning point in the history of sociology because under Malinowski's leadership, functionalism was firmly grounded into the directly observable and scientifically collected information (also referred to as empirical reality) about society and its institutions.

This block mainly deals with the way early twentieth century sociologists used the idea of function to assign meaning to a wide range of social phenomena. Its first unit is concerned with contributions of Bronislaw Malinowski. He studied primitive societies as socio-cultural wholes and explained each aspect of culture in terms of its functions.

To explain the setting in which Malinowski's functionalist approach took roots, the unit begins with a discussion of precursors of Malinowski and a gradual appreciation of the significance of collecting data about society and its institutions. Then, the unit describes Malinowski's concept of culture, needs, institutions. Lastly, it examines his theory of functionalism, which helped him to 'hang together' his data collected during his superbly conducted field work in New Guinea.

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## **22.2 PRECURSORS OF MALINOWSKI**

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Malinowski's work was largely a product of the ideas of his predecessors. Leach (1957: 137) concluded his essay on Malinowski by saying that "Malinowski... was 'in bondage' to his predecessors; he resented their existence because he was so much indebted to them". In a way this can be said about any thinker who has advanced the thought of his or her times. Let us examine here the case of Malinowski.

The eighteenth century scholars, like David Hume, Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson in Britain, Montesquieu and Condorcet in France, were interested in finding out the origins of human institutions (see Box 22.1). They thought that by examining primitive societies they could know about the origins of their own social institutions. They deduced theories about primitive societies without ever collecting any evidence about them. Inevitably their theories were based on principles prevailing in their own times and cultures. But



what is significant about them is that these scholars considered human societies as an important subject of study. They thought that, as in the natural sciences, universal laws of society could be discovered by studying human social institutions. This is the reason why we think of these eighteenth century scholars as forerunners of twentieth century sociology. Their successors in the nineteenth century, known as evolutionists, were also interested in social **evolution** and the progress of human culture.

### Box 22.1 Interest in the Origin of Human Societies

The eighteenth century scholars in Europe were concerned with the origins of human society. Among them, the best known are the Scottish **moral philosophers**, David Hume (1711-1776) and Adam Smith (1723-1790). They considered that the origin of human society is to be found in human nature. Rejecting the idea of a social contract, developed by Hobbes, they spoke about natural religion, natural law, natural morality and so on. They wanted to find out general principles of human nature. This they did in terms of stages of development. They believed that by arranging all known social groups on a scale of developed it was possible to reconstruct human history. Similarly, Adam Ferguson wrote in 1767 a book *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, in which he discussed such themes as the manner of subsistence, the principles of population growth, social division and so forth. Because these scholars were concerned with general principles about societies, we refer to their ideas, even though we do not as such read their books.

In France, Montesquieu (1689-1755), who was a lawyer and political philosopher, wrote in 1748 a book *The Spirit of the Laws* on social political philosophy. The aim of this book was to find out the interrelations between all aspects of society. He thought that everything in society is related, in a functional sense, to everything else. So to understand for example constitutional, criminal and civil law one had to study them in relation to each other and also in relation to the economy, beliefs, and customs etc. of a people. Condorcet (1743-1794) was a French Philosopher and political scientist. He too was in pursuit of the origin of human societies.

### 22.2.0 Evolutionists

The evolutionists argued that because some societies were more 'advanced' than others, all societies had to pass through certain stages of development. Theories of Charles Darwin about the evolution of human species strengthened the idea that the progress of human history could also be studied in terms of an evolutionary process.

For example, Bachofen in Europe, Maine and McLennan in Britain and Morgan in America postulated various stages of social evolution.

During the period between 1861 and 1871 came out publications, which are today regarded as theoretical classics. Among them, the best known are:

- Maine's *Ancient Law (1861) and Village - Communities in the East and West (1871)*

- Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht (The Mother - right)* (1861)
- McLennan's *Primitive Marriage* (1865)
- Tylor's *Researches into the Early History of Mankind* (1865) and *Primitive Culture* (1871)
- Morgan's *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity of the Human Family* (1871).

All these books do not primarily deal with primitive societies. Maine's books are about Roman institutions and the Indo-European communities. Bachofen wrote about traditions and myths of Greek and Roman period. But McLennan, Tylor and Morgan were mainly interested in primitive cultures as a subject of study. They collected information about primitive peoples from widely scattered sources and systematised this information.

All these scholars were keen to do away with speculative theories, which had no basis in reality. Their predecessors (the eighteenth century moral philosophers) relied on introspection about their own societies and had no access to observation of societies other than their own. The nineteenth century scholars were keen to study interrelations of parts of society by the method of correlative variations. They argued that for complex social phenomena one could not isolate simple variables. For establishing the laws of origin and development of social institutions they wrote bulky books. For example, they traced development of monogamy from promiscuity, of industry from nomadism, of monotheism from animism and so on. Take the case of Sir Henry Maine (1822-1888), a Scottish lawyer, who wrote that the original and world-wide form of social life was the patriarchal family, with the absolute authority of the patriarch. Interestingly, Bachofen, a Swiss jurist had other, rather opposite, ideas about the family. He wrote that promiscuity was the original form of family. Then came a matrilineal and matriarchal form, which was followed by a patrilineal and patriarchal form.

One more jurist and a Scot, J.F. McLennan (1827-1881) also worked out the laws of social development. He thought that promiscuity must have been the original and universal form of social life. Then must have come the stage of matrilineal and totemic groups, followed by **polyandry** and finally by a patrilineal system (see Key-words for these terms).

Finally, L.H. Morgan (1834-1881), an American lawyer, identified fifteen stages of development of marriage and family. Only Sir Edward Tylor (1832-1917) did not write about stages of human development, but focused on religious beliefs. He showed that primitive peoples' mistaken inference about dreams, visions, disease, sleeping, life and death etc. gave rise to all religious beliefs and cults.

Even now you may come across some people who believe that human societies pass through evolutionary stages. But the idea looks far less convincing to us who have access to contemporary research and writing on human societies. This was not so for the nineteenth century scholars who were primarily interested in finding out the origins of human institutions. It was only later when more information about contemporary

human societies became available that the theories of the nineteenth century evolutionists were tested against the newly available evidence. It was then argued that their theories were only conjectural, without a basis in empirical reality. For the evolutionists the idea of basing their theories on systematically collected evidence about the people they wrote about was unthinkable. They could not even imagine that primitive societies had anything to offer for their enlightenment. You might like to hear the story about a famous, late nineteenth century scholar, Sir James Frazer. He wrote many books including *The Golden Bough* (see Box 22.2), about primitive peoples. When asked if he ever met one of such people, he exclaimed, 'God Forbid'. This attitude reflects that arm-chair anthropologists like Frazer considered their own society as the most advanced. In this way their findings assumed an evolutionary character, reflecting the nineteenth century scholars' obsession with the idea of progress of human society. They maintained that their society and culture were epitome of progress.

**Box 22.2: *The Golden Bough* by J.G.Frazer**

It is said (see Kuper 1975:23) that after being told that owing to ill health he could not continue his career in science, Malinowski diverted himself with the English classic *The Golden Bough* Sir James George Frazer (1854-1940). *The Golden Bough* was first published in 1890 and re-printed in twelve volumes between 1907 and 1915. In 1922 it appeared in an abridged edition. This classic is a study of ancient cult and folklore and refers to a wide range of anthropological research.

In this book, Frazer reconstructed the evolution of human thought through the successive stages of Magic, Science and Religion. According to Frazer (1922: 55), at first magic dominated social life and the magician believed in laws of nature. These were not real, but imaginary laws. Gradually the more intelligent people came to realise the fallacy and faced the trauma of disillusionment. In that state they imagined of spiritual powers which could control nature, This was, for Frazer, the stage of religion. In course of time, even this stage proved to be an illusion, and led to the final stage of science.

We may not agree with the theory of Frazer's sociological laws but we need to give him enough credit for trying to account for similarities in societies across time and space. This required a great deal of ability, learning and scholarship. This is what had impressed Malinowski and inspired him to devote much of this scholarship to dealing with Frazerian problem of magic science and religion. About this you will read in Unit 23.

By the end of the nineteenth century scholars were reacting against the evolutionist approach to explaining human societies by reconstructing the past. Scholars, like Steinmetz (1894), Nieboer (1900), Westermarck (1906) and Hobbouse (1906) can be counted among the last of those thinkers who carried on the tradition of recasting and representing the ideas of the single-direction or unilinear development of human societies, from primitive to modern scientific stage.

Though the evolutionist approach came to be challenged, few disputed that inquiry into the origins of human institutions was the aim of sociological research. This is the reason why we find that even Malinowski who criticised the evolutionists, almost with a passion, remained at heart an evolutionist. The evolutionists were being discredited more for the conjectural and evaluatory nature of their findings. In this they were found to be little different from their eighteenth century precursors. You can say that the difference between them was that the eighteenth century moral philosophers constructed their theories without a care for providing any evidence and the nineteenth century scholars felt that they had to support their theories with some factual information. The evolutionists therefore amassed a wealth of published material, haphazardly recorded by explorers, travellers, missionaries, government functionaries and migrants. This material was used to build lofty theories regarding the remote past of human societies. The early twentieth century scholars questioned the validity of such evidence.

The attack on evolutionary theories came from two kinds of sociologists. One kind was known as the diffusionists and the other was labelled the functionalists. Both regarded the study of primitive cultures necessary for explaining the progress of human cultures. Both questioned the validity of unsystematically collected facts about primitive societies. Both gave importance to scientific collection of data about primitive people. But each evolved its own techniques of data collection and more importantly developed different theoretical frameworks to assign meaning to the data thus collected for explaining human cultures. Here, we will first discuss the diffusionists, their method of data-collection and their theories about human cultures. We will then examine the functionalists, their techniques of data collection and their theories for analysing human societies and culture. As the study of primitive cultures was common to both the diffusionists and the functionalists, the following discussion will relate to their writings on primitive groups. It is now time to complete Activity 1.

### **Activity 1**

Do you believe that human societies pass through successive stages of development? Would you say that the whole phase of evolutionist thinking, as discussed here, does not include the Indian writings on society? If so, how would you explain this fact?

#### **22.2.1 Diffusionists**

The diffusionists were struck by the plain evidence of the spread of elements of culture from one human group to another. They asked the question: If a cultural trait in group A is similar to a trait in group B, is there a diffusion and hence a link of some sort between the two groups? While answering this question, the diffusionists became involved in showing affinities, which accounted for similarities of beliefs, customs, technology, art and so on. The theory of the spread of elements of culture from one ethnic group to another came to be known as 'diffusionism'. Extreme diffusionists tried to trace the complex process of dispersal of entire human culture. They wanted to find out the origins of cultural traits. For example, Father Wilhelm

Schmidt (1868-1954) considered it very important to identify survivals of the earliest stages of humankind in the study of the conditions prevalent among the primitive peoples. In England, G.E. Smith and W.J. Perry also took an extreme position of identifying a single source of the spread of human civilisation (see Lowie 1937). In their search for the source of human civilisation they reached the conclusion that civilisation in ancient Egypt was the source from where all civilisations in the world had spread. This Egypt-based diffusionism of Elliot Smith and Perry was a much talked about theory in the 1920s, but it did not find much favour in academic circles. Bronislaw Malinowski was an ardent critic of this theory.

Most diffusionists reconstructed the history of human societies on the basis of items of cultures being transmitted from one culture to another. They evolved a geographical approach to study the growth of human society. They focused on groups from culture - specific areas, comparisons across cultures and described evolutionary processes of human civilisation. They examined the patterns of links among cultural traits across time and space. They were also known as ethnologists. Ethnologists deal with the division of humankind into races, their origin, distribution, relations and cultural traits. The ethnological tradition of studying cultural traits stimulated the growth of cultural anthropology in the United States of America, with Franz Boas as its leader. The ethnological studies are generally contrasted with ethnographic studies. We may say that the difference between the two is that ethnological studies deal with the comparison of cultural elements in a range of societies while ethnographic studies describe the way of life of a particular society. You can easily say that the very nature of ethnological studies (dealing with the comparison of cultural elements across cultures) would make ethnologists to depend on ethnographic studies for their basic data.

### **22.2.2 Birth of Social Anthropology**

Enthusiasm of ethnographers, in the early twentieth century, for making detailed studies of particular societies resulted in the publication of several ethnographic monographs (see Box 22.3). These studies created the space for a new discipline - Social Anthropology - in Britain. Social anthropology and sociology are closely related subjects. The findings of social anthropology, largely derived from the studies of non-Western societies, are of general relevance to the study of all types of societies. This is the reason why the growth of social anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s contributed to significant advances in sociological thought. Social anthropology's emphasis, under the leadership of Bronislaw Malinowski, on studying societies on the basis of first hand observation became a turning point in the development of sociological theory. It was so because social anthropologists insisted that ethnographic account must be based on the study of a chosen society through personal visits, lasting a year or more. In addition, they claimed that societies ought to be studied for their own sake and they criticised those who studied primitive cultures only to reconstruct the history of humankind.



### **Box 22.3 Ethnographic Monographs**

Ethnographers of the early twentieth century tried to explain the social phenomena in terms of the societies studied. Publications arising out of these efforts came to be known as ethnographic monographs. As an early example of this approach we can cite H. Junod's *The Life of a South African Tribe*, published in 1912-13. Malinowski's *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*, published in 1922, is considered to be the supreme example of the scientific study of a primitive society. This book analyses the kula system of exchange of gifts among the Trobrianders. To know more about this book, you are advised to listen to the audio-programme on *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*.

Professional research in Africa was initiated by the visit of Seligman and his wife to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan in 1909-10. Later, intensive field-studies of tribal societies in Africa were made by, for example, I. A. Schapera among the Bechuana, by Meyer Fortes among the Tallensi of the Gold Coast, by S.F. Nadel among the Nupe of Nigeria, by Hilda Kuper among the Swazi and by Evans-Pritchard among the Nuer of Southern Sudan. All these studies were among the small-scale political groups. All the ethnographic studies mentioned here entailed the field study of a primitive society for about a year and a half. This period was generally broken into two visits with a break of few months in between the visits. After this intensive fieldwork it took a scholar about five years to publish the results of his or her research. Most works took as long as ten years to come out.

Dominant among the ethnographers during the early twentieth century were those who followed the Malinowskian tradition of collecting first-hand information about primitive societies. Malinowski, as their leader, opposed both the evolutionists and the diffusionists and went ahead with the task of establishing social anthropology as an alternative way of studying human societies.

Let us now discuss how the new found interest in collecting data based on first-hand observation paved the way for the development of new ways of studying human societies. Later the method of data collection came to be known as participant observation by living among the people to be studied. Early practitioners of this method chose to study primitive societies by focussing on all aspects of a particular tribe. At this point it is better to complete Check Your Progress 1 for gaining confidence of knowing what you have so far read in this unit.

#### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) State, in four lines, the difference between the approaches of the eighteenth century moral philosophers and the nineteenth century evolutionists.

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- .....
- ii) Distinguish between **ethnology** and **ethnography**. Use three lines for your answer.

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### 22.3 CONCERN WITH DATA COLLECTION

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Many scholars engaged in the study of human cultures during the early twentieth century felt that both the evolutionists and the diffusionists were involved in reconstructions of the human past on the basis of less convincing evidence. You will be surprised to know that till the end of the nineteenth century, with the solitary exception of L.H. Morgan (1818-1881), no anthropologist or sociologist carried out a field-study and collected first-hand data about the people he or she had selected to study. Evans-Pritchard (1954: 72) has attributed this to the fact that the nineteenth century scholars, interested in the study of human cultures, were all from non-science background. Further he shows that the scholars who began studying human societies in the early twentieth century were mostly natural scientists (see Box 22.4).

They had been trained to test their theories on the basis of their own observations. So they were committed to collect first-hand information about prevailing socio-cultural conditions in different parts of the world.

**Box 23.4: Twentieth Century Natural Scientists' Interest in the Study of Society**

Evans-Pritchard (1954: 72) has mentioned that among the earlier scholars, writing on social institutions, Maine, McLennan and Bachofen were lawyers. Herbert Spencer was a philosopher, Edward Tylor was a foreign languages clerk and Frazer was a classical scholar. In contrast, the early twentieth century scholars, who became interested in the study of society were mostly from the natural sciences. For example, Boas was a physicist and geographer. A.C. Haddon was a marine zoologist. Rivers a physiologist, Seligman a pathologist. Elliot Smith was an anatomist and Malinowski was a physicist. A.R. Radcliffe-Brown was trained in experimental psychology. These scholars were used to testing their statements against observations and experiments. So they obviously stressed upon the need for making one's own observations of the phenomena they wanted to study.

Secondly, it occurred to scholars that systematically collected information about human cultures can be used for more purposes than just for illustrating one's ideas about earlier stages of society. As pointed out by Beattie (1964: 91) even practical considerations gave an impetus to the attempts to

understand socio-cultural behaviour in primitive societies. Colonial administrators and missionaries found it useful to collect ethnographic material on the people they were to administer/convert. In fact, some of the early records of primitive peoples were prepared by them (colonial administrators and missionaries). Appreciation of the value of such material gave stimulus to systematic and professional collection of first-hand information about human communities. Gradually, information collection replaced the interest of scholars in reconstructing the history of human institutions, and led to inquiries into living communities.

Expeditions to collect information began first in America. Here, Morgan (1851) had collected information among the **Iroquois Indians**. He lived with and was later adopted by the Iroquois tribe. In 1883-84, Franz Boas made a field-study among the **Eskimos** and later studied the American Indians of the North-West coast (British Columbia, Canada). He gave special importance to learning the language of the people to be studied.

In England, anthropological field visits for collecting first-hand information were introduced by A.C. Haddon of Cambridge University. He led in 1878-79 the famous expedition to the **Torres Straits** region of the Pacific. The purpose behind this expedition was to train scholars in conducting professional fieldwork. In his team of fieldworkers, Haddon included specialists in various academic areas. After spending four weeks in the Western islands and four months in the Eastern islands, the team collected information in **pidgin-English** (see Keywords) or with the help of interpreters. Special interests of the scholars were reflected in the publication of the expedition's reports. For example, W.H.R. Rivers wrote the chapters on personal names, genealogies, kinship and marriage. C.G. Seligman was responsible for the chapters on customs related to birth and childhood and women's puberty. A.C. Haddon wrote on trade, warfare, magic, religion and the ordering of public life. The team made an effort to cover all aspects of the native way of life. It gave a clear account of the conditions of fieldwork and the qualifications of those natives who provided information. For individual scholars, this expedition set on a firm basis the value of fieldwork experience. Two members, W.H.R. Rivers and C.G. Seligman carried out more fieldwork on their own. C.G. Seligman worked in Melanesia in 1904 and among the Vedda of Sri Lanka in 1907-8. Again in 1909-12 and 1921-22, he conducted fieldwork in Sudan and provided a descriptive account of a cultural and linguistic area. W.H.R. Rivers carried out fieldwork among the Toda of Nilgiri, India, in 1901. The Todas, by Rivers (1906), gave a precise account of fieldwork conditions and its main text described beliefs and customs among the Toda, followed by a separate section on interpretation of the field material.

The expedition to Torres Straits in 1898-99 became a landmark in the history of anthropological studies of society. Now onwards, anthropology became a full-time professional interest of scholars and secondly, gaining of fieldwork experience became an integral part of the training of anthropologists. Another important landmark in collecting ethnographic material was the expedition of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown to the Andaman Islands, India, in 1906-8. About this fieldwork and its results published in 1922, we will discuss in Units 24 and 25.

Here we will take the much discussed tradition of fieldwork initiated by Bronislaw Malinowski, who made three field visits to New Guinea. C. G. Seligman, who was Malinowski's teacher, had suggested that Malinowski should go to New Guinea for his first field-experience. In his first visit to New Guinea, Malinowski lived among the Mailu of Toulon Island, a West Papuo-Melanesian group. This visit was made during September 1914 to March 1915. In June 1915 Malinowski went to the Trobriand islands (see Map) and stayed there until May 1916. Again he went to these islands in October 1917 and lived there for one year.

**Map 22.1: i) The Geographical Location of Trobriand Islands and ii) Detailed Map of Trobriand Islands**

Malinowski first conversed with the Trobrianders in pidgin-English but soon in a matter of three months, he could make his inquiries in the native dialect. Of the two years of fieldwork among the Trobriand islanders, he spent only six weeks in the company of Europeans. He had pitched his tent right among the huts of the natives. This gave him an ideal position to observe the way of life of the Trobrianders. His story of the 'tribulations' of fieldwork is quoted as 'one of the most human documents in ethnographical writing' (Kaberry 1957: 77). For a glimpse into his field diaries see Kuper (1975: 27-32).

Furthermore, Malinowski was not just a passive observer and collector of facts about a society. He collected them by employing certain techniques. He was the first professionally trained anthropologist to conduct fieldwork in a primitive community. He evolved a range of techniques of fieldwork (see sub-section 22.4.1).

Application of these techniques was, according to Malinowski, dependent on one's training in theory relating to the study of human cultures. The rich ethnography that Malinowski had at his command prompted him to evolve a theoretical approach for presenting the results of his research. His ethnographic monographs (see the list of references at the end of this block) are not mere examples of pure ethnography nor just a record of the patterns of behaviour and belief of the Trobrianders. They show principles of organisation of the society and their interconnections. You can now easily make out that the concern for collecting data about society and its institutions was geared to finding alternative ways of studying and analysing human cultures. In the next section, we will discuss Malinowski's concept of culture. From his idea about culture emanated his theory of functionalism which gave him and his students a methodology to analyse human cultures.

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## **22.4 CULTURE AS A FUNCTIONING AND INTEGRATED WHOLE**

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Malinowski had a set of ideas, which he used to guide his approach to cultural behaviour. Malinowski (1944: 36) used culture in an encyclopaedic way to include in it implements and consumer goods,....constitutional charters for the various social groupings,....human ideas and crafts, beliefs and customs'. Be it a simple or primitive culture or a complex and developed

one, for Malinowski (1944: 35) it was a vast apparatus, partly material, partly human and partly spiritual by which man is able to cope with concrete specific problems that face him'. These statements show that Malinowski's concept of culture included (i) material culture, (ii) concrete categories of human activity and (iii) constitutional charters for social groups, and beliefs.

- i) The first category, i.e., material-culture includes implements and consumer goods. These were artefacts or physical objects. They were the products of human actions and were instrumental in satisfying human needs.
- ii) The second component, i.e., concrete categories of human activity, is covered by the term custom, which included elements of social organisation.
- iii) The third component, i.e., constitutional charters for social groups and beliefs, included cultural objects and also some aspects of social organisation.

The above description shows that Malinowski treated culture as almost everything that concerned human life and action and that it was not a part of human organism as a physiological system. For Malinowski, culture was that form of behaviour which individuals learnt and held in common and passed on to other individuals. It included also the material culture linked with such learned patterns of behaviour.

Here, we find that Malinowski drew a line of distinction between material objects on the one hand and customs, beliefs and social groupings on the other. Material objects functioned as implements and consumer goods. Customs, beliefs and social groupings were properties of those individuals who were involved in socio-cultural behaviour. Malinowski in a way used 'culture' as equivalent to society or social system. Let us examine Malinowski's definition of culture in relation to Tylor's definition of the same term.

#### **22.4.0 Malinowski's and Tylor's Definitions of Culture**

Malinowski's definition of the term culture was given in 1931 in the Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (1931:621-46). He wrote, "...culture comprises inherited artifacts, goods, technical processes, ideas, habits and values". For Malinowski, social organisation is clearly a part of culture. In this respect, you will find that his definition of culture is quite similar to Tylor's (1881) definition. We have often referred to Tylor's definition of culture in our elective courses. Once again we repeat it. Tylor said that culture is 'that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and all other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society'. A comparison between the two definitions shows that Tylor stressed the complexity aspect while Malinowski emphasised the wholeness aspect of culture.

Malinowski used the term culture as a functioning whole and developed the idea of studying the 'use' or 'function' of the beliefs, practices, customs and institutions which together made the 'whole' of a culture. He viewed

different aspects of culture as a scheme for empirical research, which could be verified by observation. In this sense, we can say that Malinowski became an architect of what is known as the fieldwork method in anthropology/sociology. In developing his perspective on field research he brought about the functionalist revolution and wrote, 'The magnificent title of the Functionalist School of Anthropology has been bestowed by myself, in a way on myself. This was no boasting. Malinowski published the results of his painstaking fieldwork in 1922 in his famous monograph, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. Here, he used the concept of culture as a balanced system of many parts. He explained that the function of a custom or institution was to be understood in the way it helped to maintain the culture as a whole. Malinowski (1931: 621-46) instructed that a culture had to be studied in its own right... as a self-contained reality'.

We should look at these emphases by Malinowski in the light of prevalent approaches of his time. At that time, evolutionists and diffusionists related the cultures 'in time to an evolutionary scale or related them in space upon some diffusionist map' (Pocock 1961: 52). Objecting to these approaches, Malinowski stressed the need for finding the interrelatedness of different aspects of culture. In this way, he argued for viewing culture as an integrated whole. This 'whole' had to be studied in terms of the function of each custom.

#### 22.4.1 Techniques for Studying Culture

For this purpose Malinowski developed techniques or field methods for studying the functioning whole of culture. Because of his insistence on field-methods his brand of functionalism almost revolutionised the discipline of anthropology. He brought about a radical reevaluation of terms used in his days for describing and analysing culture. Let us briefly examine the three broad kinds of material which, according to Malinowski, required special techniques of data-collection.

i) He advanced 'the method of statistic documentation by concrete evidence' for outlining the institutions and customs of a culture. He wanted the fieldworker to understand elements of an activity and links between its separate aspects from opinions, descriptions elicited from people, from observation of actual cases.

ii) Social action of everyday life was to be observed and minutely recorded in a special ethnographic diary. Malinowski wrote,

In working out the rules and regularities of native custom, and in obtaining a precise formula for them from the collection of data and native statements, we find that this very precision is foreign to real life, which never adhere rigidly to any rules. It must be supplemented by the observations of the manner in which a given custom is carried out, of the behaviour of the natives in obeying the rules so exactly formulated by the ethnographer, of the very exceptions which in sociological phenomena almost always occur.

iii) He asked the field worker to collect 'ethnographic statements, characteristic narratives, typical utterances, items of folklore and magical formulae' to document native mentality,



Malinowski wanted to understand the complexity of divergences between what people say about what they do (no. i of the above), what they actually do (no. ii of the above) and what they think (no. iii). A gifted field worker, like Malinowski himself, was to achieve personal identification with the people he or she wanted to study. Malinowski referred to the concept of function as use. He said that cultures were integrated wholes because they were functioning unit. For him all aspects of culture carried a meaning for members of a social group. In a way, they were a means for satisfying people's needs. This was, so to say, the rationale for their being together. Explanation of culture in terms of needs took Malinowski into the area of psychology. We will discuss this in section 22.5.

### **Activity 2**

Kuper (1975: 37-8) has commented that though Malinowski insisted upon interrelations between the various aspects of culture, he was unable to produce a coherent depiction of Trobriand culture. According to Kuper this was so because Malinowski 'lacked the notion of a system'. This means that he simply described each part and tried to show its relation to another part of culture, yet he could not perceive the essence of their culture. For example, you may describe each part of the body. You may say that arms are connected to shoulders and shoulders are connected to the neck and so on. But this description cannot give you a theory of anatomy. Well, this is one example of the failure of Malinowskian ethnography. After critically reading section 22.4, can you think of any other failure of Malinowskian description of primitive culture?

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## **22.5 THEORY OF NEEDS**

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Malinowski's search for concepts to analyse primitive culture led to a particular approach to explanation of social facts. This approach is known as his 'theory of needs'. It was presented in *A Scientific Theory of Culture* by Malinowski. According to him the 'needs' were two-fold, namely, the needs of the individual and the needs of the society. Malinowski (1944: 90) defined the term need, as follows.

By need, then, I understand the system of conditions in the human organism, in the cultural setting, and in relation of both to the natural environment, which are sufficient and necessary for the survival of group and organism. A need, therefore, is the limiting set of facts. Habits and their motivations, the learned responses and the foundations of organisation, must be so arranged as to allow the basic needs to be satisfied.

The first part of this definition speaks of the system of conditions in the human organism. It refers to biological impulses which need to be satisfied.

### **22.5.0 Biological Impulses**

Malinowski (1944: 77) provided a table of 'permanent vital sequences' incorporated in all cultures. These sequences refer to the satisfaction of impulses of an individual. These are



A) Impulse, leading to	B) Act, leading	C) Satisfaction
1) drive to breathe	intake of Oxygen	Elimination of carbondioxide in tissues
2) hunger	ingestion of food	satiation
3) thirst	absorption of liquid	quenching
4) sex appetite	conjugation	detumescence (subsidence of swelling)
5) fatigue	rest	restoration of muscular and nervous energy
6) restlessness (sleepiness)	activity	satisfaction of fatigue
7) somnolence	sleep	awakening with restored energy
8) bladder pressure	micturition (urination)	removal of tension
9) colon pressure	defecation	abdominal relaxation
10) fright	escape form danger	relaxation
11) pain	avoidance by effective act	return to normal state

This table refers merely to the satisfaction of the impulses of an individual. In this and the following list, Malinowski used unfamiliar words. Their meanings have been provided in parentheses.

### 22.5.1 Types of Needs

Malinowski (1944: 91) added the concept of individual and group survival to that of individual impulse. He constructed a model of types of needs. It comprised three types, namely, basic, derived and integrative needs.

#### i) Basic Needs

The basic needs focussed on the conditions essential to both individual and group survival. The table of basic needs is as follows:

Basic Needs	Cultural Responses
Metabolism	Commissariat (food supplies)
Reproduction	Kinship
Bodily comforts	Shelter
Safety	Protection
Movement	Activities
Growth	Training
Health	Hygiene

Culture, in terms of the table of ‘basic needs’, has the value of biological survival. This may be described as ‘primary determinism’.

## ii) **Derived Needs**

The human being’s life as a social creature brings about a ‘secondary determinism’. You can also say that for the satisfaction of basic needs culture creates its own needs. These are, according to Malinowski (1944: 125), ‘derived needs’ or imperatives, which relate to

Need	Response
a) requirements of maintenance of cultural apparatus	economics
b) regulation of human behaviour	social control
c) socialisation	education
d) exercise of authority	political organisation

These derived needs or imperatives do not however include all imperatives established among human beings. The young of many animals can also be taught these rules. But none, except human beings, have the ability to transmit them to their young. No doubt, apes are able to ‘teach’ their young how to behave and in this sense they have rules. But it is hard to imagine the mother chimpanzee commenting on another mother-baby set as observing no rules. This happens only when habit changes into custom

## iii) **Integrative Needs**

Human social life is characterised by what Malinowski (1944: 125) calls the ‘integrative imperatives’. Through integrative imperatives, habit is converted into custom, care of children into the training of the next generation and impulses into values. The phenomena such as tradition, normative standards or values, religion, art, language and other forms of symbolism belong, according to Malinowski, to the sphere of integrative imperatives. In other words, we find that for Malinowski the essence of human culture is contained in symbolism or in values.

This shows that Malinowski’s theory of needs recognises the biological bases of cultural activities and therefore it can be applied to explain and compare cultural behaviour from different parts of the world. He considers social structure as one of the cultural means to satisfy primary, derived and integrative needs of human beings. This conceptual scheme gave Malinowski an explanatory tool to prepare field records of a high order. Malinowski’s (1929) study of *The Sexual Life of Savages in N W Melanesia* and his student Audrey Richard’s (1932) *Hunger and work in a Savage Tribe* amply demonstrate that different cultures not only satisfy but also regulate and limit biological impulses (see sub-section 22.5.0)

Ralph Piddmgton (1957: 49) considered the theory of needs as a potential contribution to co-operation between psychologists and anthropologists. To summarise we can say that Malinowski’s theory of needs is a general idea about the biological and cultural factors of human behaviour. His quest for concepts, which were not purely speculative and which were also not

so concrete as to make generalisations difficult, remained an ongoing activity. In the process, we find his idea of describing societies as well-balanced cultural wholes was later overtaken by his emphasis on the study of institutions. An institution for Malinowski was a component or part of culture. He began to look for the relationship between different institutions of a society. This enabled him to link the political with the religious or the political with the economic or technological. He thought institutions to be different from each other as much as they were organised around different functions. What did he mean by the term function? Let us first Check Your Progress 2 and then read section 22.6 for finding the answer to this question.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Write, in three lines, the difference between basic needs and derived needs.

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.....  
.....

- ii) Was Malinowski able to account for the phenomena such as religion and art in his theory of needs? If yes, explain how he perceived the essence of human culture in symbolism? Use three lines for your answer.

.....  
.....  
.....

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## 22.6 THE CONCEPT OF FUNCTION AS DEVELOPED BY MALINOWSKI

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You have already learnt that the cardinal point in the conceptual framework of Malinowski was the idea of culture. It was taken by him as an instrument for the satisfaction of human needs. Culture's function in terms of needs helped Malinowski to systematically record and analyse the rich ethnographic material he collected in the Trobriand islands.

Some scholars consider Malinowski's ethnography 'as a matter of theoretical insight' (Leach 1957: 119). And such theoretical insights have today become an integral part of sociological research. According to Leach, the anthropological greatness of Malinowski lies in his theoretical assumption that all field data must fit and form a total picture, just like in a jigsaw puzzle. It must not only fit but also make sense. This assumption made it necessary for a Malinowskian to pay great attention to minute details of socio-cultural situations. This attitude brought significant results in terms of vivid and lively ethnographic accounts of primitive peoples and explanations of their behaviour (for an example see Box 22.5). Malinowski's insistence on collection of first-hand data itself became a

source of theoretical advance because it necessitated that the analysis of the data must remain grounded in empirical reality.

**Box 22.5: Malinowski's Essay on *Baloma***

This is an excerpt from Malinowski's essay on *Baloma: The Spirit of the dead in the Trobriand* (1948:191-3). Malinowski spent about ten months at Omarakana and the neighbouring village of Kiriwina (Trobriand Islands). There he lived among the natives in a tent and within five months of his stay in the village he was able to converse in Kiriwinian language. This excerpt shows the role of magic in the tribal life of the Kiriwinians. Note Malinowski's ease in bringing the Trobrianders right before our eyes.

Magic is so widespread that, living among the natives, I used to come across magical performances, very often quite unexpectedly, apart from the cases where I arranged to be present at a ceremony. The hut of Bagido'u, the garden magician of Omarakana, was not fifty meters from my tent, and I remember hearing his chant on one of the very first days after my arrival, when I hardly knew of the existence of garden magic. Later on I was allowed to assist at his chanting over magical herbs; in fact, I could enjoy the privilege as often as I liked, and I used it several times. In many garden ceremonies part of the ingredients are chanted over in the village, in the magician's own house, and, again, before being used in the garden. On the morning of such a day the magician goes alone into the bush, sometimes far away, to fetch the necessary herbs. In one charm as many as ten varieties of ingredients, practically herbs have to be brought. Some are to be found on the sea beach only, some must be fetched from the raiboag (the stony coral woodland), others are brought from the odila, the low scrub. The magician has to set out before daybreak and obtain all his material before the sun is up. The herbs remain in the house, and somewhere about noon he proceeds to chant over them a mat is spread on the bedstead, and on this mat another is laid. The herbs are placed on one half of the second mat, the other half being folded over them. Into this opening the magician chants his spell.

His share is very much appreciated by the community; indeed, it would be difficult to imagine any work done in the gardens without the co-operation of the towosi (garden magician).

Malinowski was sceptical of 'abstract theory' (Leach 1957: 134). This attitude drove him to insist on minutely recording the empirical facts about society. But he was not to be drowned in the sea of empirical details. He too, like other sociologists, had to make sense of these details. For this purpose he needed to develop a theoretical framework. Biased against 'abstract theory', he was determined to overcome deficiencies of the nineteenth century speculative theory. As a result he was engaged in a constant search for concepts of middle-range, concepts which were not too abstract as to become speculative and concepts which were not too concrete as to leave no scope for generalisations. And in the process, Malinowski confined himself to establishing culture as a tool, to serve

functional roles. Secondly, in showing the functional role of culture, he emphasised the satisfaction of needs of the individual. His theory of functionalism did not proceed beyond this.

Functionalism could not be developed by Malinowski as a methodological concept. In the words of Evans-Pritchard (1954: 54), for Malinowski functional method was 'a literary device for integrating his observations for descriptive purposes'. It is not out of place to mention here that it was Malinowski's contemporary Radcliffe-Brown who later developed the functional or organismic theory of society. You will read about it in Unit 25. Let us now complete Check Your Progress 3.

### Check Your Progress 3

i) If Malinowski failed to develop functionalism as a methodological concept, what was his special contribution to sociological research? Use two lines for your answer.

.....  
.....

ii) What helped Malinowski to explain his theory of culture as a functional tool? Use two lines for your answer.

.....  
.....

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## 22.7 LET US SUM UP

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Having discussed at length Malinowski's concept of culture, needs and function, it is easy to make out that the concept of function was not fully developed by him. As far as his concept of culture was concerned, he wanted to evolve a grand design and in the process he made his job too difficult and unwieldy. All the same he is recognised to be a valiant fighter who opposed widely accepted theories of his times. Not only this, he made his major contribution to sociological thought by combining into one the roles of an ethnographer and a theoretician. He showed how ethnographic facts were without meaning in the absence of theoretical interpretations. Over fifteen years he evolved a theoretical framework which, being grounded in empirical reality, was extensively used by his followers. In this way he became a legend and a great name in anthropology.

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## 22.8 KEYWORDS

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<b>Diffusionism</b>	The theory of the spread of elements of culture from one ethnic group to another
<b>Empiricism</b>	The practice of relying on observation and experiment or a theory that all knowledge originates in experience

<b>Eskimo</b>	A group of people of Northern Canada, Greenland, Alaska and eastern Siberia
<b>Ethnography</b>	It refers to a descriptive account of the way of life of a particular society
<b>Ethnology</b>	It is the comparative study of the elements of culture in many societies
<b>Evolution</b>	This concept refers to change and progress. When it is applied to organisms, it implies the changes in genes of given populations by processes like mutation and natural selection. Applied to the development of human society, the concept refers to successive stages of development through which societies are supposed to pass.
<b>Fieldwork</b>	The anthropological practice of carrying out research by going to the area of the people one wants to study and collecting facts which are guided by systematic theory of society
<b>Iroquois Indian</b>	An Amerindian confederacy of New York that consisted of the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, and Seneca and later included Tuscarora tribals
<b>Matriliny</b>	The system of tracing relationship to kin exclusively through females
<b>Matriarchy</b>	Social organisation in which mother is head of family
<b>Moral Philosopher</b>	Those who make the study of human conduct and values
<b>Patriliney</b>	The system of tracing relationship to kin exclusively through males
<b>Patriarchy</b>	System of society in which father or oldest living male is head of family
<b>Pidgin-English</b>	An English-based speech used for communication between people with different languages
<b>Polyandry</b>	The practice of marriage of one woman to two or more men
<b>Torres Straits</b>	A strait 80 meter wide between island of New Guinea and northern tip of Cape York peninsula, Australia

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## **22.9 FURTHER READING**

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Kuper, Adam, 1975, Anthropologists and Anthropology: The British School 1922-72. Penguin Books: London



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## 22.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) The eighteenth century moral philosophers did not feel any need to provide evidence regarding their theories of human institutions. The nineteenth century evolutionists felt such a need and provided evidence on the basis of haphazardly collected material.
- ii) Ethnography provides a descriptive account of the way of life of a particular society while ethnology refers to the comparative study of the various aspects of culture in many societies.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) The basic needs relate to the conditions, which are necessary for the survival of both the individual and the group. Derived needs, on the other hand, are those needs, which are created by culture to satisfy the basic needs.
- ii) Malinowski's idea of integrative needs accounts for symbolism. He said that when a habit becomes a custom, learnt behaviour is converted into a value, it is recognised as an integrative need.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) The insistence on collection of first-hand data is Malinowski's special contribution to sociological research.
- ii) Malinowski developed a theory of needs for explaining the concept of culture as a functional tool.

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## UNIT 23 MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION — MALINOWSKI

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### Structure

- 23.0 Objectives
- 23.1 Introduction
- 23.2 The Debate on Magic, Science and Religion
  - 23.2.0 Tylor on Religion
  - 23.2.1 Frazer on Magic, Science and Religion
  - 23.2.2 Frazer and Durkheim on Totemism
  - 23.2.3 Malinowski's Approach: The Universal in the Particular
- 23.3 The Domain of the Profane
  - 23.3.0 Gardening among the Trobriand Islanders
  - 23.3.1 Canoe-Building among the Trobriand Islanders
  - 23.3.2 Is Primitive Knowledge akin to Science?
- 23.4 The Domain of the Sacred-Religion
  - 23.4.0 Initiation Ceremonies
  - 23.4.1 Rites Related to Death
  - 23.4.2 Some Other Examples of Religious Behaviour
  - 23.4.3 A Summary of Malinowski's View of Religion
- 23.5 The Domain of the Sacred-Magic
  - 23.5.0 The Tradition of Magic
  - 23.5.1 *Mana* and Magic
  - 23.5.2 Magic and Experience
- 23.6 Similarities and Differences
  - 23.6.0 Magic and Science
  - 23.6.1 Magic and Religion
- 23.7 The Function of Magic, Science and Religion
- 23.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 23.9 Keywords
- 23.10 Further Reading
- 23.11 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### 23.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you should be able to

- discuss the views of Tylor, Frazer and Durkheim on magic, science and religion
- narrate Malinowski's examples of religious and magical behaviour
- distinguish between science and magic and between magic and religion.

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## 23.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit, you learnt about Malinowski's conceptual framework for understanding human culture. The present unit relates his theories to his way of looking at universal aspects of culture through his study of a particular people. As an apt illustration of Malinowskian approach, we have selected his essay, '*Magic, Science and Religion*'. It compares and contrasts these aspects of primitive culture in a most lucid manner (see Robert Redfield's Introduction to the book, *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*, published in 1948). A close look at the content of this essay will enable you to evaluate Malinowski's talent for seeing the universal elements of human culture through the particular case of the Trobriand Islanders, whom he had observed and studied. Secondly, we find that Malinowski does not confine himself, in this essay, to any one perspective of religion, science and magic. In a characteristic and representative manner of his approach, he has discussed the various views on religion, advanced by Tylor, Frazer, Marett and Durkheim. This provides us with a useful commentary on the then prevailing debate on these issues. We have tried to present in this unit a gist of Malinowski's ideas, as he viewed them. In passing we have also mentioned apparent inadequacies and inconsistencies in his arguments.

The unit begins with the prevailing views on magic, science and religion, in Malinowski's time. This is followed by a discussion of the area, which is considered by Malinowski as non-sacred or profane. It refers to the area of science or the human beings' rational control of their environment. Malinowski shows that the primitive people have a vast range of knowledge, based on experience and reason. This helps them to carry out their daily activities for survival and in addition also maintain the continuity of their group's existence in a difficult to control environment.

Secondly, we discuss the areas of magic and religion, which are included by Malinowski in the domain of the sacred. According to Malinowski, the primitive people observe a clear distinction between the world of science and the world of magic and religion. We will see how the two domains (**the profane** and **the sacred**) are separated from each other and further how religion is separated from magic. In this way, you will learn about Malinowski's simple theory, which deals with (i) the nature of and differences among scientific, magical and religious behaviour and (ii) how the three aspects satisfy the human needs and thereby maintain the society.

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## 23.2 THE DEBATE ON MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION

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In this section, we will briefly discuss the views on magic, science and religion, prevailing in Malinowski's time. He has discussed them in the first part of his essay and then has taken up some points for elaboration in its later parts. Here we follow Malinowski's approach by beginning with Tylor's view of religion.

### 23.2.0 Tylor on Religion

According to Malinowski we can describe Edward Tylor as the founder of an anthropological study of religion. For Tylor, **animism**, i.e., the belief in spiritual beings, is the essence of primitive religion. Tylor maintains that primitive people's reflections on dreams, hallucinations and visions lead them to see a separation between the human soul and the body. The soul survives after death because it appears in dreams, memories and visions. So comes the belief in ghosts, the spirits of ancestors and a world after death. According to Tylor, human beings in general and primitives in particular have an inclination to form the idea of the world after death in the image of the world they live in. Secondly, animals, plants and other objects, which help or obstruct man's activities, are also regarded to possess souls or spirits.

Malinowski does not agree with Tylor's view of primitive man as a reflecting being. Malinowski who has the authority of specialists' knowledge of primitive societies, maintains that the primitives are more preoccupied with fishing, gardening and tribal get-togethers and do not spend time 'brooding over dreams and visions'. Criticising Tylor in this fashion, Malinowski moves over to Sir James Frazer's writings.

### 23.2.1 Frazer on Magic, Science and Religion

Frazer's works are mainly concerned with the problem of magic and its relation to science and religion. They also include a consideration of totemism and fertility cults.

Frazer's famous book, *The Golden Bough*, brings out that besides animism, primitive religion has many more beliefs and animism cannot be described as a dominating belief in primitive culture. For Frazer, the efforts to control the nature for day-to-day survival lead the early man to resort to magical practices. It is only after finding out the inefficiency of magical rites and spells that the early man is driven to making appeals to higher supernatural being like demons, ancestor-spirits and gods. Frazer draws a clear distinction between religion and magic. For controlling nature, propitiation of superior powers is religion while direct control by way of spells and rites is magic. Frazer says that magical practices imply that man has the confidence of controlling nature directly. This attitude makes magical rites akin to scientific procedures. In addition, Frazer argues that religion implies man's acceptance of his inability to control nature directly and in this fashion religion takes man above magic. Not only this, he maintains that religion exists side by side with science.

These views of Frazer were the take-off points for many European scholars like Preuss in Germany, Marett in England, Hubert and Mauss in France. These scholars criticised Frazer and pointed out that science and magic may appear to be similar but they are quite apart from each other. For example, science is, based on reason and develops on the basis of observations and experiments while magic is born of tradition and is surrounded by mysticism. It cannot be verified by observations and experiments. Secondly, scientific knowledge is open to anyone who would like to learn it while magical formulas are kept secret and taught only to a selected few. Thirdly, science has its basis in the idea of natural forces,

while magic arises from the idea of a mystical power, which is differently named in different tribal societies. Melanesians call it *mana*, some Australian tribes call it *arungquiltha*, many American Indian groups name it as *wakan*, *orenda*, *manitu*. So, the belief in such a supernatural force is established as the essence of pre-animistic religion and it is shown to be completely different from science.

Malinowski posed many questions about this *mana* type of belief in a supernatural force. He asked, is it a fundamental idea, an innate category of the primitive mind or can it be explained by still simpler and more fundamental elements of human psychology or of the reality in which primitive people live? Before proceeding to answer these questions, Malinowski discusses the problem of the religious belief of totemism and Frazer's and Durkheim's views on this matter. Before turning to these views let us complete Check Your Progress 1.

### Check Your Progress 1

i) Define animism, in one line.

.....

ii) Give Frazer's arguments for the emergence of magic and religion among primitive people. Use three lines for your answer.

.....

.....

.....

### 23.2.2 Frazer and Durkheim on Totemism

Frazer defined totemism as the relation between a group of people and a species of natural or artificial objects. The objects are known as the totems of the groups of people. You can say that totemism is both - a religious system and a way of forming social groups. As a religious system it reflects primitive peoples' preoccupation with their desire to forge a link with such important objects as animals, vegetable species etc. Killing or destruction of these objects is tabooed to the group of people, which holds them as totems. Rather, the groups hold rites and ceremonies for multiplication of their totem objects. As a way of forming social groups, the totem objects are made a basis of the subdivision of the group into smaller units. This has thrown open an altogether new aspect of sociological significance of a religious belief. It has led Robertson Smith (1889), a pioneer of anthropology of religion, to say that primitive religion is 'essentially an affair of the community rather than of individuals'.

Durkheim's study of religion shows that he considers totemism to be the earliest form of religion. Like Robertson Smith, he too finds a very close link between religion and society. He believes the totemic principles to be similar to *mana* or the supernatural force. Durkheim (1976: 206) maintains that society is to its members 'what a God is to its worshippers'. He looks at religion as permeating all aspects of society and lays special emphasis on the public or collective aspects of religious practices.

Malinowski has many problems with Durkheim's formulations. He cannot imagine religion to be 'so entirely devoid of the inspiration of solitude'. According to Malinowski (1948: 56), the belief in immortality arises from the individual and it has little to do with the social or collective. Secondly, morals in a society are enforced by personal responsibility and conscience rather than by fear of social punishment. Lastly, Malinowski concedes the importance of social forces and agrees to consider both the individual and the social while studying religious behaviour of primitive people. In addition he argues that white religious ceremonies are held in open view of public, religious revelations appear in solitude. He also points out that not all collective enterprises in a society can be described as religious activities and therefore we cannot equate society with religion. He gives the examples of a battle or a sailing regatta or a village brawl — all these are collective actions but they have nothing to do with religion. So, according to Malinowski, the collective and religious may overlap but are not synonyms. Further, he argues that society includes both the religious and non-religious or profane aspects of life and therefore cannot be equated with religious or sacred aspects alone. With all these arguments, Malinowski rejects Durkheim's sociological theory of religion.

Now, in the background of these criticisms, made by Malinowski, you would naturally like to learn about what Malinowski has to say on these issues. Before we go on to the summary of his views of magic, science and religion, let us also look at the levels on which his thought moves. The following section makes a very brief point about Malinowski's concern with the particular and the universal for understanding the problems of magic, science and religion.

### **23.2.3 Malinowski's Approach: The Universal in the Particular**

Malinowski belongs to a borderline area, where one half lies in older preoccupations with universally valid principles of human behaviour and the other half lies in the newly found concern with empirical research in a particular society. You can easily bracket him with those nineteenth century scholars whose ideas deal with the nature and origin of religion and magic. He can be described as the last scholar of that era to provide ultimate explanations and universally applicable principles of religion and magic. But we must also recognise the fact that Malinowski is the initiator of a new phase, which held in high esteem the collection of carefully observed data from a particular society. So he is a scholar asking older questions and answering them in a new fashion.

This resulted in two clearly marked levels on which his ideas about magic, science and religion were formed and presented in the essay, which we are going to summarise in this unit. One is the level of the particular society, the Trobriand islanders. He considers the islanders as a supreme example of Humanity and used the material collected during the field research among them as a supporting evidence for his generalised views on the nature and function of magic and religion. For him the link between one's observations of social life and one's understanding of universally valid ideas is quite simple and smooth. In this essay he combines the two levels in a simplistic



manner and provides answers to questions pertaining to sociological significance of magic, science religion. Further he generalises at the level of Humanity on the basis of his knowledge of one particular case the Trobriand islanders. He tries also to prove the legitimacy of these elements. While reading his views of these three important aspects of human behaviour, it is useful to keep in mind the two levels on which his ideas are crystallised in this essay.

He visualises new ways of looking at these three aspects of social life. He has introduced a new system of reasoning in studying these phenomena. To him, all the three have to make sense. Let us see how he tries to find sense in their existence. According to Nadel (1957: 208), if his way of making sense is too simplistic and naive, it is still a novel method of studying science, religion and magic. Without this guidance, one cannot see how his successors would have made the progress that they made in the times to come. This perspective helps students of the history and development of sociological thought to learn how Malinowski introduced the logic of rationality in studies of science, magic and religion.

The American anthropologist, Robert Redfield (1948: 9), says that Malinowski's essay, *Magic, Science and Religion*, reflects the special quality of its author. The quality is of being able 'to see and declare the universal in the particular'. Malinowski's ways of demonstrating the meaning and function of religion and magic shows his deep sense of human interest in social situations. This kind of reasoning, according to Robert Redfield, enables Malinowski to turn the science of anthropology into an art. At the same time, it enables him to fuse 'the warm reality of human-living and the cool abstractions of science'. You must be, by now, very keen to learn what Malinowski actually said. So the next section gives you a summary of what he described as the primitive knowledge and its application for practical concerns of life. He calls this the domain of the profane, i.e., non-religious. Before turning to the next section, let us complete Activity 1.

#### Activity 1

**In Indian mythology we find several references to totem-taboos. Write a one-page note, listing some of them and their significance for the particular people.**

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### 23.3 THE DOMAIN OF THE PROFANE

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Malinowski begins with the question: Do the primitive people have 'any rational outlook, any rational mastery' of their surroundings? Rejecting Levy-Bruhl's (1926) idea that primitive people have a definite aversion to reasoning (see Box 23.1), Malinowski answers the question by showing that 'every primitive community is in possession of a considerable store of knowledge, based on experience and fashioned by reason'. To provide evidence he gives examples of behaviour related to the arts, crafts and economic activities of the Trobriand islanders. The behaviour related to these activities is clearly separate from magic and religion and it is 'based

on empirical knowledge and on the confidence in logic'. Malinowski calls this the profane side of life, i.e., the side, which is not religious or magical. He shows that the natives themselves keep the area of the profane apart from religion and magic. Here, for our discussion of the domain of the profane we select two from the many examples, given by Malinowski, as an evidence of his views on the existence of scientific knowledge among the primitives

#### **Box 23.1 L. Levy-Bruhl**

Lucien Levy-Bruhl was born in 1857 and died in 1939. He was a French sociologist and ethnologist and a colleague of Durkheim. Among his best known books are *How Natives Think* (1926) and *Primitive Mentality* (1923). Both the books were translated from French by Lilian A. Clare. Their French editions were published in 1912 and 1922, respectively. In both these books, Levy-Bruhl studied the common set of values, beliefs and practices, which individuals conform to and later pass on to the next generation. He took it for granted that the myths, beliefs and other ideas of primitive people reflect their social structure. He argued that these ideas differ from one group to the other. Then he showed how they could be seen as systems or the logical principles. He held that, the spiritual background of the primitive society was not the same as that of modern society. He considered the thought structures of primitive people as pre-logical as they did not understand the process of natural causation. It is important to distinguish that Levy-Bruhl focused on an analysis of the ideas, which were associated with social activities while Durkheim was confined to the study of social activities themselves.

#### **23.3.0 Gardening among the Trobriand Islanders**

The Trobriand islanders subsist mainly on products of gardening. They are also fishermen and traders of goods manufactured by them. For gardening they use such implements as a pointed digging stick and a small axe. These help them to grow crops enough to feed the population. They are also able to get a surplus yield. Their wide-ranging knowledge of the types of the soil, the plants and the interaction between the two is the main cause of their success in agriculture. This is coupled with their hard work at accurate points of time and place. In selecting the soil and seedlings they make use of their knowledge which is acquired through observation and experience. For clearing the plot, burning the bushes and planting, weeding and arranging the **yam** vines upwards, they need to possess both the ability to work hard and apply their labour at appropriate time and place. Their knowledge of weather and seasons of different types of plants and pests has not only to be fairly dependable but they need to have confidence on the reliability of their knowledge. Then only they can successfully carry out the operations of agriculture at regular intervals. Based on these arguments, Malinowski shows that the natives possess a rational outlook to their surroundings and command a fair degree of control over it. This is what enables them to grow crops for subsistence and for obtaining a surplus.

Having concluded in this fashion, Malinowski speaks of a close relationship between practical operations of gardening and an annual series of rites relating to gardening. Here, he warns us that they may be closely related but are certainly not mixed up. They are not one and the same thing because their results are clearly distinguished by the natives. The performance of annual magical rites is an absolute necessity for successful gardening and despite several decades of European influence, the Trobrianders have not changed their traditional practices. Indeed the Granada Television of England (GD 1990: 8) confirms that many of the ritual activities relating to yam cultivation in 1989 were found to be the same as described by Malinowski in 1915. The Trobrianders believe that ignoring the magical rites would endanger their agriculture with such problems as blight, drought, floods, pests, and wild animals. Malinowski argues that holding of magical rites for the well being of their gardens does not however imply that the Trobrianders attribute all success in gardening to magic. He writes,

If you were to suggest to a native that he should make his garden mainly by magic and scamp his work, he would simply smile on your simplicity. He knows as well as you do that there are natural conditions and causes, and by his observations he knows that he is able to control these natural forces by mental and physical effort. His knowledge is limited, no doubt, but as far as it goes it is sound and proof against mysticism. If the fences are broken down, if the seed is destroyed or has been dried or washed away, he will have recourse not to magic, but to work, guided by knowledge or reason.

Malinowski concludes that the native knows that despite all hardwork on his part, at one time or the other his crops do also fail. Rain or sun may not appear at the right time, locusts may eat away the crop. So 'to control these influences and these only' the Trobrianders take recourse to magic. In other words, one can say that the known set of conditions about weather, soil, plants, pests, sowing, weeding and fencing etc. are handled by the natives on the basis of the rational knowledge of their surroundings. The unknown and unaccountable set of conditions are coped by them with the help of magic.

In addition, Malinowski shows that the sphere of work and the sphere of ritual are also set apart from each other. Every magical rite associated with gardening has a specific name. The time and place of its performance are clearly specified and separated from the scheme of day-to-day operations of gardening. Work is prohibited at the time of a magical performance. All magical rites are performed in full knowledge of the people and are mostly attended by all members of the public.

Secondly, although the magician who conducts magical ceremonies is also the person who leads all agricultural operations, his two roles are clearly separated. They are not allowed to overlap or interfere with each other. In his role as a leader of agricultural activities, he fixes the date for starting the gardening work. He scolds a lazy or careless gardener. But he does not, at any time, mix this role with that of the magician. We will now turn to the second example about canoe-building.

### 23.3.1 Canoe-building among the Trobriand Islanders

Canoe is a kind of long light narrow boat with both ends sharp. Its sides are curved and it is usually propelled by hand-driven paddles. In building their canoes the Trobrianders separate the activities relating to work from those relating to magic. For building a canoe one must have the extensive knowledge of the material and the principles of stability and hydrodynamics (science dealing with the motion of water and the forces acting on solid bodies in water). Besides, they know that for greater stability one has to widen the span of the outrigger {a beam with a log at the end attached to a canoe to maintain the balance). But they also know that doing this would mean less resistance against strain. They can also give the reasons for keeping a certain width in terms of fractions of the length of their canoes. They are fully aware of the mechanics of boat making and about what one should do in the event of a storm or why one should keep the outrigger always on the weather side. Malinowski (1948: 30) tells us that the terminology about sailing, used by the Trobrianders, is as rich and complex as the one used by modern sailors. It has to be so because otherwise they cannot sail under dangerous conditions in their fragile canoes.

Just as with the activities related to yam-cultivation, those related to canoe-building amply demonstrate that the Trobrianders have an extensive knowledge of what is required for successful sailing. But here again, Malinowski points out, the Trobrianders are still faced with unaccountable conditions of sudden gales and powerful tides. This is the point at which magic enters the scene. Magical rites are performed at the time of constructing canoes, again at the beginning and during the course of sea-expeditions. Comparing the Trobrianders with modern sailors, Malinowski (1948: 30) writes,

If the modern seaman, entrenched in science and reason, provided with all sorts of safety appliances, sailing on steel-built steamers, if even he has a singular tendency to superstition — which does not rob him of knowledge or reason, nor make him altogether prelogical — can we wonder that his savage colleague, under much more precarious conditions, holds fast to the safety and comfort of magic?

You can make out that Malinowski has given recognition to both the rational outlook to one's surroundings and performance of magical rites for controlling the unaccountable and unforeseen forces of nature. In the essay on magic, science and religion, he goes on to provide further examples of activities related to fishing, warfare, health and death. In each case he shows that the primitive people make systematic observations and possess systems of logically coherent knowledge. He also mentions the native's ability 'to draw diagrammatic maps in sand or dust'. This indicates that they have the ability to codify knowledge in formulaic form. For example, they are aware of various seasons, movements of stars, lunar calendar and on that basis they can plan sea-expedition or warfare. They can even draw diagrams to explain their plans. It is now time for us to complete Check Your Progress 2.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) What is signified by setting apart the sphere of work from the sphere of ritual among the ‘Trobriand Islanders? Use four lines for your answer.

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- ii) Does a rational outlook to one’s surroundings imply the absence of faith in magical rites? Use three lines for your positive or negative answer.

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**23.3.2 Is Primitive Knowledge akin to Science?**

Malinowski (1948: 34) raises the question: “Can we regard primitive knowledge, which as we found, is both empirical and rational, as a rudimentary stage of science, or is it not at all related to it?” To this he provides a straight answer that if we consider science to be a system of knowledge based on experience and reasoning then the primitive people should be considered to possess rudimentary forms of science.

Secondly, if we take science to be a matter of attitude, then according to Malinowski, the natives are not totally unscientific in their attitudes. They may not have an abiding thirst for knowledge. They may find quite boring the topics, which Europeans may feel very interested in. This is because their whole interest is determined by their cultural traditions. They are immensely interested in their surroundings — events related to animal life, marine life and forests. At this stage in his essay, Malinowski decides to leave aside the questions related to the nature and basis of primitive knowledge. Rather he is interested in finding out if the primitives have one amalgamated area of reality in which magic, science and religion are all one and the same or they treat the three aspects of life as separate areas of social phenomena. He has, so far, shown that the world of practical activities and rational attitudes related to them form one world for the Trobrianders. Further, this world is separate from the world of magical and religious practices. We will now discuss this other area, i.e. the domain of the sacred which includes religion and magic. Complete Activity 2 and discover our own practices pertaining to magic and religion.

**Activity 2**

Write a note of four pages, giving some examples from our day-to-day behaviour in which we resort to both magical and religious practices.

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## 23.4 THE DOMAIN OF THE SACRED - RELIGION

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In this section of the essay, Malinowski (1948: 36) is mainly concerned with (i) putting some order into the facts (by this time you would have realised that this was Malinowski's constant preoccupation), (ii) determining 'more precisely the character of the domain of the Sacred and mark it off from that of the Profane' and (iii) stating the relation between magic and religion. He begins with the last point and says that a prima facie distinction between magic and religion is that magical rites have a clear-cut aim and refer to their results in terms of subsequent events. In religious ceremonies there is no forethought of an outcome in terms of a specific purpose and event. Malinowski's discussion of the nature of religious beliefs and practices among the primitive people is based on this primary distinction (later we will learn more about similarities and differences between religion and magic). He gives the example of initiation ceremonies to explain the nature of religious behaviour and its function among the primitives. To follow Malinowski's view of religion, we will go into details of this particular example.

### 23.4.0 Initiation Ceremonies

Malinowski (1948: 38) gives the following general features of initiation ceremonies.

- i) The novices (persons to be initiated) go through a period of seclusion and prepare themselves for the ceremony.
- ii) During the ceremony proper, the youth pass through many ordeals. These include acts of bodily mutilation. Sometimes these are only mimetic or imitative and not real.
- iii) These ordeals signify the idea of ritual death and then rebirth of the initiated person.
- iv) The above features represent the dramatic aspects of ceremonies. But the more important part is related to 'the systematic instruction of the youth in sacred myth and tradition, the gradual unveiling of tribal mysteries and the exhibition of sacred objects'.
- v) Both the ordeal and instruction parts of ceremonies are considered to be brought about by ancestors or culture-heroes or a person or superhuman power. It is thought that by going through the ceremonies a novice is able to form a relationship with these superior powers.

The question that Malinowski repeatedly asks about all the three aspects is about their sociological significance. Here again, he asks, what part do the initiation ceremonies play in the maintenance and development of primitive culture? According to Malinowski, the important role of initiation ceremonies is that the youth is given lessons in sacred tradition under the conditions of bodily pain and the sanction of superior powers. This indicates the overarching relevance of preserving at any cost the customs and beliefs, the knowledge received from previous generation. Stressing this aspect of



the ceremonies Malinowski (1948: 39) gives the following functions of initiation ceremonies.

- i) They give 'a ritual and dramatic expression of the supreme power and value of tradition in primitive societies'.
- ii) They serve 'to impress this power and value upon the minds of each generation'.
- iii) They transmit tribal lore and therefore preserve tradition and maintain tribal solidarity.

In addition to pointing out the above functions of these ceremonies, Malinowski emphasises another aspect, which relates to the changing status of a novice. The religious ceremonies of initiation mark a natural or biological event, i.e., the fact of bodily maturity. This is not all. They signify also a 'social transition' from mere physical growth to the idea of entry into manhood with associated duties, rights, knowledge of sacred traditions. They provide an occasion for 'communion with sacred things and beings'. Malinowski (1948: 40) describes this as 'a creative element in religious rites'. Creativity is expressed in the process of one's transition from physical to social and to a spiritual sphere.

According to Malinowski, this discussion of the main features and functions of initiation ceremonies shows that initiation is 'a typically religious act' and the very ceremony includes its purpose as well. In a larger sense, its function is the creation of 'mental habits and social usages of inestimable value to the group and its civilisation'. Let us now take another example to explain Malinowski's view of religion.

### **23.4.1 Rites related to Death**

According to Malinowski, the final event of life, death, is also a source of religion. Rites related to death seem to Malinowski as being very similar across the world. For example, we find that at the time death approaches, the dying person is surrounded by close relatives and at times by the whole community. In this way, a private act of an individual becomes a public event. This involves a chain reaction. Some persons remain near the dying or dead person while others make preparations for subsequent rites. In some parts of Melanesia, Malinowski cites, the relatives by marriage carry out the death ceremonies and the dead person's kin remain at a distance. Interestingly in some Australian tribes, it is exactly the reverse of the above.

Soon after death, the washed, anointed and decorated corpse is kept in full view of all and mourning begins with a dramatic outburst of grief and crying. In some cases shaven and in some other cases disorderly hair and torn clothes mark the public display of sorrow. Then comes the time to dispose off the corpse. The common forms of disposal are, as reported by Malinowski, burial in an open or closed grave, exposure in caves or on platform, in hollow of trees, or on the ground in a deserted place. It may be done by burning or floating the mortal body in boats.

Malinowski shows that there are contradictory customs among primitive communities. One is to preserve the body or to retain some of its parts. The other is to finish it off completely. Mummification and burning are

two extreme ways of achieving the two ends. Malinowski does not accept the view prevalent during his times that these practices are results of the spread of and contact between cultural traits of different areas. Rejecting these diffusionist claims, he argues that in relation to a dead person these customs reflect the twofold attitude of mind. One is the attitude of longing for the departed and the other is the fear and disgust of the changes brought by death. The desire to preserve the link with the dead and the parallel wish to break it, both ends are served by mortuary rites. This is why Malinowski includes them in the domain of religion. Remember what we learnt in the beginning of this unit, we learnt that all the rites which have their purpose inherent in their performance signify religious behaviour. This is exactly what happens in rites related to death. For example, contact with the corpse is considered to be polluting and dangerous. The persons taking part in mourning have to wash and cleanse themselves. Further, the mortuary rites force the mourners to overcome the disgust and allay their fears. This leads us to the second aspect of death ceremonies.

Overcoming disgust and allaying fears is achieved by people's belief in a future life or life after death. This implies a belief in the continuity of the spirit, or, in the idea of immortality. According to Malinowski, belief in the substance of a spirit or the idea of immortality is an outcome of 'a deep emotional revelation, standardised by religion, rather than a primitive philosophic doctrine'. This belief in immortality of spirit helps human beings to overcome or conquer the fear of death.

Here, we find that Malinowski has brought out a major feature of rites related to death. The rites held soon after death and the belief in immortality signify both the loss suffered by the whole group and the feelings of survival of the spirit. So, the natural event or a biological fact assumes the significance of a social event.

It is time now to quickly complete Check Your Progress 2 and then turn to the next sub-section 23.4.2.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Write, in two lines, about the main aim of initiation ceremonies among the primitive people.

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- ii) What is it that helps an individual to conquer the fear of death? Use one line for your answer.

.....

### **23.4.2 Some Other Examples of Religious Behaviour**

Further examples of religious ceremonies, given by Malinowski, include a brief comment on marriage rites. This comment provides him an opportunity to discuss the needs of propagation and nutrition. As in the case of initiation so also in marriage rites, Malinowski finds the ceremonies signifying much more than mere biological facts. They reflect the lifelong union of man and woman and concern a long chain of activities related with propagation

and nutrition. Malinowski points out that the act of eating involves an emotional tension for primitive people. Ceremonies, such as the first fruit offerings, harvest and seasonal festivities play a significant role in the agricultural cycle of the primitive culture. Celebrating among fishermen a big catch of fish or among hunters an animal hunt occupy similar place of importance. The food is a link between a person and his or her surroundings and in primitive religion, food is sacred besides being culturally and biologically important. Consideration of food as sacred leads Malinowski to view in a new light the ceremonies of sacrifice (an act of offering something precious usually some form of food to deity) and communion (an act of sharing food). We find that food is ritually administered in these rites and therefore they can be linked with the attitude of reverence towards the abundance of food. He gives the case of sacramental eating, related with totemic beliefs among Central Australian tribes. As mentioned before (see sub-section 23.2.2) a limited number of animals and/ or plants are selected for its totem by a tribe. Malinowski explains that for survival the primitive people have an abiding interest in continuity of the supply of particular species of animals and plants. In order that they get an abundant supply, they want to control these selected species. They study their habits and movements and develop an attitude of reverence for them. In this way an abiding interest in a limited number of animals and plants and its deification in the form of totemic rites is the natural outcome of the very survival of primitive communities. Again Malinowski has posited both a moral value and a biological significance in a system of beliefs related to totemic objects. We can now attempt to put together Malinowski's view of religion.

### **23.4.3 A Summary of Malinowski's View of Religion**

Malinowski has basically shown the functional value of religious ceremonies. In brief, he has surveyed the main types of religious acts and concludes that main types of religious acts have the following functions.

- i) The initiation ceremonies give a sacred character to traditional knowledge.
- ii) The event of death in a primitive society sets in motion a pattern of religious acts, which counteract the forces of fear and destruction.
- iii) The rites associated with food, sacrifice and totemistic beliefs bring the people in direct contact with powers, which provide sustenance.

Malinowski has used the method of providing concrete evidence for his views. Taking examples from his collection of data among the Trobriand islanders, he has formulated the view that all religious ceremonies have a social side without which they do not or cannot exist. So the social side of a religious ceremony is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. He emphasises that we cannot understand religion without analysing the individual mind. This is why you would find that he refers to the individual's state of mind at every stage of a religious ceremony. Further, he explains religious behaviour by contrasting and comparing it with magic. So it is now essential for us to turn to Malinowski's view of magic.

### Activity 3

Write a one page note on Malinowski's view of religion, with particular reference to the need of individuals

## 23.5 THE DOMAIN OF THE SACRED — MAGIC

We have briefly mentioned how Malinowski distinguishes magic from science (see section 23.3) and from religion (see section 23.4). Malinowski describes magic as a range of practical acts, which are carried out to achieve a desired result. Among several types of magic, Malinowski selects for special mention (i) the black magic and love magic, (ii) imitating or forecasting type of magic and (iii) simple magic.

- i) In black magic, a pointed object (like a bone or a stick, an arrow or the spine of an animal) is directed towards the person to be destroyed. This is done in a mimic fashion to an imagined body of the victim. The performance of such a ritual is marked by a dramatic expression of emotion. The magician ritually, in a mimic way, destroys a figure or object, which symbolises the victim. The rite expresses all the hatred and fury against that person.

Love magic is the reverse of black magic. In this the magician strokes and fondles the object representing the beloved. Here, the behaviour of a love-stricken person is imitated. One can say that all such magical acts, be they black or love or terror, are basically expressions of emotion. Objects and actions used in these rites are linked through emotions.

- ii) In the second type of magic the ceremonies imitate the desired result. For example, if the aim is to kill a person then the performer of the ritual will slowly weaken the voice, utter a death rattle and fall down in imitation of the rigor of death (see Malinowski 1948: 72).
- iii) Then, there are simple acts of magic, which are meant for immediate results. Generally, a magician conveys the magic spell to some object, which can be later applied to the person who has to be controlled. In such a case the material object, which receives the magic-spell, has to be of an appropriate and pre-determined nature.

After describing these common types of magic, Malinowski points out that the common feature in them is the force of magic. This refers to the power contained in the spell. Mysteries of the spell are known only to the magician whose job is to preserve the tradition of knowledge in this field.

### 23.5.0 The Tradition of Magic

The magic spell may be contained in the ritual utterance of a formula, which is handed down from one to the other generation of magicians. Malinowski describes three elements associated with the magical formulas.

- i) The first element is the phonetic effect, which results from imitations of natural sounds, such as the whistling of the wind, the sound of thunder, the roar of sea-waves.

- ii) The second element is the uttering of words, which point to the desired result of the particular magic. For example, in black magic the performer speaks about the symptoms of the disease, which is meant to kill the victim. Similarly, in healing magic, the performer describes the conditions associated with good health.
- iii) The third element refers to, according to Malinowski, the most important aspect of every spell. This comprises the mythological references to magic being handed down by ancestors and culture-heroes. Such mythological allusions provide a traditional setting of magic. Malinowski considers this element in more detail and focusses on the link between tradition and magical ritual.

Almost each magical rite has a story justifying its existence. The story generally describes when and where a particular magic rite became the property of a magician of a certain group of a family or clan. But this sort of story, Malinowski cautions, should not be confused with the origins of magic, because all magic is considered to be existing since the beginning. Magic is supposed to coexist with all rational efforts of human beings to control their surroundings. The spell or the magical rite takes care of what eludes their normal rational attempts. Malinowski gives examples of Central Australia where all magic is considered to be inherited from the times immemorial. In Melanesia, magic is supposed to come from a time when all human beings lived underground,

Secondly, magic is primarily associated with all-human activities, such as agriculture, fishing, hunting, trading, disease, death, and lovemaking. Malinowski points out that magic is mostly directed to human beings' relation to nature and all those activities, which affect this relationship. Magic is not as such directed to nature and is not conceived as a product of nature. It is also not derived from knowledge of natural laws. Rather it is primarily based on tradition and refers to human beings' power to achieve desired results.

This interpretation of magic leads Malinowski to attack those scholars who equated magic with phenomena like *mana* among the Melanesians or *wakan* among the North American Indians or *orenda* among the Iroquois.

### 23.5.1 *Mana* and Magic

Malinowski establishes that magic is a human possession. In other words it is localised in a particular person who exercises it under special instructions and in a traditionally instituted manner. He argues that then it cannot be a force akin to *mana*, which has been described as prevailing all around. It is not fixed in anything and can be conveyed in almost anything. Obviously, if magic is strictly localised in human beings and acts in a specified traditional manner, it cannot be equated with *mana* and similar ideas.

Further, he suggests that to understand native mentality one should first study the types of behaviour and then explain the local vocabulary with the help of their customs. He concludes that magic should not be taken to arise from an abstract idea of universal power, like *mana*. Malinowski emphasises that each type of magic is born of its own situation. It comes

out of the emotional tension created by certain situations. The spontaneous reaction of people and subsequent flow of ideas are the source of magic. All this so far sums up Malinowski's description of native ideas or native view of magic. This is that magic endows human beings with a power to control their surroundings.

Before moving to the next sub-section, do complete Check Your Progress 4. This will enhance your understanding of Malinowski's view of magic.

**Check Your Progress 4**

- i) What is the most common feature of different types of magic? Describe, in three lines, its three elements.

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- ii) Is magic akin to the faith in an all pervading spirit or power, commonly found in primitive tribes? Use two lines for your answer.

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**23.5.2 Magic and Experience**

Malinowski now explains as a sociological observer this belief in a power over certain things. He describes once again the situation in which magic rites are performed. Whenever a person engaged in a chain of practical activities comes to a standstill, i.e. he or she cannot do anything more to stop the negative outcome, then comes over a feeling of impotency. The feeling is one of not being able to turn the course of events in one's favour. Despite best efforts, the hunter is unable to kill the game, the sailor does not find the shoal or the gardener is unable to control the havoc caused by insects. What is one to do? The fear of losing control over one's surroundings creates tension, which leads one to some sort of activity. According to Malinowski, in this situation, one is driven to 'some substitute activity'. The person under tension or 'the sway of impotent fury' performs imaginary attacks at the enemy and utters words of anger against the enemy. Or, the separated lover would see the beloved in visions. The fisherman would see in imagination the multitude of fish in his net, he would invoke them by name.

Based on this reasoning, Malinowski concludes, "these reactions to overwhelming emotion or obsessive desire are natural response of man to such a situation, based on a universal psycho-physiological mechanism". These reactions take the form of magical rites. According to Malinowski, these are 'revealed to man in those passionate experiences, which are faced by him in the moments of his realisation of impotency of his rational actions'.

Here comes the question of the link between what is promised by performance of magical rites and what is actually achieved in real life? Malinowski gives an answer to this with 'one gain easily outweighs several



losses'. This means that the times when magic is successful are much more reckoned than those times when it fails. As magic is always held by some outstanding person of the group, it coincides with that person's skills, abilities and mental powers. The efficacy of magic is then dependent on the personal fame of the magician. In this way, myths associated with magic give it the character of a living force.

The failure in magic is accounted in terms of neglect in following the taboos and observances. Secondly, it is also explained in terms of stronger magic or counter-magic. Desire to achieve an ultimate control of one's surroundings and limit one's rational actions and subsequent impotency and substitute activities results in magical rites. Now counter-desire, for example, to own more property or power than your neighbour, gives rise to counter-magic. Malinowski gives examples from his Trobriand data and tells us that each magical act has a counter-magical act, which is supposed to destroy the effect of the initial rite of magic. A sorcerer who learns how to cause a disease has to, at the same time, learn the formula to cure the disease. So the dual forces, positive and negative, are an essential feature of magic and these help in explaining why a magical act may not sometimes bring the desired result.

#### **Activity 4**

Do you agree with Malinowski's claim that magic is a kind of 'substitute activity'? Write a note of two pages on reasons for an individual's resorting to a substitute activity

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## **23.6 SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

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Malinowski outlines, as a conclusion to the essay, relations between magic and science and between magic and religion.

### **23.6.0 Magic and Science**

Relation between these phenomena is shown by Malinowski in terms of both the similarity and difference. First we give the similarities.

#### **Similarities**

- i) Like science, magic has a specific aim related with human needs and instincts. Both are governed by a system of rules, which determine how a certain act can be effectively performed.
- ii) Both science and magic develop techniques of carrying out certain activities. On the basis of these similarities, Malinowski concludes that he would agree with James Frazer and call magic a pseudo-science. Then he outlines the following differences between science and magic.

#### **Differences**

- i) Science, as reflected in the primitive knowledge of tribals, is related with the general experience of everyday life. It is based on observation and reason over their interaction with nature. Magic, is on the other

hand, founded in particular experience of tense emotional states. In these states not the observation of nature but of one's own self or rather of impotency is crucial. It is the drama of emotions upon the human organism (see sub-section 23.5.3).

- ii) The basis of science is the conviction in validity of experience, effort and reason. But magic is based on the belief that one can still hope, one can still desire.
- iii) The corpus of rational knowledge is incorporated in a social setting and certain type of activities, which are clearly separable from the social setting, and activities related with the body of magical knowledge. On the basis of these differences, Malinowski concludes that science belongs to the domain of the profane while magic comprises half of the domain of the sacred.

### **23.6.1 Magic and Religion**

Just as Malinowski compares magic with, science, he shows the relationship between magic and religion. According to him the similarities between the two are as follows.

#### **Similarities**

- i) Both magic and religion belong to the area of sacred and are born and function amidst emotional tension.
- ii) Both phenomena provide an escape from emotional stress, which cannot be wished away on the basis of the primitive people's range of rational knowledge.
- iii) Mythological traditions closely surround both magic and religion. Taboos and practices associated with the two areas separate them from the domain of the profane.

#### **Differences**

Looking at the differences between religion and magic, we find the following areas of differences.

- i) Magical acts are a means to an end, which must follow them. Religious acts are self-contained acts, performed in self-fulfilment.
- ii) The art of magic has a clearly marked and limited technique in which spell, rite and the magician are the main elements. Religion has no such simple technique. It has many aspects and purposes and its rationale lies in the function of its belief and practice.
- iii) The magical belief concerns one's simple faith in one's power to bring about certain results on the basis of a particular spell. Religion concerns, on the other hand, with a whole range of supernatural powers.
- iv) Mythological tradition in religion is both complex and creative and focuses on tenets of belief. In magic, mythology centers around boastful accounts of what was in the beginning.

- v) Magical art is handed down, from generation to generation, from one magician to another, mostly in direct filiation (i.e. from father to son). Thus, it is confined to the specialists. In religion everyone takes an active part, for example every member of the community has to go through initiation. Similarly everyone has to go through the act of mourning and in due course, the mourner has also to be mourned. Again, spirits have significance for all and in after life everyone becomes a spirit. Becoming a spiritual medium is one specialised role in religion. But this is not a professional role, which can be learnt. This is only a personal gift.
- vi) In magic we have both positive and negative types. Because magic has practical implications in terms of direct results, the contrast between positive and negative magic assumes a significant role. In religion in its early stages, according to Malinowski, there is little distinction between beneficial and malevolent powers.

Complete Check Your Progress 5 so that you can make sure of your ability to demonstrate similarities and differences between religion and science on the one hand and religion on the other hand.

### **Check Your Progress 5**

- i) Which two of the social phenomena of magic, science and religion are formed by a system of rules, which determine how a certain act can be effectively performed?
- ii) Which two of the social phenomena of magic, science and religion belong to the domain of sacred and are born and function amidst emotional tension?
- iii) Identify to which of the three social phenomena of magic, science and religion does each of the following statements relate?
  - a) Based on the belief that one can still hope and desire.
  - b) Based on the conviction in validity of experience, effort and reason.
  - c) Particular experience of tense and emotional states.
  - d) Related to the general experience of life.
  - e) Has many aspects and purpose and its rationale lies in the function of its belief and practice.

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## **23.7 THE FUNCTION OF MAGIC, SCIENCE AND RELIGION**

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Finally, Malinowski returns to his favourite theme of showing cultural function of each phenomenon. The function of primitive knowledge is making the tribals familiar with their surroundings and enabling them to use natural resources. It sets them apart from all living species in the world.

The function of religion is to establish mental attitudes, e.g., respect for tradition, adjustment with nature, courage and confidence in struggle for survival and in the event of death.

The function of magic is to supply primitive people with a practical way out of difficulties faced by them in day-to-day pursuit of their survival. It provides them with the ability to carry on with life despite inevitable problems. In this way, Malinowski (1948: 9) argues, 'the function of magic is to ritualise man's optimism, to enhance his faith in the victory of hope over fear'.

In order to fully comprehend the function of magic, science and religion complete Activity 5.

#### **Activity 5**

Choose two examples of religious behaviour of a group of your choice. Show their functions in Malinowskian terms.

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## **23.8 LET US SUM UP**

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We began this unit with a discussion of the debate on magic, science and religion, during the time of Malinowski. This was followed by Malinowski's approach to the study of social phenomena of magic, science and religion. Summarising his essay on this theme, we described the domain of the Profane and the domain of the Sacred. The former dealt with his view of primitive knowledge which Malinowski considered as an example of the scientific attitude and rational outlook to one's surroundings. The latter included a consideration of the magical and religious beliefs and practices. Finally we presented Malinowski's view of similarities and differences between magic and science and between magic and religion, followed by a brief discussion of the function of magic, science and religion. Here, the attempt was to give you a concrete illustration of Malinowski's approach.

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## **23.9 KEY WORDS**

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<b>Animism</b>	In the context of Tylor's view of religion, it refers to belief in the existence of spirits separable from bodies.
<b>Nonce</b>	A person admitted to probationary membership in a religious ceremony.
<b>The Profane</b>	It refers to those areas of life, which are not concerned with religion or religious purposes. In other words, they deal with secular aspects.
<b>The Sacred</b>	It refers to those areas of life, which are related to religion. For Malinowski, the sacred includes magical rites, which are different from religious rites. So Malinowski's definition of this term is a more inclusive category.

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## **23.10 FURTHER READING**

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Malinowski, B., 1974. *Magic, Science and Religion and Other Essays*. Souvenir Press: London.

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## **23.11 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Animism, in the context of Tylor's view of religion, refers to belief in spirits which are separable from bodies.
- ii) Frazer argues that the primitive people try to control nature for their day-to-day survival. They employ magic for this purpose. When their magic fails to achieve the desired ends they appeal to higher supernatural beings and this leads to emergence of religion.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) This signified that the Trobriand islanders do not mix up the domain of secular activity of work with the domain of magical practices. The former domain represents their rational outlook to their surroundings while the latter represents their feelings of impotency over the unaccountable and unforeseen events in nature.
- ii) A rational outlook to one's surroundings does not imply an absence of faith in magic. Magic has the function of accounting for the unforeseen conditions of life while the rational thinking and actions help the people to actually control their surroundings.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) The main aim of initiating ceremony among the primitive people is to initiate a novice into the mysteries of sacred traditions of their group.
- ii) The idea of immortality of soul helps the people to overcome the feelings of fear and sorrow caused by death.

### **Check Your Progress 4**

- i) The force of magical spells is the common feature of most types of magic. Its three elements are (i) the phonetic effect of ritual utterances, (ii) selection of words, in magical spells and (iii) references to culture-heroes or ancestors or other supernatural powers.
- ii) The faith in an all pervading spirit or power cannot be equated with magic because magic relates to only one aspect of social life whereas an all-prevailing power has to encompass all aspects.

### **Check Your Progress 5**

- i) Magic and Science
- ii) Magic and Religion
- iii)
  - a) Magic
  - b) Science
  - c) Science
  - d) Magic
  - e) Religion



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# UNIT 24 CONCEPT OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE RADCLIFFE.BROWN

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## Structure

- 24.0 Objectives
- 24.1 Introduction
- 24.2 Intellectual Influences
  - 24.2.0 The Field-work Tradition
  - 24.2.1 The Durkheimian Tradition : Radcliffe-Brown's 'Conversion'
- 24.3 The Concept of Social Structure in Radcliffe-Brown's Work
  - 24.3.0 Social Structure and Social Organisation
  - 24.3.1 Social Structure and Institutions
  - 24.3.2 Structural Continuity and Structural Form
- 24.4 The Structural System in Western Australia
  - 24.4.0 The Territorial Basis
  - 24.4.1 The Tribe
  - 24.4.2 The Moieties
  - 24.4.3 The Totemic Group
- 24.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 24.6 Key Words
- 24.7 Further Reading
- 24.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 24.0 OBJECTIVES

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After going through this unit, you will be able to

- mention the major intellectual influences which helped shape Radcliffe-Brown's brand of social anthropology
- describe the concept of social structure and related concepts elaborated by Radcliffe-Brown
- see how these abstract concepts assume concrete shape through a case study presented by Radcliffe-Brown.

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## 24.1 INTRODUCTION

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The previous two units have familiarised you with some of the important contributions of Bronislaw Malinowski. We now move on to the work of Malinowski's contemporary and academic rival, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. Radcliffe-Brown was three years Malinowski's senior and survived him

by eleven years. Together, these two men dominated contemporary British social anthropology. Whilst Malinowski, in the words of Adam Kuper (1973: 51), brought “new realism into social anthropology with his lively awareness of the flesh and blood interests behind custom..... Radcliffe-Brown..... brought a more rigorous battery of concepts to the aid of the new fieldworkers.” It is precisely one of these rigorous concepts that we will study in this unit, namely, the concept of social structure.

To make our task easier, we will first briefly trace the intellectual influences, which contributed to shaping Radcliffe Brown’s brand of social anthropology. This will be the first section.

In the second section, the major theme of this unit will be described, namely, Radcliffe-Brown’s understanding of social structure.

The third and final section will focus on a case study. We will briefly describe some structural features of tribes in Western Australia which were studied by Radcliffe-Brown. This will help clarify abstract ideas through concrete examples.

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## 24.2 INTELLECTUAL INFLUENCES

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Modern social anthropology, as Jain (1989: 1) puts it, is woven from the twin strands of the fact-finding, **empirical** ethnographic tradition, (about which you have studied in the previous units of this Block) on the one hand and the ‘holistic’, analytical tradition on the other. The former is represented by British and American anthropology, the latter by French social anthropology which was profoundly influenced by Emile Durkheim.

Social anthropology as practised by Radcliffe-Brown bears the stamp of both these traditions. Let us first consider the impact of the fieldwork tradition on Radcliffe-Brown’s work.

### 24.2.0 The Field-work Tradition

Cambridge University, England, where Radcliffe-Brown studied, was during his time going through an extremely creative and productive intellectual phase. Teachers and students freely shared and challenged each other’s views. Radcliffe-Brown became the first student of Anthropology of W.H.R. Rivers in 1904. Rivers and Haddon had participated in the famous ‘Torres Straits’ expedition, which you have read about earlier in Unit 23.

Under the guidance of Rivers and Haddon, Radcliffe-Brown was initiated into fieldwork. His first field studies (1906-08) dealt with the Andaman Islanders. He thus became a part of the new, empiricist tradition of British scientific anthropology. This was a major formative influence, which was to persist throughout his career.

Emile Durkheim’s path-breaking work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), had a profound impact on some British scholars. Radcliffe-Brown was one of them. Let us now go on to see why he was so attracted to the Durkheimian perspective.

### 24.2.1 The Durkheimian Tradition: Radcliffe-Brown's 'Conversion'

The contributions of Emile Durkheim have been systematically described to you in Block-3 of this course. The Durkheimian tradition, in the words of Adam Kuper (1975: 54), offered "...scientific method, the conviction that social life was orderly and susceptible to rigorous analysis, a certain detachment from individual passions..." Durkheim was optimistic that human beings would be able to lead a life that was both individual and social, in a properly organised society, i.e. a society based on '**organic solidarity**' (see key words).

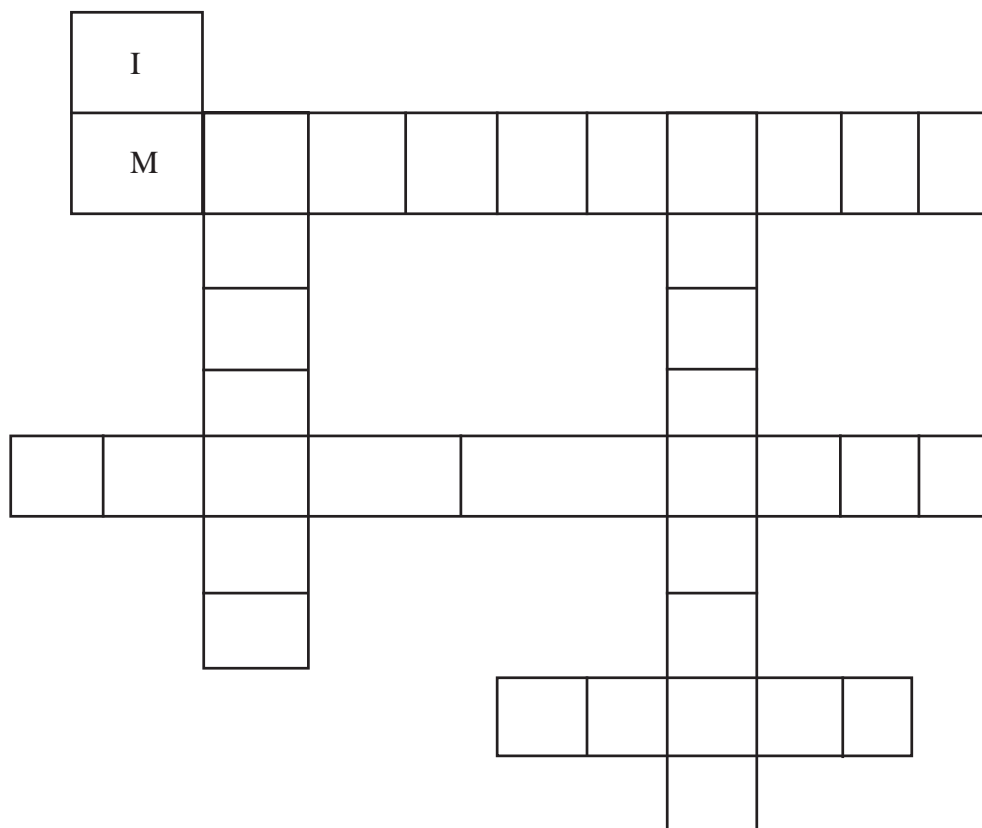
As you know, Durkheim advocated the study of 'social facts' in a sociological manner. He spoke of studying these facts objectively, without preconceived notions. In his view, society was basically a moral order. The concept of the 'collective conscience' was an important part of his work. Durkheim wanted to develop sociology on the lines of the natural sciences i.e. as an 'objective', rigorous science. All these ideas attracted Radcliffe-Brown. Durkheimian sociology combined with Radcliffe-Brown's admiration for the natural sciences resulted in his ideas about the ideal society of the future.

In a nutshell, the impact of the Durkheimian tradition marked a shift in emphasis in Radcliffe-Brown's work. The 'ethnographer' became a 'sociologist'. From mere gathering of descriptive, ethnographic information, an attempt was made by Radcliffe-Brown to analyse this information using sociological concepts. He tried to organise his data on comprehensive, theoretical lines. We will now go on to examine an important concept developed by Radcliffe- Brown, namely, the concept of social structure. But before we do so, why not check your progress by attempting a crossword- puzzle?

#### Check Your Progress 1

- i) With the help of the following clues, complete the crossword puzzle. To help you, the first puzzle has been solved.

D
U
R
K
H
E



### Clues

- 1) Down - The French sociologist whose ideas profoundly influenced Radcliffe-Brown.
- 2) Down - Name of the islands where Radcliffe-Brown conducted his first field studies.
- 3) Down - He was Radcliffe-Brown's teacher.
  - 1) Across - Radcliffe-Brown's contemporary and rival.
  - 2) Across - Radcliffe-Brown studied here.
  - 3) Across - For Durkheim, society was basically an order.

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## 24.3 THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN RADCLIFFE-BROWN'S WORK

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According to Radcliffe-Brown, the basic requirement of any science is a body of coherent concepts. These concepts are to be denoted by technical terms that are accepted and used in the same sense by all the students of the subject. For instance, physicists use terms like 'atom', 'molecule', 'combustion' etc.

The meanings and usages of these terms do not change from student to student. Can the same thing be said about sociology and social anthropology? Radcliffe-Brown points out that in anthropological literature, the same word is used in the same sense by different writers and many terms are used without precise definition. This shows the immaturity of the science.

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

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

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

Rigorous, clear concepts will, according to Radcliffe-Brown, help social anthropology to develop as a distinctive science. It enables generalisations based on synchronic and diachronic explanations of social life. In this context, the concept of social structure becomes an important one, helping us to see the entire web of social relationships in a systematic way. Thus, we can gain insights into the way society works and stays integrated.

### **24.3.0 Social Structure and Social Organisation**

As Radcliffe-Brown (1958: 168) puts it, “the concept of structure refers to an arrangement of parts or components related to one another in some sort of larger unity.” Thus, the structure of the human body at first appears as an arrangement of various tissues and organs. If we go deeper, it is ultimately an arrangement of cells and fluids.

In social structure, the basic elements are human beings or persons involved in social life. The arrangement of persons in relation to each other is the social structure. For instance, persons in our country are arranged into castes. Thus caste is a structural feature of Indian social life. The structure of a family is the relation of parents, children, grandparents etc. with each other. Hence, for Radcliffe-Brown, structure is not an abstraction but empirical reality itself. It must be noted that Radcliffe-Brown's conception of social structure differs from that of other social anthropologists. You may read more about the diverse uses of this concept in Box 24.1.

How does one seek out the structural features of social life? Radcliffe-Brown says we must look out for social groups of all kinds, and examine their structure. Within groups, people are arranged in terms of classes, categories, castes etc. A most important structural feature, in Radcliffe-Brown's opinion, is the arrangement of people into dyadic relationships or person-to-person relationships, e.g. master-servant or mother's brother-sister's son. A social structure is fully apparent during inter-group interactions, and interpersonal interactions. Having had a preliminary look at the concept of social structure, let us see what Radcliffe-Brown meant by social organisation. Structure, as we have seen, refers to arrangements of persons. Organisation refers to arrangements of activities. For instance, whilst studying this Block you have organised your activities, i.e. reading a particular section, attempting the exercises, referring to keywords whenever necessary etc. This is organisation at the individual level. Social organisation is for Radcliffe-Brown (1958: 169) "the arrangement of activities of two or more persons adjusted to give a united combined activity". For instance, a cricket team consists of bowlers, bat-persons, field-persons and a wicket-keeper whose combined activities make the game possible.

#### **Box 24.1 The Concept of Social Structure**

In the decade following World War II, the concept of social structure became very fashionable in social anthropology. The concept has a long history, though, and has been used by scholars in different senses.

- i) The original English meaning of the word structure refers to building constructions. The concept of structure in the sense of building or construction can be discerned in early Marxist literature. Marx spoke of the relations of production as constituting the economic 'structure'. Marx and Engels were profoundly influenced by the evolutionist Morgan whose book *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity* (1871) may be described as the first anthropological study of social structure.
- ii) By the 16th century the word structure came to be used in anatomy. Herbert Spencer, who had an anatomical image of society in mind, brought the terms 'structure' and 'function' into sociology. This image is also to be found in the work of Durkheim from whom Radcliffe-Brown drew many of his ideas. Following Radcliffe-Brown a number of British scholars like Evans-Pritchard, Fortes and Forde concentrated on certain formal aspects of, society like the political structure and kinship structure.



iii) Another dimension of the concept of structure can be seen in the work of the French structuralist Levi-Strauss. His view of structure has been drawn from linguistics and denotes an abstract, analytical model against which empirical systems are compared. Certain patterns or regularities are then discerned and explained.

Radcliffe-Brown illustrates the concepts of structure and organisation with reference to a modern army. To begin with, the structure consists of arrangement of persons into groups: divisions, regiments, companies etc. These groups have an internal arrangement of their own, namely ranks. Thus we have corporals, majors, colonels, brigadiers etc.

The organisation of the army or arrangement of activities can be seen in the allocation of various activities to various persons and groups. Manning the borders of the land, helping the Government during times of national calamity etc. are some of the activities of an army.

Complete Activity 1 and try to inter relate the concept of social structure.

#### **Activity 1**

Study any one of the following in terms of their social structure and social organization, (i) hospital, (ii) a village panchayat, (iii) a municipal corporation. Write a note of about two pages and compare it, if possible, with the notes of other students in your Study Centre.

### **24.3.1 Social Structure and Institutions**

One of the basic premises underlying a social relationship (which, as we have seen, is the building block of social structure) is the expectation that persons will conform to certain norms or rules. An institution refers to an established, socially recognised system of norms and behaviour patterns concerned with some aspect of social life. A society's family-related institutions, for example, set down acceptable patterns of behaviour to which family members are expected to conform. In our society, a child is expected to show respect to the parents; the parents are expected to support and care for the child as well as aged members of the family and so on.

Institutions, in Radcliffe-Brown's (1958:175) words, "define for a person how he is expected to behave, and also how he may expect others to behave". Of course, individuals do violate these rules from time to time and various **sanctions** exist to cope with deviations. According to Radcliffe-Brown, social structure has to be described in terms of the institutions, which regulate the relationships between persons or groups. As he puts it, "the structural features of social life of a particular region consist of all those continuing arrangements of persons in institutional relationships, which are exhibited in the actions, and interactions that in their totality make up the social life." (1958: 175).

### **24.3.2 Structural Continuity and Structural Form**

If, as Radcliffe-Brown describes it, social structure refers to an arrangement of persons, we could conclude that once the persons die or disappear,

structure must also disappear. This, however, is not the case. Individuals may come and go, but structure persists or continues. For example, social groups, classes, castes, have an ever-changing membership. They lose members by death and gain new ones by birth. For example, the Lok Sabha may lose members who may die, resign, or lose the next election, but they will soon be replaced by new ones. A tribal chief may die, but soon a successor takes his place. At this stage, we must highlight the distinction made by Radcliffe-Brown between social structure and structural form.

As we have seen above, the social structure is always in a state of flux. Individuals are born and die, the composition of society is ever-changing. Radcliffe-Brown argues that although social structures are in flux, the structural form is comparatively stable. This structural form is reflected in the 'social usages' or norms widely observed. These social usages persist, even though persons come and go. The stability of this structural form depends on how well integrated its parts are (e.g. family, educational system, political system etc.) and the performance by these parts of the special tasks necessary to maintain it. For instance, the special task of the family is the rearing and socialisation of children. Educational institutions impart training, the political system is concerned with governance. These tasks refer to 'functions' of the parts of the system. We will study Radcliffe-Brown's notion of 'function' in detail in the next unit. As a word of caution it may be said that Radcliffe-Brown's distinction between social structure and social form is not made absolutely clear even in his own writings, where the latter comes out as synonymous with social organisation.

In a nutshell, 'social structure', an important social anthropological concept developed by Radcliffe-Brown, refers to empirically observable phenomena, namely, arrangements or relationships of the members of a society. There is an organisational aspect as well, which refers to a pattern of arranging the activities people engage in. Social structure involves institutions, which define socially acceptable rules and modes of inter personal behaviour. Social structure is constantly in a state of flux, but the structural form an abstract concept taking into account social usages is relatively stable. Its stability depends on how effectively its component parts carry out their 'functions'.

Thus far, we have been talking about social structure in a rather abstract way. The best way to make these ideas crystal clear is through an example. Radcliffe-Brown's field studies took him to various parts of the world from the Andaman Islands to Africa and to Australia. We will now focus upon the structural system of the tribes of the Western Australia as studied by Radcliffe-Brown. This will clearly demonstrate to you how social relationships help to build up the social structure.

Before going to the next section complete Check Your Progress 2.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Answer the following questions in two sentences each.
  - a) What did Radcliffe-brown mean by 'Social Structure' and 'Social Organisation'?

- .....  
.....
- b) What are social ‘institutions’? Give an example.
- .....  
.....

- ii) Mark whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F).
- a) People never violate institutions. (T/F)
- b) The social structure is extremely stable whilst structural form is in a permanent state of flux. (T/F)
- c) According to Radcliffe-Brown, social anthropology can become a science only when it develops rigorous concepts. (T/F)

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## 24.4 THE STRUCTURAL SYSTEM IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Let us look some of bases of the social structure of these tribes as systematically set down by Radcliffe-Brown.

### 24.4.0 The Territorial Basis

The essential basis of the structure of Western Australian tribal society, says Radcliffe-Brown, was the division of the country into numerous distinct territories. Each male belonged to his distinct territory from birth to death. His sons and their sons inherited this territorial identity. The men connected to a particular territory formed a “clan”, which was of basic importance in the social structure. Where did women fit in? Well, girls belonged to their fathers’ clans. Clan exogamy being a strict rule, they married men from other clans to which they then belonged.

The men of a clan, along with their wives and children formed a ‘horde’, which was identified by its distinct territory. The horde was an economically self-sufficient and politically autonomous unit. Elders held authority. Its total population was small, usually not more than 50 persons.

The horde was sub-divided into families, of the nuclear type. Each family had its own home, hearth and food supply and was dominated by the male. It dissolved upon his death. Even though the family was temporary, the clan was a permanent group. The horde, however, was in a state of flux. The male members were its nucleus, but females married out and new ones married into the horde. Briefly, the ‘clan’ consists of the men identified with a particular territory. The ‘horde’ refers to the men of a clan along with their wives and children, the wives having earlier been members of their fathers’ clans.

### 24.4.1 The Tribe

A number of clans having similar customs and language formed a linguistic community or tribe. Radcliffe-Brown points out that unlike some other

regions, these tribes were not politically united, nor did they come together for collective action. Different hordes and tribes had an important link, namely, the kinship structure. As Radcliffe-Brown puts it, the kinship structure was "...a complex arrangement of dyadic, person-to-person, relationships. A particular man was closely connected through his mother with her clan and its members. He could always visit their territory and live with the horde though he was not and could not become a member of the clan. Different members of a single clan were connected in this way with different other clans". Similarly, a man had relations with his grandmother's clan, his wife's clan and would probably keep in touch with the clans his sisters had married into. Thus, the kinship structure involved a large number and range of social relationships.

### 24.4.2 The Moieties

Read this sub-section very slowly and carefully because it may be unfamiliar and confusing. The society Radcliffe-Brown was speaking of, namely, western Australian tribes society was divided into two 'moieties'. Moieties are the two broad divisions into which society is divided. Each clan belongs to either one of them. These moieties may be referred to as I and II. Further, society is divided into two alternating generation divisions. Let us call them 'x' and 'y'. If your father belongs to generation 'x', then you will be part of 'y' and your children will be 'x' and so on. Therefore, a clan always consists of persons of both divisions. Society is thus divided into four "sections", namely, Ix, Iy, IIx and IIy. Radcliffe-Brown mentions some of the names given to these sections, e.g. Banaka, Burong, Karimera and Paldjeri.

In accordance with the tribal laws, a man must find a wife in the opposite moiety in the same generation division, thus a man of Iy must find a wife from IIy. For example, in the Kareira tribe, a man from Banaka section can only marry a Burong woman.

#### Activity 2

Select any five of your married relatives (e.g., mother, brother, sister, mother's brother's son/daughter, father's brother's son/daughter etc.) How were their mates selected? Is there any relationship between the families concerned? Write down your findings, and compare them, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

### 24.4.3 The Totemic Group

Another basis of social structure is the totem. As you have studied in Blocks 3 and 5 of this course, the totemic object is regarded as the common ancestor of clan members.

Each clan has its own sacred totem-centres, myths, rites and ceremonies. The totem lends solidarity and persistence. Radcliffe-Brown shows how some totemic ceremonies (e.g. those for the **initiation** of boys) in fact lead to the co-operation of a number of clans. These meetings of friendly clans mark out the religious structure of society. Co-operation during ceremonies also implies some amount of political unity, as these clans have forgotten

any existing differences and have co-operated on the basis of mutual trust and friendship.

What can we conclude from the above section? We can say that the structural description provided by Radcliffe-Brown reveals a number of important things. Structural description must take into consideration not just social groups (e.g. family, clan, horde) but also the entire gamut of socially fixed dyadic relationships, as has been done by Radcliffe-Brown in the description of the kinship system of the Australian aborigines which you have just read about.

Radcliffe-Brown's concept of social structure, though sometimes criticised as being too general has been ably used by him in his studies. By focussing on the formal aspects of social life, i.e., the way social life is built up or constructed, he provides a valuable corrective to the extremely personal kind of description given by Malinowski.

Indeed, the work of these two men who disliked each other intensely is in fact complementary. As Adam Kuper puts (1973: 51) it, "some saw Radcliffe-Brown as the classic to Malinowski's romantic".

It is now time to complete Check Your Progress 3.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

Match the following items.

- |           |   |
|-----------|---|
| a) Burong | i) Linguistic community                     |
| b) Tribe  | ii) Economic and political self-sufficiency |
| c) Clan   | iii) Territorial identity                   |
| d) Horde  | iv) Kaieira tribe                           |

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## **24.5 LET US SUM UP**

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The theme of this unit was the concept of social structure, as described by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. We began with a brief look at the intellectual influences, which helped shape his distinctive brand of social anthropology. We focussed on the impact on Radcliffe-Brown of the fieldwork and Durkheimian traditions.

Moving to the main theme, i.e., social structure, we defined social structure and social organisation. We then spoke of social institutions, which are an important component of structural description. We then considered how social structure, though in a state of flux, has continuity. In this connection, we spoke of structural form as well.

In order to make these new ideas clear, we moved onto a structural description of some Western Australian tribes studied by Radcliffe-Brown. We saw some of the bases of structural arrangements like territory, tribes, moiety, and totem.

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## 24.6 KEY WORDS

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<b>Empirical</b>	Based on observation and experience
<b>Ethnography</b>	Collecting and compiling information regarding the life, customs, institutions, social relationships etc. of a particular social group
<b>Initiation ceremonies</b>	Ceremonies through which the young members of a group are ritually made a part of adult social life, which involves certain rights and duties (e.g. <i>janeu</i> or thread-ceremony amongst Hindus)
<b>Organic Solidarity</b>	A concept put forward by Durkheim, referring to a form of social solidarity which gives full scope to individuality and personal creativity
<b>Sanctions</b>	Rewards or punishments given by society for conformity or non-conformity to social rules

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## 24.7 FURTHER READING

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Radcliffe-Brown, A.R., 1958. Social Structure. In M.N. Srinivas (ed.). *Method in Social Anthropology*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

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## 24.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- Down
- 1) Durkheim
  - 2) Andaman Islands
  - 3) W.H.R. Rivers

- Across
- 1) Malinowski
  - 2) Cambridge
  - 3) Moral

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) By 'social structure', Radcliffe-Brown referred to patterns of social relationships entered into by individuals or persons in a society. By 'social organisation', he referred to the arrangements of the activities undertaken by a group.  
b) Social institutions are socially prescribed ways and rules of behaviour involving the expectations of persons entering into an interaction, e.g. in a classroom, teacher is expected to give a lesson, students are expected to pay attention.



- ii) a) F
- b) F
- c) T

**Check Your Progress 3**

- a) iv)
- b) i)
- c) iii)
- d) ii)

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# UNIT 25 CONCEPT OF FUNCTION — RADCLIFFE-BROWN

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Concept of Function-  
Radcliffe-Brown

## Structure

- 25.0 Objectives
- 25.1 Introduction
- 25.2 The Concept of Function
  - 25.2.0 Structure and Function
  - 25.2.1 Functional Unity
  - 25.2.2 'Eunomia' and 'Dysnomia'
  - 25.2.3 The Historical Method and the Functional Method
- 25.3 Some Examples of Radcliffe-Brown's Structural-Functionalism
  - 25.3.0 Ceremonial Weeping in the Andaman Islands
  - 25.3.1 The Study of Totemism
  - 25.3.2 Kinship in Primitive Societies
  - 25.3.3 The Mother's Brother
- 25.4 Let Us Sum Up
- 25.5 Keywords
- 25.6 Further Reading
- 25.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 25.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit, you should be able to

- describe the concept of 'function' put forward by Radcliffe-Brown
- give examples from Radcliffe-Brown's work to show how he used the concept of structural-functionalism.

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## 25.1 INTRODUCTION

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The earlier unit (unit 24) familiarised you with the concept of structure as elaborated by Radcliffe-Brown. In this unit, we move on to a related concept, namely, that of function. These two concepts, i.e. 'structure' and 'function' are really inseparable from each other. The study of structure makes sense only in terms of function and function may be observed within the format of structure. Together, these two concepts help build up the 'structural-functional' mode of sociological investigation. As you have read in Units 22 and 23, Malinowski made use of the concept of function to understand society. The concept was further developed by Radcliffe-Brown as we shall see in this unit. By linking function with social structure, Radcliffe-Brown made a theoretical leap that Malinowski failed to achieve.

This unit consists of two sections. The first section will systematically bring out the various facets of the concept of 'function' as described by Radcliffe-Brown.

In the second section, we will focus on examples from Radcliffe-Brown's work, which highlight the concept of structural-functionalism.

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## **25.2 THE CONCEPT OF FUNCTION**

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As you have studied earlier in this course, the concept of function is an important one in the science of biology. The various parts or components that make up the structure of a living organism have a definite role to play in maintaining it, in keeping it alive and healthy.

Emile Durkheim systematically applied this concept in the study of social institutions. He spoke of function in terms of the needs of the social organism. Radcliffe-Brown substitutes the idea of 'needs' with necessary conditions of existence. In other words, he assumes that human societies must fulfil certain basic conditions so that they may exist. Just as the animal must breathe, eat, excrete and reproduce, so must the social organism carry out certain activities. These 'necessary conditions for existence' can, according to Radcliffe-Brown, be discovered by the proper kind of scientific enquiry. Let us now elaborate the connection between structure and function as described by Radcliffe-Brown

### **25.2.0 Structure and Function**

How do structure and function interact in the case of living organisms? The process by which the structure of the organism is maintained, is called 'life'. The life-process involves the activities and interactions of the various cells and organs that make up the organism. In other words, it is the functioning of the various constituent parts of the organism that help maintain the structure. If our lungs or stomachs or hearts were to suddenly stop functioning, what would happen to the structure of our bodies? It would collapse and we would die. As Radcliffe-Brown (1971: 179) puts it, "...the life of an organism is conceived as the functioning of its structure. It is through and by the continuity of the functioning that the continuity of the structure is preserved"

Let us turn now from organic to social life. The continuity of the social structure is maintained by the process of social life. Social life consists of the activities and interaction of various human beings and of the groups of which they are a part. Social life, in other words refers to the way in which the social structure functions. The function of any recurrent social activity is the part it plays in maintaining the continuity of the social structure. For example, marriage is a recurrent social activity. Through marriage, individuals of the opposite sex are brought together and society legitimises their sexual relationship. Children may be born and new members are added to society. Thus, by providing a socially acceptable outlet for sexual relations and providing a legitimate way through which society obtains new members, marriage contributes or performs a function in maintaining social structure. In Radcliffe-Brown's (1971: 180) own words, "the concept of function .....thus involves the notion of a structure consisting of a set of relations amongst unit entities, the continuity of the structure being maintained by a life process made up of the activities of the constituent units"

Let us further emphasise the interconnections between social structure and function. Radcliffe-Brown points out that in the case of an animal organism, structure can to some extent be observed independent of function e.g., we can study the human skeleton in terms of the way in which the bones are arranged, their differing shapes and sizes etc, without considering their function. But in studying human society 'structure' and 'function' cannot be separated.

According to Radcliffe-Brown (1971: 181), "Some of the features of social structure, such as the geographical distribution of individuals and groups can be directly observed, but most of the social relations which, in their totality constitute the structure, such as relations of father and son, buyer and seller, ruler and subject, cannot be observed except in the social activities in which the relations are functioning". In other words, 'social morphology' (i.e. the study of the kinds of social structure, their similarities, differences and classification) and 'social physiology' (the study of the way social structures function) are interdependent for Radcliffe-Brown

Let us now first complete Check Your Progress 1 and then discuss an important idea expressed by Radcliffe-Brown, namely, the 'functional unity' of the social system.

### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Complete the following sentences.
  - a) Whilst Durkheim spoke of 'needs', Radcliffe-Brown used the term .....
  - b) According to Radcliffe-Brown, the life of an organism is the .....
- ii) State whether the following are 'True' (T) or 'False' (F)
  - a) Marriage is a private affair, having nothing to do with social structure. (T/F)
  - b) It is not possible to observe the structure of a biological organism independent of function. (T/F)
  - c) The study of social morphology and social physiology is interconnected, according to Radcliffe-Brown. (T/F)

#### 25.2.1 Functional Unity

As we have studied above, the function of social usage or activity refers to the contribution it makes to the functioning of the total social system. This implies that the social system has a certain kind of unity, which Radcliffe-Brown terms as 'functional unity'. By this he means a condition in which all the parts of the social system work together in a harmonious, consistent fashion i.e. without producing persistent conflicts which cannot be resolved or regulated. For instance, if we take up the example of Indian society in Pre-British India, we may say that the various parts of the social system, e.g. village organisation, caste, joint family etc. worked together in a consistent fashion. They complemented each other and contributed to maintaining the existing social structure.

We have so far been restricting our discussion to the positive functions of social institutions, namely, their role in maintaining the social structure. Let us now turn to the possibility of dysfunction as described by Radcliffe-Brown.

### **25.2.2 ‘Eunomia’ and ‘Dysnomia’**

The science of pathology deals with the problem of organic dysfunction, in other words, disease, when some part of the organism fails to perform its function adequately, disease results, which, if unchecked, may lead to death. In the case of organic structures, we can identify strictly objective criteria which can help us to distinguish disease from health, or pathological from normal. For instance, we can say that if the body temperature of an individual rises above 98° Fahrenheit, he/she is ill, or if the stomach secretes more than a certain amount of acid, the individual might suffer from ulcers. In other words, we can diagnose disease on the basis of certain standards or rules. Radcliffe-Brown points out that an attempt to apply the notion of health and disease to society and the state was made by the Greeks of the fifth century B.C. They distinguished ‘**eunomia**’ (good order, social health) from ‘**dysnomia**’ (disorder, social ill-health). In the nineteenth century, Durkheim tried to understand social pathology with the help of the concept of ‘**anomie**’. Radcliffe-Brown too adopts the terms ‘**eunomia**’ and ‘**dysnomia**’. He points out that societies’ do not fall ill and die in the same sense as animals do, and accepts that it is not possible to have definite, objective criteria to determine the ‘health’ of society, because the science of human society, according to him, is not mature enough to do so.

For Radcliffe-Brown, the eunomia of a society refers to the harmonious working together of its parts or, in other words, functional unity or inner consistency of the system. Dysnomia, on the other hand is a condition of functional disunity or inconsistency. A society thrown into a state of dysnomia rarely dies, but instead struggles towards a new state of eunomia or social health. In the process, it might even change its structural type.

These concepts in Radcliffe-Brown’s view are particularly relevant for social anthropologists who in the course of their investigations come across tribes whose social structures have been thrown into disarray with the onslaught of the outside world, particularly Western domination. Let us now see what Radcliffe Brown says about the use of the functional method in studying society, particularly primitive society.

In order to fully understand the terms ‘eunomia’ and ‘dysnomia’, let us now complete Activity 1.

#### **Activity 1**

Is Indian society in a state of ‘eunomia’ or ‘dysnomia’? Substantiate your views with the help of an essay, of 500 words. Compare your views if possible, with that of other students at your -Study Centre.

### **25.2.3 The Historical Method and the Functional Method**

Radcliffe-Brown mentions two methods for the interpretation of cultural materials, namely, the historical and functional methods. The historical

method concentrates on the process of historical development of a culture, in other words, on how the culture has come to be what it is.

This method is useful only when the society to be studied has historical records. In the case of primitive societies with no historical records, this method proves deficient. The result may be conjectural or speculative history in other words, guesswork. This is not a particularly useful exercise.

The functional method of interpretation, says Radcliffe- Brown, rests on the assumption that culture is an integrated system. Each element of the culture has specific function to perform in the life of the community. This method assumes that there are certain general laws of function, which are valid for all human societies and tries to discover and verify these laws with the help of logical, scientific methods.

It must be noted that Radcliffe-Brown sees both these methods as complementary in sociological investigations. He does not discard the historical method but points out its limitations in studying primitive societies.

We have just seen how Radcliffe-Brown conceptualises social functions as the contribution made by the constituents of the social structure to maintaining the life and health of the society. We have studied the notion of ‘functional unity’, ‘eunomia’, ‘dysnomia’ and the use of the functional method in social-anthropological investigation. Let us now take a look at how Radcliffe-Brown uses the concept of function in studying actual social realities. We will focus upon the function of ‘ceremonial weeping’ amongst the Andaman Islanders, the study of totemism, kinship in primitive societies and on the relationship between the mother’s brother and sister’s son in certain primitive communities.

But before turning to the next section (25.3), let us complete Check Your Progress 2.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Answer the following questions in three sentences.
- a) What does Radcliffe-Brown mean by the ‘functional unity’ of society?
- .....
- .....
- .....
- b) How does a society respond to ‘dysnomia’, according to Radcliffe-Brown?
- .....
- .....
- .....
- ii) State whether the following are ‘True’ (T) or ‘False’ (F)
- a) The historical method is especially effective in the study of primitive society. (T/F)



- b) The functional method studies culture as an integrated whole with the help of speculation and conjecture. (T/F)
- c) According to Radcliffe-Brown, the historical and functional methods are in complete opposition to one another. (T/F)

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### **25.3 SOME EXAMPLES OF RADCLIFFE-BROWN'S STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM**

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Radcliffe-Brown is more than just a 'functionalist', he is a 'structural functionalist'. By this we mean that he is concerned not just with the way customs and social institutions fulfil certain needs or conditions of existence. He is also concerned with the connection between social relationships of various kinds. His method of structural-functionalism is best understood through some examples. Note how he combines in the following examples the use of the concepts of social structure and function in arriving at explanation.

In his work, *The Andaman Islanders*, Radcliffe-Brown (1933: 230) writes: "Every custom and belief plays some determinate part in the social life of the community, just as every organ of a living body plays some part in the general life of the organism". It is against this background that you will be able to understand how he explains ceremonial weeping amongst the Andaman Islanders. For more details about, the Andaman Islanders listen to the audio-programme on Radcliffe-Brown.

#### **25.3.0 Ceremonial Weeping in the Andaman Islands**

Andamanese ceremonies are marked by formal weeping. Andamanese weep, ceremonially on a number of occasions, e.g. when friends and relatives are reunited after a long separation, after a death, during marriage and initiation ceremonies, peace making ceremonies and so on.

Radcliffe-Brown holds that the purpose underlying all ceremonials is the expression and transmission of sentiments, which help to regulate individual, behaviour in conformity with the needs of society. Hence, Radcliffe-Brown emphasises the importance of probing the meaning of the custom. How is this to be done? Well, in the first place, one can take account of the explanations of the various members of society. Further, one can compare the different contexts or situations in which the custom appears, and abstract its real significance.

Formal weeping, Radcliffe-Brown concludes, takes place in situations in which social relations which have been disturbed or interrupted are about to be resumed. For instance, when long-lost friends meet, ceremonial weeping marks the fact that the long separation is over, and the friendship will resume once more. Similarly, ceremonial weeping at funerals marks the final departure of the deceased. Soon, life will have to go on as usual; the normal relations and activities will be resumed in this manner, ceremonial weeping has definite role or function to play in the life of that society. We shall now discuss how Radcliffe-Brown views totemism as a way of expressing the structure of relationships.

### Activity 2

Observe and list down the various ceremonies performed in a marriage in your community. Select any two. What do these signify? What function do they play? Write down your findings in about a page, and compare them, if possible, with those of other students at your Study Centre.

### 25.3.1 The Study of Totemism

As you have studied in Block 3 (unit 12) and Block 5 (unit 19) of this course, totemism refers to the way in which human beings relate themselves to some natural object from which they claim descent. In the words of Kuper (1975: 74), “In totemism a specific group within a society adopts a ritual attitude towards a natural species or object”. Durkheim argues that totemism is a way in which collective sentiments are expressed and ritualised through symbolism, and this symbolisation helps to maintain group solidarity. But Durkheim does not touch upon a crucial question, namely, why are natural objects selected as totems?

This is precisely what Radcliffe-Brown tries to explore. He observes in his Australian field-studies that some tribes in New South Wales are divided into two exogamous **moieties**. These are named after two birds, the eaglehawk and crow. Eaglehawk men marry crow women and vice-versa. Other such dual divisions have been found in Australia which are also named after pairs of birds or animals. These pairs of birds or animals are represented in myths as being opponents in a conflict. Despite this opposition, there is also some kind of fundamental similarity or resemblance. In the case of eaglehawk and crow, both are meat-eating birds. Interestingly enough, the relationship between moieties too is one of alliance and competition; they are paired and opposed at one and the same time.

Thus, Radcliffe-Brown sees totemism as more than just a technique of maintaining group solidarity, (i.e., its function) but also as a way in which the social opposition between groups is expressed (i.e., the structure of relationships). He has thus laid the foundation for much of the future work undertaken by structuralists who use the notion of ‘opposition’ to provide interesting interpretations of social usages. The work of Levi-Strauss may be cited in this context.

Let us move now to a brief appraisal of Radcliffe-Brown’s work on kinship.

### 25.3.2 Kinship in Primitive Societies

The study of kinship is Radcliffe-Brown’s specialisation. His work in this area is path breaking for two reasons:

- a) Earlier studies of kinship were basically exercises in speculation and conjectural history, e.g. the theories of ‘primitive promiscuity’ (see unit 22). Radcliffe-Brown tries to make sense of kinship systems in terms their contemporary relevance for the concerned societies.
- b) Since the kinship system provided the major organisational principle for most primitive communities, it is imperative to understand its

principles. By focussing on this topic, Radcliffe- Brown contributes a great deal in helping students of social anthropology understand the peoples they studied.

Radcliffe-Brown is not merely interested in the usages, which shape the relationships between kin, but also in the terms used to denote kin, i.e., kinship terminology. Further, he concentrates on ‘classificatory’ systems of kinship terminology, wherein kin outside the circle of family are also classified along with members of the family. For example, mother’s sister, though outside the circle of the patrilineal family, is nonetheless classified as ‘mother’, Radcliffe-Brown identifies three basic principles of the classificatory system of kinship terminology. These are,

- a) **The unity of the sibling group** — Here, brothers and sisters share a feeling of solidarity and were treated as a unit by outsiders. My mother’s sister is also addressed as ‘mother’, my mother’s brother is like a ‘male mother’ (see sub-section 25.3.4).
- b) **The unity of the lineage group** — A lineage refers to the descendants in a line (traced either through male or female) of a single ancestor. Like siblings, lineage members show solidarity and are treated as a single unit by outsiders.
- c) **The ‘generation principle’** — It is observed that in all kinship systems, there is a certain distance or tension between members of succeeding generations. For example, my mother has to socialise me, hence she will try to discipline or control me. However, as Radcliffe-Brown points out, members of alternating generations (grandparents and grandchildren) tend to share easy and friendly relationships. In many societies it is believed that the grandchild replaces the grandparent in the social system. Kinship terminology in some cases (e.g. **the Hawaiian systems** - see Keywords for details) use generational combinations and oppositions to classify kin.

Although studying kinship terminology certainly provided interesting insights into the way kinship worked, Radcliffe-Brown did not neglect the social relationships that were the building-blocks of the kinship system. These relationships were shaped by solidarity and opposition. A reflection of this can be clearly seen in ‘joking relationships’ in which Radcliffe-Brown was very much interested. What is a ‘joking relationship’? It is a relaxed and friendly relationship between kin marked by an exchange of jokes (often with sexual overtones) and friendly insults. Junod (1912-13), in his report on the Thonga of Mozambique, describes the joking relationship between a man and his mother’s father.

Radcliffe-Brown, dismissing Junod’s conjectural explanation of the phenomenon, focussed on the relationship between mother’s brother and sister’s son (see Radcliffe-Brown’s *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, 1971). He chose to locate the problem of joking relationships in the context of alliance between members of socially separated groups. Joking relationships serve to protect the delicate relationships between persons who are bound together in one set of ties and yet separated by other ties for example, members of different lineages are socially separated

from each other. But if they marry each other, they are also allied. Joking thus is one way of defusing the tensions of certain delicate relationships. Another response is avoidance or extreme respect. In Radcliffe-Brown's own words, "I once asked an Australian native why he had to avoid his mother-in-law, and his reply was because she is my best friend in the world; she has given me my wife. The mutual respect between son-in-law and parents-in-law is a mode of friendship. It prevents conflict that might arise through divergence of interest".

### Activity 3

Make a list of all the joking and avoidance relationships among kinspersons that exist in your own society.

In a nutshell, Radcliffe-Brown gave a new impetus to kinship studies by firmly rejecting speculative hypothesis and focussing upon the structure of social relationships in the kinship network and the way these operated in balancing tensions and integrating society. We will now briefly discuss Radcliffe-Brown's special interest in the relationship between mother's brother and sister's son in some primitive communities.

### 25.3.3 The Mother's Brother

Let us now examine his treatment of the role of the mother's brother (referred to as '*mama*' in many Indian languages) in some primitive communities. This is an excellent example of Radcliffe-Brown's structural functional method. In a number of primitive communities, like the Bathonga group of Eastern Africa, the Nama Hottentots of South Africa and the Friendly Islanders of Tonga, the mother's brother and the sister's son are observed to share a particularly warm and affectionate relationship. The nephew is permitted to take many liberties with his maternal uncle who in turn takes special care of him, makes sacrifices on behalf of the nephew when the latter is ill, and leaves a share of his property and sometimes even one of his wives for the nephew to claim. Radcliffe-Brown says (1971:17), "It is a mistake to suppose that we can understand the institutions of society by studying them in isolation, without regard to other institutions with which they seems to be correlated". He identifies another affectionate relationship that seems correlated to the one between maternal uncle and nephew. He points out (1971: 17) that "the custom of allowing the sister's son to take liberties with his mother's brother seems to be generally accompanied with an obligation of particular respect and obedience to the father's sister... His father's sister is sacred to him; her word is his law; and one of the greatest offences of which he could be guilty would be to show himself lacking in respect to her".

Radcliffe-Brown points out that in most primitive societies, kinship regulates the social relationships of individuals. Various patterns of behaviour are associated with these relationships, and these follow stable and definite patterns. But if we display different kinds of behaviour towards every single relative, things could get very complicated, especially if the number of relatives is very large. This difficulty, says Radcliffe-Brown, is avoided in primitive societies by a system of classification. Different kinds of relatives are clubbed together into a limited number of categories. The most

commonly used principle of classification is that of the equivalence of brothers. In other words, if an individual stands in a particular relationship to a man, the same kind of relationship exists with the man's brother, the same is the case with a woman and her sister. Hence, the father's brother is regarded as a sort of father and his sons are like the individual's brothers. Similarly, mother's sisters are like other mothers and their children are like brothers and sisters.

How do the father's sister and mother's brother fit in? The three communities earlier mentioned are patriarchal. The father is regarded with awe and fear, the mother with tenderness and affection. In keeping with this trend, the father's sister is given much respect and reverence and the mother's brother affection and tenderness. In a word, the paternal aunt is a sort of 'female father' whilst the maternal uncle is a 'male mother'. This explanation derives from the notion of 'extension of sentiments'. By this we mean that the sentiments expressed towards the mother extend to and include her brother, and the same is the case with the father's sister.

How does Radcliffe-Brown explain this sort of classification? In his own words, (1971: 25) "in primitive society there is a strongly marked tendency to merge the individual in the group to which he or she belongs. The result of this in relation to kinship is a tendency to extend to all the members of a group a certain type of behaviour which has its origin in a relationship to one particular member of the group"

In a nutshell, Radcliffe-Brown studies the role of the maternal uncle in primitive societies in terms of correlated institutionalised relationships. This is the essence of functionalist methodology.

It is now time to complete Check Your Progress 3.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Match the items in Column 'A' with the appropriate ones in Column 'B'

A	B
a) formal weeping	i) equivalence of brothers
b) Bathonga	ii) Andaman Islands
c) paternal aunt	iii) Tonga
d) father's brother	iv) East Africa
	v) female father
	vi) affectionate, warm relationship

- ii) How does Radcliffe-Brown view the institution of totemism?

.....

.....

.....

iii) Fill up the blanks with suitable words.

- a) Radcliffe-Brown paid special attention to the ..... system of kinship terminology.
- b) Tension existing in certain delicate relationships may be defused through ..... and .....

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## 25.4 LET US SUM UP

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This unit dealt with the concept of ‘function’ elaborated by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. The relationship between ‘structure’ and ‘function’, Radcliffe-Brown’s idea of the ‘functional unity of society’ and the twin concepts of ‘eunomia’ and ‘dysnomia’ were made clear to you. A comparison was drawn between the historical and functional modes of analysis with particular reference to primitive society.

The concept of function and the functional method were further clarified with the help of some examples. You saw how Radcliffe-Brown explained the custom of ‘ceremonial weeping’ amongst the Andaman Islanders and how he analysed totemism as an expression of structured relationships. Then you learnt about Radcliffe-Brown’s special interest in kinship studies and how he explained the institutionalised relationship between maternal uncle and nephew in certain primitive communities.

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## 25.5 KEYWORDS

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<b>Eunomia</b>	A state of societal health or well being
<b>Extension of sentiments</b>	In the context of Radcliffe-Brown’s understanding of close relations between mother’s brother and sister’s son, it implies extending to the mother’s brother the same kind of sentiments one does to the mother
<b>Dysnomia</b>	A state of societal ill-health, disease
<b>The Hawaiian System</b>	Anthropologists identify kinship systems of the world on the basis of the differences in kinship terminologies. Of the six types of kinship systems the Hawaiian system is also known as the ‘generation system’ of kinship. In this system, all persons in the same generation are classified in one group, with a distinction between the sexes. For example, in the first ascendant generation, a common term is used to designate father, father’s brother and mother’s brother. Similarly, a common term is used for mother, mother’s sister and father’s sister.
<b>Moiety</b>	One of two basic complementary tribal subdivisions



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## 25.6 FURTHER READING

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Radcliffe-Brown, A.R. 1971. *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*. Cohen and West Limited: London.

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## 25.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) a) 'necessary conditions of existence'  
c) functioning of its structure.
- ii) a) F  
b) F  
c) T

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) a) By the 'functional unity' of society, Radcliffe-Brown refers to a condition wherein all the parts of society work together harmoniously. Thus, conflicts and tensions are very limited.  
b) A society in a state of 'dysnomia' rarely dies. Rather, it once again tries to achieve a state of social health or eunomia. In the process, it may even change its structural type.
- ii) a) F  
b) F  
c) F

### Check Your Progress 3

i)

A	B
a)	ii)
b)	iv)
c)	v)
d)	i)

- ii) Like Durkheim, Radcliffe-Brown too sees totemism as a way of maintaining social solidarity. He also sees it as a way in which the social opposition between groups is maintained. In this way, he accounts for both, the function and the structure of relationships involved in totemism.
- iii) a) classificatory  
b) joking, avoidance

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# UNIT 26 A CRITIQUE OF MALINOWSKI AND RADCLIFFE-BROWN

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A Critique of Malinowski  
and Radcliffe-Brown

## Structure

- 26.0 Objectives
- 26.1 Introduction
- 26.2 The Functional School - A Myth or Reality
- 26.3 A Natural Science of Society
  - 26.3.0 The Distinctive Place of Social Anthropology
  - 26.3.1 Radcliffe-Brown's Fieldwork
  - 26.3.3 Radcliffe-Brown's Theoretical Contributions
- 26.4 Growth of Anthropological Research under Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown
  - 26.4.0 Malinowski's Impact
  - 26.4.1 Radcliffe-Brown's Impact
- 26.5 Subsequent Developments
- 26.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 26.7 Key Words
- 26.8 Further Reading
- 26.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 26.0 OBJECTIVES

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After reading this unit, you should be able to

- appreciate the relative positions of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown in the development of sociological theory
- assess their influence on the succeeding generation of anthropologists.

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## 26.1 INTRODUCTION

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This unit is both a critical statement on the last four units of this block and a glimpse into the later developments in sociological thought. Much of what Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown contributed to sociological theory has been discussed in units 22, 23, 24 and 25. Going through these units, you must have formed your own impression of strong and weak points in their writings. In this unit you will find a critical appraisal of their contributions in terms of the history of ideas about human society. This kind of evaluation will help you understand their relative place in the total body of sociological thought.

You already know that social thinkers interested in the history of human civilisation found it useful to study primitive societies. They regarded that primitive societies represented the early stages of human development and

their study would help them to discover the laws of progress of humankind. Understanding primitive cultures in terms of the use or function of a custom or belief for the maintenance of a society was a radically new approach, which was evolved by Malinowski. It came to be known as the Functionalist School of Social Anthropology. Some, for example Radcliffe-Brown (1971: 188-9), may even doubt its existence and consider it as myth. While others, such as Firth (1957), regard Malinowski's attempt to analyse social reality in terms of functional approach as a turning point in sociological studies. We examine this issue in section 26.2 and show that the tradition of rigorous fieldwork was the hallmark of this school and without this it would not have been possible to make further advances in our understanding of human behaviour.

As a fieldworker Malinowski is supreme but as a theoretician he proves to be a failure and his failure prompted others to introduce new elements to the Malinowskian functional approach. After a consideration of inadequacies of Malinowski's theoretical framework, we move on to Radcliffe-Brown's brave efforts to provide a sound theoretical basis to our understanding of primitive societies and then on to that of human societies in general. We discuss in Section 26.3 Radcliffe-Brown's conception of social anthropology as a branch of natural science

Both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown had a large number of followers. A great deal of anthropological research was carried out under their direct or indirect guidance. A brief review of this literature is given in Section 26.4. Finally we indicate the lines of subsequent development of ideas for studying human societies. These developments succeeded functionalist analysis in providing alternative explanations of human behaviour.

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## **26.2 THE FUNCTIONAL SCHOOL — A MYTH OR REALITY**

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You already know that Malinowski applied the concept of function to present in a coherent and logical manner the ethnographic account of the Trobriand Islanders' society. This proved to be a successful approach for making sense of apparently diverse and complex patterns of human behaviour. The whole exercise assumed the mantle of a school of thought, known as functionalism. As already mentioned in the Introduction to this Block, functionalism became a widely recognised theory (for the term 'theory' see Box 26.1) in social sciences. While rejecting the earlier established ways of understanding the progress of human civilisation, Malinowski provided an alternative way of making sense of the customs and beliefs of a primitive people. And, this was his unique contribution to sociological research. It is altogether another point that he tried to generalise his findings (which were strictly based on one case) in terms of human behaviour at large. This may not be acceptable. But the naivety of this step does not negate the lead that Malinowski gave by looking into the use or function of each custom. To explain one belief or activity he had to also look at its connections with other activities. This helped him in relating his account of Trobriand Islanders' life to one cultural whole. This was no

small achievement, considering the level of explanation of human behaviour offered by his evolutionist and diffusionist colleagues.

### Box 26.1 Theory

This is a commonly used term in social sciences. It generally refers to a systematic scheme of abstract terms. Such abstractions help in articulation of ideas in a particular branch of knowledge. Very often, the ideas about human society and human relations are expressed by the term social theory. In our elective course ESO-13 we have used this term to refer to abstract conceptual schemes about human society. Abstract conceptual schemes are basically systematically thought out inter-related ideas, which are commonly comprehended and accepted by academics.

The main features of Malinowski's functionalism may be summarised as follows.

- i) Compared to catch-all descriptions of social phenomena, presented by the nineteenth century scholars, Malinowski gave a biographical account of his fieldwork and presented his material in a systematic and coherent manner.
- ii) He focussed on one particular aspect of culture and gradually moved to the whole culture. This gave a thematic unity to his **monographs**.
- iii) Malinowski's emphasis on individuals, their behaviour, reactions, emotional states brought alive before us the cultural patterns of the primitive people. His view of individual interests and social order provides a balance in his understanding of human social behaviour. Even a long time after Malinowski, anthropologists have found it relevant to refer to his interest in experimental psychology and individual needs.
- iv) Malinowski cut across theories about man's nature and spoke about the hiatus between what is said by the people and done by them. This shows his awareness of the tension between individual interests and social order. For example, he discussed the reciprocal nature of exchange in his book, *Arogonauts of the Western Pacific*. His insight into this principle of exchange inspired the analysis of gift-exchanges by Mauss. Later Mauss inspired Levi-Strauss who maintained that the principle of reciprocity was the most significant aspect of social control. Transactional analysis has its roots in this very idea of Levi-Strauss.

We do not know if you have been able to raise questions regarding Malinowski's functionalist approach. Remember, in Unit 22 we had asked you to try to find inadequacies in his approach. Here we point out some of them.

- i) Malinowski linked each aspect of culture with its other aspects. The question comes up, if everything is linked to everything else, where does one stop? Obviously, the point of relevance of these connections is not taken up by Malinowski. He has not worked on any specific

problems. Rather, he has been too occupied in construction an integrated cultural whole.

- ii) The lack of analytical relevance in his accounts implies an absence of **abstraction** and therefore the absence of any development of a theory.
- iii) Malinowski's functionalism is akin to a crude utilitarianism, where everything has to exist to serve a purpose. It is surprising that he never arrived at the idea of a social system, a relationship between groups.
- iv) Malinowski (1935: 479-81) was not able to take account of changes, which affected tribal societies. He admitted of not including in his writings the European influence on the Trobriands in his book, *Coral Gardens and their Magic*. He considered this to be 'the most serious shortcoming' of his research in Melanesia.
- v) While emphasising the importance of fieldwork Malinowski did not displace evolutionism and diffusionism. He only added to them a **synchronic** analysis of a particular community. In fact Malinowski (1929) wrote,

I still believe in evolution, in the process of development, only I see more and more clearly that answers to any evolutionary questions must lead to the empirical study of the facts and institutions, the past development of which we wish to reconstruct.

But the special contribution of Malinowski's work lies in another direction. This refers to his invention of methods of field research. His theory of functionalism has been much criticised and improved upon by subsequent scholars. But we have hardly anyone who can claim to have improved upon his techniques of field research. Standards set by him are still used as measuring yardstick to evaluate the quality of anthropological fieldwork. Even now, one is supposed to spend a minimum period of eighteen months among the people one wants to study. One is expected to learn the local language and use it for data-collection. By living among the people and participating in their activities, one has to make a psychological shift from 'they' to 'we'. In other words, one has to become a part of the community. These ideal guidelines set by Malinowski, some, for example Powdermaker (1970: 347) would claim, are a kind of myth, generated by Malinowski's charisma. They would claim that even Malinowski did not conform to these ideas. All the same we find that this myth has provided many anthropologists with real guidelines.

As a conclusion to an appraisal of Malinowski's contributions, we may say that he gave a new vision not only to social anthropology but also to inquiry into human behaviour in general and by implication into one's own conduct. At the same time he gave new techniques of observation and data-collection. But he lacked the ability to deal with abstractions. In fact, he was quite suspicious of abstract theories. The task of introducing theoretical concepts to guide anthropological research was completed by Malinowski's contemporary, Radcliffe-Brown, who established social anthropology as a branch of natural science.

Let us complete Check Your Progress 1.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Would you describe Malinowski as an evolutionist? Use three lines for your positive/negative answer.

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.....  
.....

- ii) How does a systematic ethnographic account of a society help us to understand better the culture of that society? Use three lines for your answer.

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**26.3 A NATURAL SCIENCE OF SOCIETY**

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Radcliffe-Brown’s theoretical position is contained in his paper, *A Natural Science of Society*. As a response to psychological studies of man, he had a vision of comparative sociology dominating all social sciences. In the following section we will first discuss how he carved a distinct place for social anthropology. This will be followed by a discussion of Radcliffe-Brown as a fieldworker and then as a theoretician.

**26.3.0 The Distinctive Place of Social Anthropology**

As you have read in Units 24 and 25, Radcliffe-Brown held the firm conviction that social anthropology must model itself on the lines of the natural sciences. Its methods, concepts and conclusions were to be strictly ‘scientific’, objective and verifiable. Radcliffe-Brown made a clear distinction between social anthropology and ethnology. Ethnologists were engaged in conjectural history, which was a completely unscientific exercise according to him. As you read in Unit 25, Radcliffe-Brown stressed that to study primitive society, insistence on historical details was not really necessary. Rather than asking ‘how did this come to be’? Radcliffe-Brown, in line with Durkheim, preferred to ask ‘what does this mean’? In short Radcliffe-Brown spoke out against the prevailing trend of delving into the historical roots of everything and laid stress on the contemporary significance of the societies he studied.

Radcliffe-Brown was also wary of explaining social phenomena in psychological terms. Unlike Malinowski, he avoided psychological explanations. We have repeatedly stated how Malinowski’s functional theory was heavily tilted towards the biological and psychological. Radcliffe-Brown did not fall into this trap. For him, social anthropology was primarily concerned with social rather than biological functions, with the ‘persons’ in a society rather than biological ‘individuals’ (See Kuper 1975: 86).



Despite his attempts to chart out a separate territory for social anthropology, Radcliffe-Brown could not quite free himself from his natural science background. This reflects in his insistence on scientific method, rigorous concepts, and the need to derive laws about society. As the discipline developed over the years, these notions came to be regarded as old-fashioned and naive.

However, it cannot be denied that Radcliffe-Brown's contribution to the discipline was immense. He cleared the path on which a generation of brilliant scholars was soon to tread, as we shall read in section 26.4 of this unit.

### 26.3.1 Radcliffe-Brown's Fieldwork

Your reading of the previous units will have brought home to you the crucial role played by Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown in shaping modern social anthropology. You will by now have realised that fieldwork, as is practiced today, was brought into the forefront by Malinowski. Radcliffe-Brown too undertook a considerable amount of fieldwork. However, as has been pointed out by many scholars, the quality of Radcliffe-Brown's fieldwork was nowhere near the rich and lively work of Malinowski. Let us discuss this point further.

In the words of Adam Kuper (1975: 60) the fieldwork of Radcliffe-Brown was "... 'survey and salvage' ethnography, and it was sterile as compared with the type of fieldwork Malinowski was to persecute in the Trobriands". For example in his first field-study in the Andaman Islands, Radcliffe-Brown (1964) tried hard but failed to learn the local language. Finally, he resorted to collecting information by conversing in Hindustani, which the local people didn't really understand well. He made progress in his fieldwork only after he found an English-speaking informant!

Far from trying to involve himself with the life and customs of his "subjects", as did Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown maintained an aloofness, a distance which obviously reflected in the quality of his fieldwork. His fieldwork in Australia in 1910 was primarily directed towards gathering information about the complex Australian kinship system. To do so, he spent several months with his party on the Bernier Island, the site of a lock-up hospital for **Aborigines** suffering from venereal disease. It was partly on the basis of the memories of these informants that Radcliffe-Brown built up his model of a certain type of Aboriginal kinship system. So obsessed was he with the discovery of formal structures that he neglected the study of the many functioning tribes that still existed in Australia.

Radcliffe-Brown's basic concern was to fit facts into a logical, coherent theoretical mould. In the process it was inevitable that flesh-and-blood human beings with their special needs, ideas and values tended to be lost somewhere. On the other hand, Malinowski's fieldwork brought out the humanity of his subjects, their passions, motives and aims. In a way, Malinowski's work was content without much form whilst Radcliffe-Brown's work was form without much content. However, as has been repeatedly emphasised in the previous units, Radcliffe-Brown gave the discipline of social anthropology a theoretical impetus, a range of rigorous concepts that would make field work more focussed, more coherent.

### 26.3.3 Radcliffe-Brown's Theoretical Contribution

As you have studied in the previous units, the concepts of 'social structure' and 'function' advanced by Radcliffe-Brown are important in helping field-workers make sense of the data they collected. Let us once again review these concepts.

#### i) Social Structure and Function

Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, unlike their evolutionist predecessors, view primitive societies as living entities, rather than as links in the imaginary chain of progress and development. Both reject speculation and conjectural history and preferred to study primitive peoples on their own terms. The 'functionalist' school of social anthropology with which both are associated, sought to study social institutions and customs of primitive societies in terms of their relevance and value for the societies concerned, that is, their function. But while Malinowski's notion of 'function' draws primarily on physiological and psychological needs, (see unit 22), Radcliffe-Brown speaks of social functions or conditions of existence of the society used.

We have spoken earlier of the impact of Durkheim's sociology on Radcliffe-Brown's ideas (see unit 24). For Radcliffe-Brown, ceremonials, customs, ways of acting and believing had to be seen in the context of the social system from which they emerged, and the way in which they integrated and maintained that system. Our earlier discussion of the role of the mother's brother in some primitive groups amply illustrates this point (see unit 25).

#### Activity 1

If you were to make an anthropological study of a group of people, would you follow Malinowski and consider both individual interests and social order? Or, would you rather follow Radcliffe-Brown and consider conditions of existence of the society itself? Write a note of one page on how you would prefer to go about this exercise.

But while Malinowski's theoretical thrust ends with the notion of function, Radcliffe-Brown has in addition a well-developed notion of social structure. For Radcliffe-Brown, social structure refers to the web of social relationships entered into by the persons who constitute society. By describing social structure, the notion of function becomes more clear, more explanatory. Section 25.4 of Unit 25 has already made this point quite clear.

We shall now see how both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown influenced the succeeding generation of anthropologists.

#### Check Your Progress 2

i) How did Radcliffe-Brown's fieldwork differ from that of Malinowski?

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.....  
.....

- ii) Distinguish between Malinowski's and Radcliffe-Brown's notions of function. Use three lines for your answer.

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## 26.4 GROWTH OF ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH UNDER MALINOWSKI AND RADCLIFFE-BROWN

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The thirties and forties of the twentieth century marked an unprecedented growth of anthropological research in England. During this period, under the leadership of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown, anthropologists experimented with radical methods of gathering sociological data and interpreting them in first, functionalist and later, structural functionalist terms. Malinowski is constantly present in meticulously carried out field researches and Radcliffe-Brown is abundantly present in the efforts at theorising through abstractions. We shall briefly examine highlights of this creative period in the development of sociological thought.

### 26.4.0 Malinowski's Impact

Malinowski continues to be a powerful influence in anthropology. His theoretical framework, comprising the ideas of culture and needs, may not inspire us now but his interest in methodological and philosophical issues is again and again referred in the Malinowski Memorial Lecture, held annually in his honour. The most profound impact of his ideas on his students is recorded in *Man and Culture*, edited by his student, Raymond Firth (1957). This collection includes essays by Audrey, I. Richards, Ralph Piddington, Talcott Parsons, Phyllis Kaberry, J.R. Firth, E.R. Leech, I. Schapera, Meyer Fortes, S.F. Nadel, Raymond Firth, Lucy Mair and H. Ian Hogbin. The essays by Malinowski's former students and colleagues are a clear testimony of his influence on their works. The spirit of this collection is not to write high praises, it is to evaluate Malinowski's contribution and its relevance for contemporary sociology.

His efforts to develop field techniques for carrying out intensive sociological studies of particular societies have been recognised by Evans Pritchard (1951), Firth (1951), and earlier by Richards (1939). Ethnography written from 1929 to 1940 reflects the liberal use of Malinowski's functional approach. His practice of documenting generalisations has also been emulated by his successors. For example, Firth's *We the Tikopia* (1936) and Schapera's *Married Life in an African Tribe* (1940) explain the institution of family in terms of its function. The functions of procreation and socialisation, have been related to other aspects of social life. Similarly, the function of providing sustenance has been described by Richards (1939) in explaining the economic activities of the Bemba in Northern Rhodesia. These rather voluminous books give long descriptions in a truly Malinowskian mould. They lack a sense of social organisation and its

principles. Descriptions of concrete ground-realities are expected somehow to spell out these principles. In other words they present a mix-up between analysis and description — a common feature of Malinowski's scholarship.

Students came to Malinowski from different parts of the world, including from Australia, New Zealand and India. Hogbin, Hart, Piddington, Kaberry and Stanner were from Australia and New Zealand. You may like to know a little more about Malinowski's Indian student. He was D.N. Majumdar, who wrote his Ph.D. thesis at Cambridge, in 1935, under T.C. Hodson. Based on this, he published in 1937 a book, *A Tribe in Transition : A Study in Culture Patterns*. Following Malinowski, this book takes the holistic approach of functionalist method. It appears that Majumdar (1937:1) was fascinated by Malinowski's notion of culture, defined as social response to biological and psychological needs.

### **26.4.2 Radcliffe-Brown's Impact**

Radcliffe-Brown's first appointment to a professorship was in 1920, when he was invited to start a department of Anthropology in the University of Cape Town, South Africa. Thus he entered a new phase in his career which was now to be devoted to teaching, writing, developing theory and training a new generation of social anthropologists. In Cape Town he set up a School of African Studies. In 1926, he moved to Australia to take up a post at Sydney. He organised a course for undergraduates, started several research projects on the aborigines and launched a new journal called *Oceania*. He then went on to Chicago in 1931. American anthropology at that time was dominated by Lowie and Kroeber. The development of psychoanalysis had made 'culture and personality' studies very popular. In that milieu Radcliffe-Brown introduced a new way of thinking into American anthropology. People like Eggan, Warner and Tax came to represent a 'Radcliffe- Brownian' theoretical school whose contributions to the discipline have been considered.

In 1937 Radcliffe-Brown returned to England to the chair of social anthropology, newly established in Oxford. Shortly after his return, Malinowski left the country. Radcliffe-Brown took Malinowski's position as the leader of the profession. In Adam Kuper's (1975: 65) words, "...Radcliffe-Brown was the leader of a long overdue challenge to Malinowski, representing sense, clarity and sociology". The theoretical weaknesses of Malinowski forced many fieldworkers to look for a more theoretical, sociological orientation and Radcliffe-Brown seemed to fulfil this need.

The value of the sociological option offered by Radcliffe-Brown had yet to be demonstrated. Social anthropological analysis had to experiment with sociological frameworks. The results of these 'experiments' were such brilliant monographs as Bateson's *Naven* (1936), Evans-Pritchard's *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937).

Radcliffe-Brown's tenure at Oxford resulted in an extremely fruitful partnership with Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes, they produced a series of works mainly concerned with the political structure and kinship. In 1940 they brought out *African Political Systems*. Evans-Pritchard brought out

two monographs. *The Nuer* and the *Political System of the Anuak* in the same year. In 1945 and 1949 Fortes produced monographs on the Tallensi community. In 1949 and 1951 Evans-Pritchard published studies on the Sanusi of Cyrenaica and the Nuer kinship respectively. In this manner, Radcliffe-Brown brought into British social anthropology a new theoretical framework and areas of interest (notably political structure and kinship) which were to bear fruit in some of the most important and influential studies of the period.

You will probably be interested to know that Radcliffe-Brown had a very profound influence on one of India's leading social anthropologists, M.N. Srinivas. Srinivas's D. Phil thesis at Oxford, *Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India* (1952) was completed under Radcliffe-Brown's supervision. In this work he attempted to see the connections between religion and the social structure leading to important formulations like 'sanskritisation'. Spearheading the movement for village studies in India, Srinivas studied the Indian village in terms of its social structure developing important concepts like that of 'dominant caste' along the way.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Identify the feature of Malinowski's scholarship that is commonly shared by the followers of both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown.
- ii) Match the items in Column 'A' with those in Column 'B'.

A	B
i) Oceania	a) Srinivas
ii) Coorgs	b) Fortes
iii) Naven	c) Evans-Pitchard
iv) Tallensi	d) Bateson
v) Nuer	e) Radcliffe-Brown

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## 26.5 SUBSEQUENT DEVELOPMENTS

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As we have repeatedly stated, Malinowski failed to give his brand of social anthropology an analytical thrust. The concepts he used were not sufficiently rigorous. No doubt, he gathered extremely rich and interesting details about the societies he studied, but he failed to fit them into a sound theoretical mould. It is against this background that we can appreciate Radcliffe-Brown's efforts. Radcliffe-Brown tried to introduce a certain level of abstraction with the use of concepts like 'social structure' and 'function'. However, he was not too successful in his efforts. He defined social structure merely in terms of the interactions and relationships entered into by concrete person. In effect, the level of abstraction that he himself preached was not quite attained. Evans-Pritchard successfully attempted what Radcliffe-Brown could not.

Evans-Pritchard developed a notion of social structure which was basically concerned with the persistent, permanent groups in society like the family, the tribe and the nation. He brought home the realisation that the social anthropologist need not stop at observation of the actual interactions between persons to arrive at conclusions about the social structure. One needs to go to higher levels of abstraction. In his study, the Nuer (1940), he demonstrated the 'segmentary' structure of Nuer society in which different groups were mutually united and opposed at various levels of the social structure. In this fashion, he brought in a higher level of abstraction to the understanding of social structure. I was in fact Evans Pritchard who rejected 'structural-functionalism' and brought pure 'structuralism' into the discipline.

Another development was the work of the French 'structuralist' Claude Levi-Strauss. Borrowing heavily from linguistics, Levi-Strauss took the notion of 'social structure' to the highest level of abstraction. He distinguished between the 'structure' and 'social relation' and constructed models, which were basically analytical constructs against which actual social relations could be compared and contrasted. Levi-Strauss's studies of kinship and mythology became extremely influential.

In a nutshell, Malinowskian functionalism was refined into 'structural-functionalism' by Radcliffe-Brown. Following his lead, Evans-Pntehard introduced a greater level of abstraction in his theoretical framework and developed 'structuralism'. In France, 'structuralism' was given a new dimension with the work of Levi-Strauss. Sociology today may be said to be in the 'post-structuralist phase'. Many scholars have borrowed extensively from diverse disciplines like literature, linguistics, mathematics etc. resulting in exciting theoretical developments. It is not within the scope of this course to bring to you these developments, you may learn about them at the M.A level.

This brief resume of post-Radcliffe-Brownian developments may have conveyed the impression that functionalism died with Mahnowski. This is certainly not the case, as functionalism continued to thrive. To this day it remains an important theory in sociology. The work of Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton is important in this regard. Block 7 will bring their contributions to you.

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## **26.6 LET US SUMUP**

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In this unit we assessed the contributions of Malinowski and Radchfle-Brown. First, we gave critique of Malinowski's achievements. Then we discussed in a little more detail Radcliffe-Brown's scholarship as both a fieldworker and a theoretician. We reviewed anthropological research under the direct and indirect guidance of both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. The unit ended with a brief account of subsequent developments in sociological theory.



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## 26.7 KEY WORDS

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- Abstraction** It expresses a quality apart from an object and refers to the intrinsic form with no attempt at concrete representation. In the context of this unit, the term has been used to express the theoretical ideas as opposed to descriptive accounts of human behaviour
- Aborigines** The original inhabitants of a place. The tribal people in Australia are generally known as aborigines
- Monograph** A written account of a single theme
- Sanskritisation** It is a concept, given by M.N. Srinivas, who writes, “Sanskritisation is a process by which a low Hindu caste or tribe or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently twice-born caste”.
- Synchronic** It concerns with the set of events existing in a contemporary time frame, without referring to historical events

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## 26.8 FURTHER READING

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## 26.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Malinowski cannot be described an evolutionist because he became obsessed with empirical reality. Though he remained an evolutionist at heart, in practice he was moving away from the evolutionist’s love for speculations about human culture.
- ii) In catch-all accounts of social phenomena, it is not possible to find systematic and logical correlation between different aspects of a culture. But as systematic, ethnography is always based on data from a particular society, it is possible to relate all aspects of that culture in an integrated whole.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Radcliffe-Brown maintained a certain aloofness and distance from the people he studied. Hence his fieldwork is sometimes dull, lifeless and sterile. Malinowski, on the other hand tried to fully involve himself with his subjects, resulting in lively and richly detailed field-work.

- ii) Malinowski speaks of function primarily in terms of physiological and psychological needs. Radcliffe-Brown, on the other hand, speaks of the needs of society or its necessary conditions of existence.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Meticulously prepared ethnography
- ii) a) e  
b) a  
c) d  
d) b  
e) c

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## **UNIT 27 THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL SYSTEM — PARSONS**

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### **Structure**

- 27.0 Objectives
- 27.1 Introduction
- 27.2 Talcott Parsons and the Early Approaches to the Concept of Social System
  - 27.2.0 The Utilitarian, the Positivist and the Idealist Points of View
    - 27.2.1 The Point of View of Talcott Parsons
- 27.3 Parsons' Action Approach
- 27.4 Basic Unit of Organisation of a Social System
  - 27.4.0 The Motivational Orientation
    - 27.4.1 The Value Orientation
    - 27.4.2 Institutionalisation of Roles in a Social System
    - 27.4.3 Collectivity as a Social System
- 27.5 Pattern Variables
  - 27.5.0 Affectivity versus Affective Neutrality
  - 27.5.1 Self-Orientation versus Collective Orientation
  - 27.5.2 Universalism versus Particularism
  - 27.5.3 Ascription versus Achievement
  - 27.5.4 Specificity versus Diffuseness
- 27.6 Functional Prerequisites
  - 27.6.0 Adaptation
    - 27.6.1 Goal-Attainment
    - 27.6.2 Integration
    - 27.6.3 Latency
- 27.7 Types of Structures of Social Systems
  - 27.7.0 The Universalistic-Achievement Pattern
    - 27.7.1 The Universalistic-Ascription Pattern
    - 27.7.2 The Particularistic-Achievement Pattern
    - 27.7.3 The Particularistic-Ascription Pattern
- 27.8 Let Us Sum Up
- 27.9 Key Words
- 27.10 Further Reading
- 27.11 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### **27.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After studying this unit you should be able to

- explain the early approaches to the study of social systems and Parsons' own point of view regarding them

- understand the action approach of Parsons in the study of the social system
- discuss the basic unit of organisation of the social system
- outline the concept of pattern variables given by Parsons
- describe the functional prerequisites of a social system, and finally
- discuss the types of structures of social systems exemplified empirically by Parsons.

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## 27.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous units of Block 6 you learnt about the contributions of B. Malinowski's and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown's functionalist and structure-functionalist approaches to the study of society. Both these thinkers belonged to the British tradition of social anthropology. They had based their theories on their study of primitive societies.

In this Block, we will explain to you the contribution of American sociologists, Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton to the development of functionalism. For several decades sociology, specially American, was dominated by Parsons and later Merton. The functionalist approach of both Parsons and Merton is a common link between the Blocks 6 and 7 of this course. Unlike the British social anthropologists, the focus of Parsons' and Merton's study was on the modern industrial societies, especially the American society.

To understand the sociological version of functionalism, it is necessary to grasp Talcott Parsons' concept of the social system. Unit 27 is devoted to this task. It describes the concept of **social system** as analysed by Talcott Parsons. His conceptual scheme is provided to analyse the structure and processes of social systems. Parsons' concept of the social system is developed in the nature of a general sociological theory, which can be applied for the study of both the simple primitive societies as well as the complex modern industrial societies.

The unit begins with a discussion of the early approaches to the study of the social systems and Parsons' alternative to these approaches. This is discussed in Section 27.2. The alternative to these approaches is Parsons' 'action approach', which is given in Section 27.3. Parsons has developed his theory from the level of **action** to the social system. The next Section 27.4 describes the basic unit of organisation of a social system given by Parsons. These units are roles and role expectations. The institutionalisation of roles is discussed and social system as a collectivity is described in this section. To explain the dilemma of choice of action available to an individual in a social system Parsons developed the concept of pattern variables. These pattern variables are discussed in Section 27.5.

The survival of any social system depends, according to Parsons on four functional prerequisites. These functional prerequisites have been described in Section 27.6. Finally, Section 27.7 discusses the types of structures of social systems exemplified by Parsons from empirical cases in society.

## 27.2 TALCOTT PARSONS AND THE EARLY APPROACHES TO THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL SYSTEM

Let us first understand in simple terms what is meant by a social system. A social system has been defined by Mitchell (1979: 203) as ‘consisting of a plurality of al actors interacting directly or indirectly with each other in a bounded situation. There may be physical or territorial boundaries but the main point of reference sociologically is that here individuals are oriented, in a wide sense, to a common focus or interrelated foci’. According to this definition such diverse sets of relationships as families, political parties, kinship groups and even whole societies can be regarded as social systems.

Parsons’ ideas on social systems and his theory of action or action approach are rooted in the thinking of his predecessors. In his monumental book *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) Parsons has reviewed the contributions of many social scientists, but gave special emphasis to Pareto, Durkheim and Max Weber. In this work Parsons attempts to highlight the underlying unity in the contributions of most of these thinkers. By sorting out these unities. Parsons felt that his quest for a general theory of social system would be forwarded. In his opinion a notion of a theory of action was hidden or was present by implication in the works that he reviewed. In the case of Max Weber, however he found action theory more or less clearly formulated. Let us now examine the early approaches to the study of the concept of social system.

### 27.2.0 The Utilitarian, the Positivist, and the Idealist Points of View

Parsons divides earlier contributions into three broad schools of thought, viz., the utilitarian, the positivist, and the idealist. The utilitarians see social action in a highly individualist fashion. They emphasise utilitarian rational calculation but at the level of the individual. For this reason they are unable to accommodate the fact that social life is collectively cohesive and not a random effect (See Box 27.1).

#### Box 27.1 Utilitarianism

Utilitarianism is a school of thought, which believes in the fact that pleasure is better than pain. It is a philosophical outlook and is generally associated with the name of Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832). According to this outlook utility is the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The proper goal of all human beings should be maximisation of utility. Bentham believed that good motives are good as far as they lead to harmony of interests of an individual with those of others.

Thus utilitarianism is a moral theory which has certain social implications. It holds that nothing is desired for its own sake pleasure that it provides. Since pleasure is the guiding force of this philosophy, the moral rules also are believed to be those which encourage behaviour, which can increase pleasure and reduce pain.

Bentham applied this philosophy to the study of economics, administration and law. The classical economists such as Adam Smith, Ricardo and few others subscribed to this view.

Early English Sociology too, was influenced by this philosophy. One of the sociologists most influenced by this philosophy was Herbert Spencer.

The positivists on the other hand believe that social actors have complete knowledge of their social situation. This leaves no room for error on the part of actors or variation among actors (See Box 27.2)

### **Box 27.2 Positivism**

The term 'positivism' was first used by Auguste Comte (1798-1897). You learnt about his 'positive philosophy' in the first block of ESO-13.

This term also has been used for the distinct doctrines of school of philosophers known as 'logical positivists'. They believed in the central idea that the meaning of a statement lay in the method of its verification. Any statement, which could not be verified, therefore, becomes meaningless.

In Parson's view a social theory is positivistic which holds the view that human action can adequately characterised without regard to the agent's own standpoint. He considered utilitarianism as one of the good example of a positivistic theory.

The idealist posit that social action is the realisation of the social spirit and the ideas such as, of a nation or a people, and consequently pay scant attention to real everyday impediments on the ground that obstruct the free realisation of ideas. (see Box 27.3)

### **Box27.3 Idealism**

Idealism is the school of thought, which believes that the mind plays a key role in the constitution of the world as it is experienced. In the history we can discern different forms and applications of idealism. Its most radical form has been rejected because it is equivalent to solipsism. Solipsism is the view that all reality is nothing but the activity of one's own mind and that in reality nothing exists but one's own self

However, idealists usually recognise the existence of the external or natural world fully. They do not claim that it can be reduced to the mere process of thinking. They believe that the mind is active and capable of producing and sustaining modes of being that would not have existed otherwise, such as law, religion, art and mathematics

The eighteenth century Irish philosopher George Berkeley is identified closely with this philosophy. He believed that all aspects of everything of which we are conscious are actually reducible to the ideas present in the mind. For example, the idea of a chair or a cow already exists in

our minds, therefore, we recognise the chair or the cow when we find it. Thus, the observer does not conjure the external objects (chair or cow) into existence. In fact, Berkeley held that the true ideas of the external objects are caused in the human mind directly by God

The eighteenth century German philosopher Immanuel Kant further refined idealism through his critical inquiry into the limits of possible knowledge. Kant believed that there is no way of knowing things in themselves, they can be known to us only in the way that they appear to us in experience. He held that the fundamental principles of all science are essentially grounded in the constitution of the mind rather than being derived from the external world.

Finally, the name most closely associated with this philosophical outlook is of the nineteenth century German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel. Hegel believed that the highest achievements of the human spirit (culture, science, religion, and the state) are conceived and sustained by the dialectical activity; such as thesis, antithesis and synthesis of free reflective intellect. It is not the result of naturally determined processes in the mind (Funk and Wagnalls' New Encyclopedia 1971-83, Volume 13: 370-371). In fact, Hegel's philosophy, especially his dialectical thought influenced Karl Marx in developing his ideas of dialectical historical materialism. For Hegel's ideas see Block 2 of ESO-13.

In the *Structure of Social Action* Parsons uses this classification to review the contributions of major thinkers like Durkheim, Pareto and Weber. He goes to great lengths to point out elements of the various schools of thought in their writings. While doing so, however, Parsons is also coaxing out of these authors elements crucial to his understanding of social action and for the development of his action frame of reference.

### 27.2.1 The Point of View of Talcott Parsons

Parsons emphasised that both the utilitarian and idealist approaches to the study of social systems and social reality were one-sided. The **utilitarian approach** treated social systems as products of rational impulses of human beings (individuals) to integrate their needs and urges as orderly systems. These systems are based on compatibility of interests through contractual mutuality. An example of contractual mutuality is the system of polity (government and state) which represents organised system of power. The market system, which is based on contractual relationships of economic interests, is yet another such example of an orderly system.

But the orderly systems as analysed by utilitarian social scientists, according to Parsons, neglect the role of values. Similarly, in the idealist treatment of social system, democracy is seen simply as the fulfilment of the spirit of a nation. Idealism places too much emphasis on values and ideas and not enough on social practice. Weber too, in a way, belonged to this tradition for he argued that capitalism was aided in its early stages by the Protestant ethic. The difference between Weber and the outright idealists is that Weber never said that the Protestant ethic caused capitalism. But it must be admitted that Weber elaborated at length certain values such as those of

‘rational asceticism’ or ‘inner worldly asceticism’ but neglected the role of needs or search for utilities.

According to Talcott Parsons both the idealist and the utilitarian notions of the social system assume certain characteristics in human impulses in an apriori manner. By apriori we mean that which is already given or assumed. One such characteristic is rationality in the regulation of needs in the utilitarian approach to the social system, and commitment to ultimate values and ideals in the idealist approach.

The utilitarian approach does have the notion of individual actor in the system but only as an abstraction with certain endowed qualities (a prioristic in character).

The idealist approach does the same, only prioristically assumed characteristics are different. The idealists assume that human beings act only to fulfil a grand mental design.

The positivists go to the other extreme and insist that true human action is born out of full information of the situation. There is thus a finality and inflexibility in their scheme for there is only one way to act: the correct way. Consequently there is no room for values, error and variations in social action.

Thus, while each of these schools of thought, the utilitarian, the idealist and the positivist say something important, it is their exclusivism, which Parsons objects to. The utilitarians only emphasise the individual’s rational choice and miss the collective. The idealists talk of values and miss out the pressures exerted on values by empirical reality. Finally, the positivists emphasise complete knowledge of the situation and overlook the role of values, or of error or of variations.

Keeping the above in mind, Parsons offers another approach to the study of social systems termed as “action approach”.

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### **27.3 PARSONS’ ACTION APPROACH**

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Parsons own approach to the social system is integrative in nature since he not only brought out the significance of motivational factors, such as those present in the utilitarian perspective in the formation of the system, but also that of values. He formulates this approach through his theory of social action, which is an intrinsic element of the social system.

Action, according to Parsons (1973) does not take place in isolation. It is not “empirically discrete but occurs in constellations” which constitute systems. We will discuss these systems later. Let us first understand the concept of action. The concept of action, according to Parsons, is derived from behaviour of human beings as living organism. As living organisms they interact (orientate) with outside reality as well as within their own mind. Behaviour becomes action when four conditions are present.

- i) it is oriented to attainment of ends or goals or other anticipated affairs,
- ii) it occurs in situations,



- iii) it is regulated by norms and values of society,
- iv) it involves an investment of ‘energy’ or motivation or effort.

When all these factors are present, a behaviour becomes action. Take for example a lady driving an automobile to go to a temple. She is probably going to offer prayers. In which case then the offering of the prayer is her end or goal to which she is oriented. Her situation is the road on which she is driving and the car in which she is sitting. Moreover, her behaviour is regulated by social norms or values in which the offering of prayers is recognised as desirable. In addition, she is applying her intelligence in the skill of driving which is learnt from society. Finally, the very act of driving the car implies expenditure of energy, holding the wheel, regulating the accelerator and skilful negotiation through the traffic on the road. When behaviour is seen in this analytical context, it can be defined as action.

Orientation of action can therefore be divided into two components, the **motivational orientation** and the value orientation. Motivational orientation refers to a situation in which action takes place taking into account needs, external appearances and plans. The second form of orientation is value orientation, which is based on considerations of standards of values, aesthetics, morality and of thinking. You will learn more about these two components of action in sub-sections 27.4.1 and 27.4.2 of this unit.

### Activity 1

List four kinds of social behaviours you perform in your day-to-day life which qualifies as action according to Parsons, having the four conditions,

- i) it is oriented towards the attainment of ends or goals or other anticipated affairs.
- ii) it occurs in a situation
- iii) it is regulated by norms and values of society
- iv) it involves investment of ‘energy’ or effort or motivation.

Write a note of two pages giving the behaviours and why you consider them ‘action’ as defined by Parsons. Compare, if possible, your note with those of other students at your Study Centre.

As mentioned earlier, action according to Parsons does not occur in isolation but occurs in constellations. These constellations of action constitute systems. These systems of action have three modes of organisation, which Parsons describes as the personality system, the cultural system and the social system. The personality system refers to those aspects of the human personality, which affect the individual’s social functioning. The cultural system encompasses instead, the actual beliefs, concrete systems of values and symbolic means of communication. The social system, in this context, refers to the forms and modes of interaction between individuals and its organisation. Mitchell (1979: 204) gives the example of a social system as the authority structure of an organisation or the division of labour in a family.

A social system, according to Parsons, has the following characteristics.

- i) It involves an interaction between two or more actors, and the interaction process is its main focus.
- ii) Interaction takes place in a situation, which implies other actors or alters. These alters are objects of emotion and value judgement and through them goals and means of action are achieved.
- iii) There exists in a social system collective goal orientation or common values and a consensus on expectations in normative and **cognitive** (intellectual) senses.

To understand the concept of social system better, let us now examine the basic unit of organisation of the social system.

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## 27.4 BASIC UNIT OF ORGANISATION OF A SOCIAL SYSTEM

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The social system has a mode of organisation of action, which is called role. It is the basic conceptual unit of the social system and it incorporates the individual actor's total system of action. It is also a point of intersection between the system of action of an individual actor and the social system. The primary element of role, according to Parsons is role-expectation. It implies reciprocity between the actor and his/her alter (the other persons), and is governed by a range of motivational and value orientations.

As mentioned earlier, the motivational orientation refers to a situation in which action takes place taking into account needs or motives, external appearances and plans of the individual actors. **Value orientation** refers to the values, aesthetics, morality, etc. aspects of action. The organisation of unit acts into social systems therefore involves the motives and values, which link it to the personality system in the first case and to the cultural system in the second.

### 27.4.0 The Motivational Orientation

The range of motivational orientations are three. These are the cognitive, the **cathectic** and the **evaluative** orientations.

- i) The cognitive orientation makes actors see their environment or object in relation to their need dispositions as a mental object. They, i.e. the actors, attempt to understand the objectivity of the subject matter of observation.
- ii) The cathectic orientation involves emotional attitude of actors towards their object.
- iii) The evaluative orientation leads the actors to organise their effort in realisation of their object with optimum efficiency. Take for example the behaviour of a housewife going to the market to purchase vegetables. The cognitive orientation enables her to judge the quality of vegetables in relation to her need and need in relation to its prices, the cathectic orientation would determine as to which vegetable she

likes more than the others, and the evaluative orientation would make it possible for her to make a choice of a vegetable which gives her maximum satisfaction.

### 27.4.2 The Value Orientation

The range of value orientations also comprises three parts. These are the cognitive, the appreciative and the moral.

- i) The cognitive orientation is one, which relates to the issue of validity of judgement.
- ii) The appreciative orientation is that which makes it possible for actors to judge their emotional response to object, its appropriateness or consistency.
- iii) The moral orientation is one, which refers to value commitment of an actor towards his or her objects.

The example of a housewife buying vegetables reveals only the motivational orientation of the housewife. But in value orientation it is the value system and the cultural pattern of the society which is involved. The individual actors act in the context of this cultural-pattern. For example, the role and status of a son in his family is guided by certain norms of the society. As a son in a patriarchal family, he has a different status than as a son in a matriarchal family. His behaviour will be guided by the norms of his society.

Thus, the motivational orientation involves only the motives or psychological aspects of the individual while the value orientation involves the cultural system. Both, the psychological and the cultural aspects of individual behaviour are, however, interlinked and interdependent.

The motivational orientations and value orientations are two levels of orientations, according to Parsons, that define the behavioural and cultural aspects of role and role expectations.

The role expectations in a social system serve as patterns of evaluation. Every actor who performs a role has a dual capacity, because role implies interaction with other person or persons. It divides role into two kinds according to Parsons. The first is the orientation role where actor as ego (self) interacts with alter (the other person) as his or her object. The second is the object role where actor is the object of alter's orientation.

### 27.4.2 Institutionalisation of Roles in a Social System

In a social system roles are institutionalised. Institutionalisation means that expectations from a specific role, its values and motivational orientations are integrated within the culture of a society. Society sets common standards for role expectations from its members, and when an actor imbibes these standards common to society in the orientations and performance of his/her roles, the roles are said to have been institutionalised.

In order that roles are performed in society in accordance with the standards prescribed by society or in line with the pattern of institutionalisation, each society imposes sanctions. These sanctions are rewards or punishments, as

the case may be, if the role is performed in conformity to the standards or values of society or when it is violative of these values.

### 27.4.3 Collectivity as a Social System

Related to the concept of role is Parsons' notion of collectivity as a social system. Collectivity can be identified only through the boundary of a social system that determines which members are included and which others are excluded from the membership of the collectivity. All collectivities have membership boundaries (such as, among others, those based on kinship, qualifications or skills or faith). By boundary we mean the limits to which a social system functions as a distinct identity. A kinship system, as an example of a social system has its members and their roles and statuses determined by the cultural pattern found in that society. The boundary of a collectivity varies from situation to situation. The collectivity is not merely a social aggregate of members such as a category. A category is defined through common attributes such as age, sex or education, etc. Collectivity is also not a plurality of individuals who are commonly interdependent with one another ecologically, that is, in a physical situation, such as in a market.

Collectivity differs from the above two types of social aggregates because its plurality is characterised by solidarity of its members; as in a kinship group or in an association. This solidarity emerges from the institutionalisation of shared values such as, the value of cooperation among certain kins or sharing the beliefs and practices of a religion.

Collectivities may have internal subdivisions as sub-collectivities where membership might overlap. Collectivities and sub-collectivities are forms of social system. Society, according to Parsons is a total social system which is self-subsistent or which maintains itself without being dependent on any other social system. The distinction between the social system and society is however relative and analytical.

So far you have learnt about the conceptual unit of the social system called roles, the institutionalisation of roles, and collectivity as a social system. To explain the choices of action available to individuals in the social system as a collectivity, Parsons has developed the concepts of pattern variables. You will learn about these concepts in the next section.

#### Check Your Progress I

- i) Distinguish between the utilitarian, the positivist and the idealist basis of social action given by Parsons using about nine lines.

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ii) What do you understand by role institutionalisation? Discuss using about five lines.

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iii) Fill in the blanks:

- a) The ..... system is an example of contractual mutuality based on economic interests.
- b) Action according to Parsons does not take place in .....
- c) The systems of action have three modes of organisation which Parsons describes as the social system, the personality system and the ..... system.
- d) The range of motivational orientation is cognitive ..... and evaluative.
- e) The ..... comprises three parts, the cognitive, the appreciative and the moral orientation.

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## 27.5 PATTERN VARIABLES

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In order to develop concepts, which could reflect the properties of all action systems, Parsons was led to a set of concepts, which could bring out the variable properties of these systems. These concepts are termed pattern variables.

Role being the most vital element of the social system, its performance generates forces of strain or tension. The extent of strain depends on the way role-expectations are institutionalised in society and also on the degree to which the values of role-expectations are internalised by social actors. In relation to motivational orientation and value orientation, in the performance of roles, each actor faces dilemmas. These dilemmas emanate from strains in an individual's choice of or preference within a range of orientations both related to needs and to values. Though these dilemmas are often seen dichotomously they in fact are placed along a continua. But for reasons of simplicity let us proceed as if these dilemmas were dichotomous in character. The actor must choose between the options, before she or he can act with respect to the situation. For example, in a situation, which requires an actor to choose between universalistic values or particularistic values, the actor can choose only one of them.

There are in all five pattern variables, each side of it represents one polar extreme. These pattern variables are

- i) affectivity versus affective neutrality
- ii) self-orientation versus collectivity orientation
- iii) universalism versus particularism
- iv) ascription versus achievement
- v) specificity versus diffuseness.

Let us now discuss each of them in detail.

### **27.5.0 Affectivity versus Affective Neutrality**

Affectivity versus affective neutrality concerns the dilemma of role performance where evaluation is involved in relation to a situation. How much should a situation be evaluated in emotional terms or with a degree of emotional neutrality? This poses a difficult choice in most roles that we are expected to perform in society. Take for example the mother-child relationship. It has high degree of affective orientation, but discipline is also required. So on many occasions a mother would have to exercise affective-neutral role in relation to her child's socialisation. But mother-child relationship is essentially dominated by affectivity. In comparison, doctor-patient relationship brings out the aspect of affective neutrality that characterises a doctor's role. Affective-neutrality is essential for proper medical care, especially where surgical treatments are involved. But according to Parsons in all role performance situations the dilemma of choice and its degree of expression or commitment remains.

### **27.5.1 Self-orientation versus Collectivity Orientation**

Similarly, in self-orientation versus collectivity orientation pattern variable the main issue is that of moral standard in the procedure of evaluation. The moral standard arises from the fact that actor has to make a choice between his or her own gratification and its deferment for the good of a larger number of people, a collectivity. Some form of altruism and self-sacrifice is involved. The dilemma of this pattern variable has always been present in human life from primitive mode of economy and society to modern civilisation. The notion of socialist society and socialist consciousness offers us a good example where a whole social system and patterns of its institutions are based on the dominant choice in favour of collectivity orientation. But as Parsons has rightly pointed out, institutionalisation of such values is always fragile. This is because the response to the situation by the actor is always in the form of a dilemma.

### **27.5.2 Universalism versus Particularism**

Universalism versus particularism is a pattern variable which defines the role situation where the actor's dilemma is between the cognitive versus the cathective (or emotional standards) evaluation. A very good example of roles adhering to universalistic standards of human behaviour are role performances which go strictly by legal norms and legal sanctions. It one abides by the rule of law irrespective of personal, kinship or friendship considerations, then that would be an example of the universalistic mode of role performance. If one violates legal norms only because the person



involved is a kin or a friend, then particularistic considerations would be said to be operating. Parsons says that in societies where the role of the bureaucracy of formal organisations and modern institutions have become widespread there the dilemmas of Universalism and particularism have become a matter of choice in everyday life.

### 27.5.3 Ascription versus Achievement

The actor's dilemma in the ascription versus achievement pattern variable is based on whether or not the actor defines the objects of his or her role either in terms of quality or performance. In India a very good example of this pattern variable is the role performance governed by the caste system. In the caste system, the statuses of persons are determined not on the basis of their personal achievement or personal skills or knowledge but on the basis of their birth. Ascription is based on assigning certain quality to a person either by birth, or age, or sex or kinship or race. Achievement is based on personal acquisition of skills and levels of performance in society.

### 27.5.4 Specificity versus Diffuseness

The specificity versus diffuseness pattern variable concerns the scope of the object of role performance. Scope, in this case, is to be understood in terms of the nature of social interaction.

Some social interactions, such as between doctors and patients or between buyers and sellers of goods in the market, have a very specific scope. The nature of these interactions is defined in terms of a very precise context of interaction. A doctor does not have to understand the social, financial or political background of his or her patients in order to treat them and to give them a prescription. Doctor's task is very specific. So is the case of sellers of commodities in the market, who do not have to know the general details of the life of their customers. Such roles are specific in terms of the standards of response between actors.

On the contrary, some role relationships are very general and encompassing in nature. Such roles involve several aspects of the object of interaction. Some examples of such role relationships are friendship, conjugal relationship between husband and wife, relationships between kin of various degrees. All these relationships are such where the actor does not interact with another in a relationship in a specific context as such, but in a diffused manner such as in case of two close friends. The scope of interaction is flexible, open and encompassing in nature.

#### Activity 2

Think carefully about the organisation where you work or study such as, your Study Centre. Now, according to the Pattern Variables described by Parsons give two features of your interaction with this organisation and determine which pattern it falls into. For example, if you work in a private company runs by your friend or relative, your interaction with it can have both the qualities of universalism or particularism.

Write a note of a page and compare, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

The pattern variables, according to Parsons, not only define the nature of role interaction and role expectations in social system but provide in addition, the overall direction in which most members of a social system choose their roles. It also gives us an idea about the nature of the social system. For instance, take the family as a social system: the role expectations within the family amongst its members can be said to be affective, largely collectivity oriented, particularistic, ascriptive and diffuse.

On the contrary, take the example of your membership in a medical association or bar association, or student association, here role expectations and standards of role performance would largely be oriented towards pattern variables of affective neutrality, self-orientation (due to competition), universalism, achievement and specificity. But these are extreme examples. In real life the dilemma of choices in terms of pattern variables are much more precarious and full of strain than we find in the examples we have mentioned.

Till now you learnt about the various characteristics of the social system. In the next section we are going to discuss those aspects of the social system which Parsons considers the prerequisites for its functioning.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Define pattern variables and list them using about six lines.
- ii) Given below are different types of social behaviour. State in the line given below each sentence, the pattern-variable to which it belongs.
  - a) A school teacher giving extra marks to her own child.
  - b) A policeman shooting his brother who is running away after looting a bank.
  - c) The son of a millionaire working as a clerk in his father's company.
- d) The daughter of a clerk getting the job of the Director in an organisation through her merit.
- e) The saleswoman gives the change of money to a client.
- f) The exchange of notes and gossip between two friends.

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## **27.6 FUNCTIONAL PREREQUISITES**

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As you have already learnt. Parsons thinks all systems such as the family, the economy or the polity have a boundary which they maintain in order to subsist. This self-maintenance of systems is possible because human actors as social beings are socialised in society and their motivational and value orientations accordingly are patterned. In order to maintain itself, social systems have to perform some indispensable adjustment between its internal organisation and outer environment. These adjustments are like the adjustment that the human body has to make with the outside environment through breathing, blood circulation and through the maintenance of a steady temperature within itself. Social systems, Parsons

argues, also have a self-adjustive and self-maintaining quality. These adjustment processes which maintain the social system internally and through its boundary conditions are called functions. Functions are processes of system's self-maintenance.

There are certain functions without which a social system cannot subsist. These are called 'functional prerequisites' by Talcott Parsons. There are four such functional prerequisites.

- i) adaptation
- ii) goal attainment
- iii) integration
- iv) latency

The scope of functioning of these functional prerequisites is further defined in terms of whether they deal with processes external or internal to the system. They are also defined in terms of the nature of interaction as such, whether it is consummatory or whether it is instrumental. Consummatory is where the emphasis is on achieving some desired end and instrumental is where the emphasis is on the acquisition and incorporation of means to achieve ends.

Let us now examine each of these functional prerequisites.

### **27.6.0 Adaptation**

Adaptation as a functional prerequisite implies generation and acquisition of resources from outside the system, its external environment and to effect its distribution in the system. External environment in this case means land, water, etc. As an example we can mention the economic system, which involves resource utilisation, production and distribution in the society. Adaptation is oriented to factors external to the system and it has an instrumental character.

#### **27.6.1 Goal-Attainment**

Goal-Attainment is that functional prerequisite which involves, firstly, the determination of goals, secondly, the motivating of members of the system to attain these goals, and thirdly, the mobilising of the members and of their energies for the achievement of these goals. Its processes are consummatory in character although it does involve external interaction.

The organisation of the power and authority structure in a social system is an example of an institution where goal attainment is the primary thrust. The political processes are its examples. It needs to be remembered that goal attainment is related to the ideological and organisational set up of the social system.

#### **27.6.2 Integration**

Integration is that functional prerequisite which helps to maintain coherence, solidarity and coordination in the system. In the social system this function is mainly performed by culture and values. Therefore, the cultural system and its associated institutions and practices constitute elements of integration.

Integration ensures continuity, coordination and solidarity within the system; it also helps in safeguarding the system from breakdown or disruption. This functional prerequisite is internal to the system and has a consummatory character.

### 27.6.3 Latency

Finally, latency is that functional prerequisite of the social system which stores, organises and maintains the motivational energy of elements in the social system. Its main functions are pattern maintenance and tension management within the system.

This function is performed by the socialisation process of the members of the social system. The process of socialisation helps in internalisation of the symbols, values, tastes and habits specific to the social system in the personality of the actors who are members of the system. It needs also to be added that in Parsons' view the function of tension management must take place internally in all institutions. This is how it can be differentiated from the function of "integration" which refers primarily to the integration between different systems in society. The functional prerequisite of latency also bears an instrumental character.

#### Functional Prerequisites of a Social System

	<b>Adaptation</b>	<b>Goal Attainment</b>
External	Example - Economic System - Resource utilisation, production, Distribution etc.	Example-Political System - State, Political Parties, etc.
	<b>Latency or Pattern Maintenance</b>	<b>Integration</b>
Internal	Example - Family socialisation, Education etc.	Example - Cultural system - Religion, ideology, etc.

In the preceding sections we familiarised you to the concept of social system. Let us now understand the empirical examples of types of structures of social systems given by Parsons.

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## 27.7 TYPES OF STRUCTURES OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS

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Parsons has dealt primarily with four types of structures of social systems in his sociological analysis. These are the economic system, the family system, the political system and the personality system.

Ideas about dilemmas of role expectations and role performance enunciated in the form of pattern variables (which you just studied) and formulation of functional prerequisites, taken together would further our knowledge of societies significantly. We find that it helps us to identify different types of structures of social systems, their social characteristics and their place in

society. We can identify social systems not just theoretically, as we saw in the earlier sections on pattern variables and functional prerequisites, but empirically as well.

In his book *The Social System* (1951), Parsons mentions many types of empirical (i.e., that which can be observed in the field [societies] and can be verified) social systems with different clusterings of social structures. Parsons made a distinction between the concept of social system and **social structure**. Social system is manifested through the totality of the principles through which roles and related elements of social interaction are organised. Social structure, on the other hand, reflects the specific manner in which these roles in an interaction situation are configured or composed together. For instance, family is a social system but its social structure can be seen in the empirical clustering of kinship roles.

Similarly, the economic system can be treated as another example of a social system, but its social structure is characterised by roles related to production, marketing, management, etc. Pattern variables illustrate in a precise manner the principal types of clusterings of social structures. Parsons mentions four such types

- i) the universalistic-achievement pattern
- ii) the universalistic-ascription pattern
- iii) the particularistic-achievement pattern
- iv) the particularistic-ascription pattern

### **27.7.0 The Universalistic-Achievement Pattern**

It is a type of structure of social system in whose roles those value-orientations are dominant which encourage achievement based on legal rational methods among members of a society. It exemplifies modern industrial societies where the governing values are those of equality, democracy, freedom of enterprise, rational management and openness in social interactions. Divisions of society based on caste, ethnicity or other particularistic values do not go well with this social system. The nearest example of this type of structure of a social system, in Parsons' opinion, would be the American society.

### **27.7.1 The Universalistic-Ascription Pattern**

It is yet another type of configuration of roles which makes a kind of social system in which values of legal rationality are encouraged in performance of roles but the distribution of authority is not on the basis of equality or democracy. Modern principles of science and technology are employed in work and occupation, in industry and communication but the distribution of these takes place on ascriptive principles, such as membership to a particular ideological association, or party, or cult. Parsons believes that Nazi Germany is an example of one such society.

German social structure during the Nazi regime manifested a peculiar combination of rational methods of organisation of roles in industries, management and productive institutions but discriminated between those

who, according to them symbolised ideal qualities of German people such as white Nordic races, and those that did not, namely the Jews. There could be other examples drawn from other periods of social history as well.

### **27.7.2 The Particularistic-Achievement Pattern**

This type of social structure, according to Parsons, is best seen in the classical Chinese society. This society was dominated by values of ‘familism’. By ‘familism’ we mean the notion of continuity with ancestors (ancestor worship), strong ties of kinship, but where the female line of descent was undermined in favour of the male. This led to an overall female subordination in that society. It was based on a configuration of roles in which occupation, authority, management, etc. were organised not on universalistic principles but on particularistic ones.

Of all the particularistic principles in operation in traditional or classical Chinese society birth and kinship were emphasised the most. But at the same time, the society also emphasised achievement and a “code of propriety” in the conduct of roles which was equivalent to legal rationality (universalistic principle). All these features were contained in Confucianism which was the official ethic in classical China. The dominance of universalism along with the ascription principle can be seen in the recruitment of civil servants in China. Entrance into these services was based on competitive examinations, which only those candidates who conformed to the official ethic could take.

### **27.7.3 The Particularistic-Ascription Pattern**

It refers to such types of social structures in which the roles are organised in terms of values, which are associated with kinship, birth and other ascriptive features. In social structures of this kind, achievement through individual effort is not encouraged. Work, in this type “is considered as a necessary evil just as morality is a necessary condition of minimum stability”, says Talcott Parsons.

Overwhelming emphasis, in this kind of society, is placed on expressive or artistic orientations. Society is traditionalistic as there is no incentive to disturb tradition and a strong vested interest exists in favour of stability. In Parsons’ view the “Spanish Americans” in the USA exemplify this type of social structure. But you could also debate whether traditional Indian caste society had features, which were particularistic-ascriptive, or not.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Fill in the blanks:
  - a) According to Parsons, all social systems have a ..... which they maintain in order to subsist.
  - b) In order to maintain itself social systems have to perform some ..... adjustments in its internal organisation and outer .....
  - c) Adaptation, goal attainment, integration and latency are the ..... without which a social system cannot subsist.



- d) Pattern variables illustrate in a precise manner the principal types of clustering of .....
- ii) Describe one of the functional prerequisites, with examples, in about six lines.

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- iii) Discuss any one of the types of structure of social system described by Parsons in eight lines.

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## 27.8 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you learnt about the early approaches to the study of social systems, such as the utilitarian, the positivist and the idealist approaches. You learnt that Parsons did not accept these approaches because the utilitarians stressed too much on external, motivational factors, the positivist left no room for error on the part of social actors or values and the idealists stressed too much on values. Thus, as an alternative, Parsons developed his own ‘action approach’ theory, which is integrative in nature. In this theory he has included the motivational orientation as well as the value orientations.

Parsons has described role as the most vital element of social systems. In performance of roles individuals are confronted with dilemmas which in turn emanates from choices offered by society within a range of orientations, both motivational and value. The dichotomy in the nature of orientations described by Parsons in his pattern variables determines the course of action followed by individuals in society. We have described in this unit the functional prerequisites, such as, adaptation, goal attainment, integration and latency without which a social system cannot exist. Finally, we have

described in this unit the types of structures of social systems analysed by Parsons based on the criteria of universalism, particularism, ascription and achievement. Parsons has given the examples of these types of social systems from real societies.

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## 27.9 KEYWORDS

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<b>Action</b>	A human behaviour, according to Parsons, in which four conditions are fulfilled is an action. These conditions are <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i) it is oriented towards attainment of ends or goals or other anticipated affairs</li><li>ii) it occur in situations</li><li>iii) it involves investment of 'energy' or effort and</li><li>iv) it is regulated by norms and values of society.</li></ul>
<b>Cathectic</b>	That which pertains to the emotions such as, affection, love, like, dislike, etc.
<b>Cognitive</b>	That which pertains to comprehension or understanding. For example when you see a chair you know that it is a chair because it has a certain shape, it is made of wood or metal and so on.
<b>Evaluative</b>	That which pertains to comparative judgement
<b>Motivational Orientation</b>	It refers to the mechanical aspects of action. Reasons or purposes of social action which are not related to the values and norms of society such as, choosing the best sari or most appropriate birthday card.
<b>Social Structure</b>	It reflects the specific manner in which the roles in interaction situation are configured or composed together.
<b>Social System</b>	It is manifested through the totality of principles through which roles and related elements of social interaction are organised.
<b>Utilitarian Approach</b>	It refers to the belief that individual in society is guided by rational motives of satisfying needs and avoiding pain. Hedonism, i.e. the doctrine that pleasure is the chief good in life is part of the belief in utilitarianism.
<b>Value Orientation</b>	It refers to that orientation of social action which is governed by social norms and values,

such as marrying someone within one's own caste or class or wearing a formal dress for a formal party.

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## 27.10 FURTHER READING

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Black, Max (ed.) 1961. The Social Theories of Talcott Parsons: A Critical Examination. Prentice-Hall, Inc.: Englewood Cliffs, N.J.

Hamilton, Peter, 1983. Talcott Parsons. Key Sociologists series; Routledge: London and New York

Parsons, Talcott, 1951. The Social System. The Free Press, Glencoe: Illinois

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## 27.11 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) According to Parsons, the utilitarian point of view of social action is highly individualistic in nature. It gave importance to rational calculation at the individual level. The positivists believed that social actors know everything about the situation in which they act i.e. in which they perform their social roles. Therefore, for them, the actor has only one way to act, the correct way. This point of view left no room for variations of action or for values. Finally, the idealists believed that social action is the realisation of the social spirit and the ideas, such as of a democracy or socialism. They gave overemphasis to values and ideals.
- ii) Social roles are said to be institutionalised when the expectations from that role, its values and motivational orientations are integrated within the culture of the society. The society sets the common standards for role expectations from its members and when the actors (performing their social role) imbibe these standards common to society their roles are said to be institutionalised.
- iii)
  - a) market
  - b) isolation
  - c) cultural
  - d) cathectic
  - e) value-orientation

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Pattern variable refers to the dichotomy within the range of orientation, both motivational and value orientations in which the social actor has to choose one side before the actor can act. In the performance of roles, individuals face dilemmas which occur due to improper internalisation of values related to role expectation. These strains in

the role performance are reflected in the dichotomy of the pattern variables. These pattern variables are

- i) affectivity versus affective neutrality
  - ii) self-orientation versus, collective orientation
  - iii) universalism versus particularism
  - iv) ascription versus achievement, and
  - v) specificity versus diffuseness.
- ii) a) affectivity
  - b) collectivity orientation
  - c) universalism
  - d) achievement
  - e) specificity
  - f) diffuseness

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) a) boundary
  - b) indispensable, environment
  - c) functional prerequisites
  - d) social structure
- ii) Adaptation is a functional prerequisite. It implies the generation and acquisition of resources, such as food, water, materials for construction, etc. from outside the system i.e. the external environment. It also takes care of the distribution of the resources in society. Best example of this functional prerequisite is the economy. It is oriented to the external factors for the system and is instrumental in character.
  - iii) The particularistic-achievement pattern of configuration of a social system, according to Parsons was dominated by values of “familism”. In this type the values of kinship ties, continuity with the ancestors and ancestor worship were prominent. The organisation of occupations, authority, management, etc. were based on particularistic principles of birth and kinship. However, in this society achievement and “code of propriety” in performance of roles similar to legal rational action was followed. Traditional or classical Chinese society represents this type of social system.

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# UNIT 28 FUNCTIONALISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE — PARSONS

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## Structure

- 28.0 Objectives
- 28.1 Introduction
- 28.2 Parsons' Concept of Functionalism
- 28.3 Functionalism and Social Change
- 28.4 Changes Within Social Systems
  - 28.4.0 Factors Causing Strain Towards Change
  - 28.4.1 Social Movement and Social Change
- 28.5 Changes of Social Systems: Evolutionary Universals
  - 28.5.0 Primitive or Archaic Societies
  - 28.5.1 Intermediate Societies
  - 28.5.2 Modern Societies
- 28.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 28.7 Key Words
- 28.8 Further Reading
- 28.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 28.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit you will be able to

- explain Parsons concept of functionalism
- discuss the relationship between functionalism and social change
- describe the changes within social systems
- outline the changes of social systems or the evolutionary universals given by Parsons.

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## 28.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit (Unit 27) you have learnt about the concept of the social system, given by Talcott Parsons. In this unit we shall explain to you his concept of functionalism and social change. Parsons described two types of social change; one kind of social change is within the social system and the other kind is when social systems change as a whole. We shall describe both these varieties of social changes in the following pages.

Section 28.2 explains Parsons' concept of functionalism, and section 28.3 the relationship between functionalism and social change. In section 28.4 changes within social systems are discussed while section 28.5 describes the changes of whole social systems: Parsons' notion of **evolutionary universals**.

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## 28.2 PARSONS' CONCEPT OF FUNCTIONALISM

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In Parsons' view the stability of a social system is maintained not only through the rules and regulations that society imposed upon its members or through other measures of social control that state enforces upon its citizens but in a more enduring manner, by the internalisation of socially approved values, expected behaviour patterns and codes of social existence. This internalisation takes place in society through the process of socialisation of its members. Child learns from his/her environment in the family and neighbourhood both the expected and prohibited norms and values with respect to different social institutions and social roles. Later on as the person grows older, the school, the college and work-place make the person learn and imbibe other sets of social values and expected behaviour patterns.

Recall from the past exercise Parsons' concept of, the functional prerequisites of a social system. These functional prerequisites are adaptation, goal attainment, integration and latency, which are all necessary responses, in Parsons' view for the existence and survival of any social system. The institutions and processes, which serve to maintain the existence of the system, are considered to be functional for the system by Talcott Parsons.

Functionalism represents the viewpoint that all social systems invariably possess the tendency to evolve and integrate such processes and institutions as elements (parts) of the system, which help in its own self-maintenance. Social systems are basically oriented to evolving such units as components of their form, be it in the shape of processes (such as, in Parsons' understanding, adaptation, goal-attainment, integration and latency) or as social institutions, such as government, economy, schools, courts, etc. all of which serve to maintain the system as if on purpose. The term **teleology** refers to this purposiveness of institutions. Teleology is thus an essential characteristic of functionalism. It is based on an analogy with the organic system, for instance the human body. In the human body, processes such as respiration, blood circulation, maintenance of a constant temperature, etc., are intended to maintain the health of the body. As such these processes are Ideological or purposive in nature. Simply stated, teleology is any explanation, which is in terms of the final cause or purpose. For example it would be teleological to argue that fruits and seeds exist so that animal and birds can eat them in order to live; or that the function of the long tail of monkeys is to help them jump easily from tree to tree. (See Box 28.1 for teleology as a criticism of functionalism.)

### **Box 28.1 Teleology**

Besides several criticisms of functionalism, its teleological nature is its logical criticism. As you know, teleology is the explanation for the existence of a process or institution or any object or idea in terms of the purpose it fulfils. Thus, according to this explanation the effect is treated as the cause. This is the principal objection to the functionalist theory. For example, according to this theory, religion exists in societies in order to uphold the moral order of societies. Here the effect of religion



has been used to explain the cause, i.e, the moral order (see Cohen, Percy 1968, Chapter 3 for detailed criticism of functionalism).

Why is the teleological nature of functionalism its logical criticism? It is a logical criticism because how can an effect which comes later explain the cause which precedes the effect. It defies the laws of logic. It is like saying that A factor produces B, therefore, the occurrence of B must explain A. However, sociologists belonging to the functionalist school of thought, such as Durkheim were aware of these flaws in functionalism and made attempts to overcome them.

The vital functions of the human body have the purpose of maintaining the survival of the body, and if any foreign infection threatens the body, its internal system reacts to save it from such invasions and continues to do so until the threat has been neutralised. There is a self-regulatory role that such processes play in human body. It is called **homeostasis**.

Functionalism implies that social systems bear resemblance to organic systems such as the human body. The processes and institutions in social systems and the human body possess self-regulatory mechanisms that keep them stable and save it from external threats. A stability of this sort is called homeostasis. But unlike the human body however, which has a universality for all species of human kind, the social systems are historical products. Parsons acknowledges the enormous variations in the forms and styles of social systems. This is ensured by the plasticity of human infant, which unlike other animal species does not grow up with a limited general traits of behaviour. The child learns different languages, conforms to different sets of cultural values and behaviour patterns of the group of society in which he/she is born. The child also has the unlimited capacity to learn new languages, cultural styles, etc; depending on what it is exposed to. Human beings are not born with pre-determinate instinctive traits like other animals are. The socialisation process of the human child and its personality system maintain the stability and integration of the social system through the internalisation of values and ways of social behaviour that the social system approves. In addition human beings not only learn from culture and society but also create new forms of culture and integrate them within pre-existing patterns.

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### 28.3 FUNCTIONALISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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The above characteristics of functionalism might give us an impression that it only has to do with continuity and self-maintenance of the social system, and that it does not have a view of social change. In fact, there are many sociologists who have criticised functionalism only for this reason and argued that functionalism over-emphasises only those features of a social system which bring about stability of continuity. They also accuse functionalism for assuming a large measure of agreement or consensus in a society on its core values, beliefs and behaviour patterns or opinions about social issues. This Criticism is based on the-functionalist position that members of a social system are socialised from childhood onwards to a common set of beliefs and values, which are specific to that society.

Talcott Parsons did not deny the element of value consensus and stability in a social system that results from the functional processes of the systems concerned. But he also visualised the possibilities of social change. This results from the specific nature of individual social systems as well as from the very nature of the motivational orientations, which organise action systems of members in a society. The first links social systems to its external boundary conditions, such as ecology, resources, physical and environmental conditions as well as to historical factors such as cultural contacts, **diffusion** of ideas and interests and to social strains arising out of these historical factors. The second relates it to motivational elements in action systems, which are essentially directional in nature. The direction of orientation of motives and values generates harmony as well as strain in the social system. The first leads to stability, the second to change. Parsons viewed social change at two levels, firstly, change which emerges from processes within the social system, and secondly, the processes of change of the social system itself.

According to Parsons social sciences have yet to formulate a general theory of social change which can take into account both these aspects of social change. But sociology can approach the problem of social change if it delimits its analysis in two respects, first, change must be studied with the help of a set of conceptual categories or paradigms. The conceptual categories that Parsons puts forward for such analyses of change are those of motivational and value orientation, as well as those that relate to the functional prerequisites of the system. (In section 27.6 of Unit 27 of this block, you had been introduced to them.) Second, social change, according to Parsons, must be studied at a specific historical level rather than in a general form applicable universally to all societies. Parsons, therefore, held the view that for sociologists it is relatively easier to study processes of change within the social system than processes of changes of the social system as a whole.

Parsons' main contributions relate to studies of changes within the social systems in varying specific situations, but he had also attempted to analyse changes of whole social systems with the help of the concept of "evolutionary universals" which he formulated later in his career. We shall be studying Parsons' contributions to processes of social change at both these levels.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Define the concept of functionalism using about four lines.

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- ii) What is meant by teleology? Discuss using three lines.

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.....

iii) Fill in the blanks

- a) Unlike the human body, which has universality for all species of human kind, the social systems are ..... products.
- b) The direction of orientation of motives and values generates ..... as well as ..... in the social system. The first leads to stability and the second to .....

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## 28.4 CHANGES WITHIN SOCIAL SYSTEMS

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Elements of functionalism are clearly evident in Parsons' explanation of social changes that takes place within social systems. He drew an analogy between the changes in biological life cycles and changes within social systems, although he qualified this analogy by saying that unlike the organic or biological systems, social systems are governed to a large extent by cultural factors which transcend biology. Nevertheless, the processes of growth, differentiation, the tendency towards self-maintenance that we witness operating in the processes of change within biological systems to a large extent also operate within the social system. In addition social systems also undergo changes from within due to cultural innovations within the system, contact with other cultures and diffusion of new values and styles of living.

A primary factor related to processes of change within the social system is increase in population, its density and aggregation. It has been observed historically that major social systems, such as large communities, cities and organised forms of polity emerged in the past near river valleys and fertile lands where production of food could be harnessed in larger quantities. This increase in food production contributed to a growth of population and for other major changes within the social system, such as the division of labour, emergence of urban centres, and more complex form of social organisations such as caste in India and guild in Europe. According to Parsons these changes did not come about smoothly but almost invariably through the need for re-establishing equilibrium in the system. This re-establishing of equilibrium was required due to strains in relationships between past and present patterns of relationship, values and interests. Parsons says, "change is never just alteration of pattern but alteration by the overcoming of resistance". By overcoming of resistance, Parsons meant the resolution of strain or conflict in the social system.

Each social system, according to Parsons, develops a vested interest or interests of different kinds over a period of time as it integrates itself in accordance with its functional prerequisites (adaptation, goal attainment, integration and latency). But the demands of new ideas from within, need for changes in technology or the mere pressure of external factors on the system, such as changes in climate, ecology or pestilence, etc., force social systems to shed pre-existing vested interests and give way to accepting new modes of thinking; to new ideas, technology, patterns of work, division of labour, and so on. These contribute to disturbances in the older mode of equilibrium and to its replacement by a new equilibrium in the social system.

Between these two points of time a long drawn process of adaptation takes place in social systems by which new ideas, new ways of doing things are made acceptable to people. Parsons calls this process, the process of institutionalisation. New roles, new types of organisations, new “cultural configurations” such as the development of science or of religious ideas, impinge, or put strain, upon existent modes of equilibrium in the social system. The impingement of the new upon the old elements of the social organisation generates strains and conflicts with established vested interests. Parsons does not place the responsibility for causing social strain on any one factor; there is no ‘prime mover’ as such in the making of social change. The fact of social strain, however, represents a point of social development at which the older balance of interaction systems, institutions and structures of the system (roles, statuses, occupations etc.) is destabilised and the tendency towards a new equilibrium begins.

#### **28.4.0 Factors Causing Strain Towards Change**

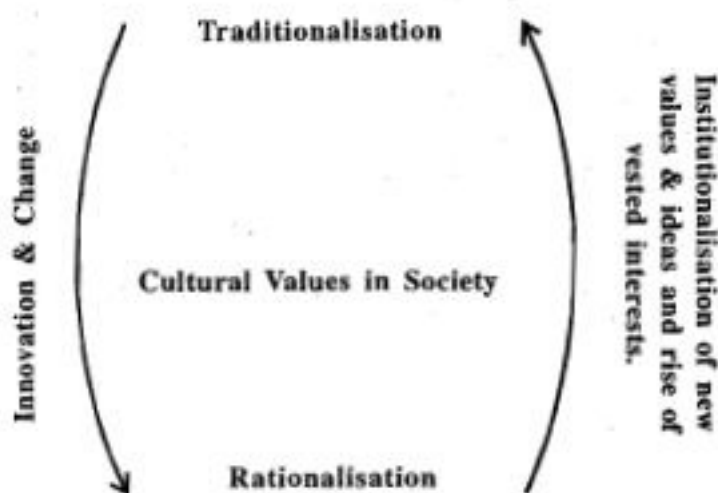
Parsons mentioned several factors, which contribute towards the building up of strain in social systems, which bring about the need to establish a new equilibrium. Some of these factors are

- i) Changes in the demographic character of population through migration, racial intermixture (intermarriages), as well as changes in the mortality and fertility rates of the population. All of these factors affect the nature of social configuration.
- ii) Changes in the physical environment, such as exhaustion of physical resources (soil, water, weather conditions etc.) may also contribute to strain and change in the social system.
- iii) Changes in population resulting from increased productivity of food and availability of resources for members within a social system.
- iv) Changes in technology and application of scientific knowledge for the advancement of society, and finally
- v) Development of new “cultural configuration” such as new religious ideas, or the integration of religious values with science and technology might also trigger changes in the social system. Parsons held the view that these factors are not exhaustive but merely illustrative in order to indicate that they do not act individually but in a state of “interdependent plurality”. Or, in other words many factors and some may have escaped mention above, act interdependently, to bring about changes within the social system.

Cultural factors bring about changes within the social system through a continuous process of “**rationalisation**” and “**traditionalisation**” of values and beliefs. Parsons used the concept of “rationalisation” to mean, as it did for Weber, a process of progressive growth of rational, individualistic and innovative attitudes towards work, personal commitments and social institutions in general. It also includes an increase in legal and formal methods of allocation of responsibilities in place of custom or tradition or personal whims of people in authority such as the king, the priest or the potentate. But while the rationalisation process works there is also a

tendency in social systems to render its values stable, and thus institutionalise them over a period of time. This gives birth to the rise of vested interests. These vested interests emphasise preservation of these values irrespective of changing situations. When this happens the rational values tend to become traditionalised. Cultural values in society or in social systems continually undergo these processes of rationalisation and traditionalisation and again further rationalisation leading to traditionalisation, and so on in a cyclical process.

**Cultural factors which bring about change within social systems**



**Figure 28.1 Changes within Social Systems: An Example**

Parsons illustrated the processes of social change within the social system by drawing examples from the family system. The family undergoes changes inherently through the life cycle of the persons who are its members. The processes of birth, maturation, adulthood, old age and death are internal to the family system, each giving rise to social consequences which call for change and new adjustment in family roles, occupation, authority, status, as well as values and beliefs of its members. The mechanism by which the child is socialised is crucial to this process of continuity and change in the family. It engrains values of the system in the personality of the child, but as the child grows older other values are imbibed from the larger systems of society. The new roles and expectations in adult life may not always harmonise with those of the child, and family system has thus an inbuilt process of both stability and change.

**Activity 1**

Think carefully about the social roles you perform in your family. Now compare these roles with the ones you performed in your family when you were a child.

Write a note of one page on the changes in your roles and role expectations (i.e. what you think the others in your family expected from you) as a member of your family. Compare, if possible, your note with the notes of other students at your Study Centre

These changes are best illustrated through the study of the family cycle. One aspect of this cycle relates to changes in the role of the child in the process of biological growth. This puts strain on his or her personality for at each stage in the changing biological cycle of the person (for example, childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and old age) the role expectations also change. New educational and cultural values need to be imbibed in place of the older ones. The biological process of socialisation is however not without strain because change from one phase of life of a person to another involves resistance and anxiety. It gives expression to new defense mechanisms to preserve the old in place of learning new roles and new values. The process of socialisation and education therefore always involves manipulation of role expectations through rewards and punishments. In early childhood parents perform this role and in later life social system offers its own structure of social sanctions to bring about conformity with expected roles.

The second aspect of the family cycle is structural in nature. It is determined by changes in the size of the family. Families, which were nuclear become joint with the increase in membership. The size of family may be governed by factors both internal and external to the system. The external factors may have to do with economic resources, wealth and property or mode of occupation. The internal factors are governed by the reproduction rate and sex ratio. These two factors are interrelated.

#### **28.4.1 Social Movement and Social Change**

Parsons discussed social change within the social system at two levels

- i) At the first level Parsons analysed social change as it occurs through role differentiation, socialisation and institutionalisation processes and their attendant strains (recall our earlier illustrations from the family system). Changes of this type are slow, continual and inherently adaptive in nature. The chain of processes involved in this type of social change are, innovation or rationalisation, institutionalisation of innovation, development of vested interest around new institutional adaptations, and finally, traditionalisation of innovation. This is an ongoing process of adaptive social change.
- ii) The second level is social change through “revolutionary” movements. This type of social change results from “revolutionary” movements which brings about a sudden alteration or change in the balance or equilibrium of the social system. He gave the examples of Communist and Nazi movements to illustrate this kind of change. Parsons held that broadly four types of conditions must prevail before such movements could spread widely and gain supremacy in the social system.

These conditions are,

- 1) The presence of widely spread and distributed alienative motivations among the people. In other words, a large section of population must feel disenchanting with the existing system.



- 2) The emergence of the organisation of a deviant (or alternative counter) subculture. In other words, the presence of a counter ideology which departs radically from the existing one. This helps a large population of members of the social system to evade the sanctions of the existing social system or even to challenge it openly.
- 3) This results into the third condition of success of a revolutionary social movement, that is, the development of an ideology, a set of beliefs, which could be successfully put forward and claim legitimacy for its values, symbols and institutional structures.
- 4) Finally, the fourth condition for such social movement is the organisation of a power system with particular reference to the state to support and legitimise the ideology of the new movement and give it an operative shape. The success of the Communist Movement both in Soviet Russia and China illustrates historically the existence and validity of the above four conditions.

A major consequence of revolutionary social movements in terms of social change is that it sets in motion adaptive transformations in the social system. This is because most revolutionary ideologies according to Talcott Parsons have good deal of the Utopian (idealistic) element in them. When these values are subjected to implementation there follows “a process of concession” to development of adaptive structures. The more radical the ideology the more difficult is the evolution of such adaptive structures. Instead there is a compulsive tendency towards orthodoxy. For instance, in the Communist movement, the institution of the family was characterised as a “bourgeois prejudice”, or property system, in terms of private ownership was declared as evil. But to do away with both these institutions in actual practice proved impracticable. There is thus a tension in revolutionary ideology between belief and practicality.

Secondly, all revolutionary movements, according to Parsons, involve a degree of ambivalence in structures, such as between class and egalitarianism in Communist movement. Moreover, in most such movements there is a tendency among the followers to gratify or satisfy their own repressed need-dispositions as the system is no longer “theirs”, but “ours”. A sense of command over the system contributes to the tendency towards personal or collective self-gratification among the leadership. This in course of time mitigates the radical nature of the revolutionary social movement. Finally, as time moves on a movement which began on a revolutionary plank slowly moves towards “orthodoxy”. There is a tendency thus to socialise members into patterns of conformity in the same manner as the pre-revolutionary society did. This contributes to the system’s stability and is no different from any other normal stable social system. Thus, Parsons believed that even revolutionary social movements which claim radical social transformation in the social system ultimately undergo the process of adaptive change consistent with the needs of system stability. Such revolutionary movements begin with heterodoxy and end up in orthodoxy.

## Check Your Progress 2

- i) In what way is population a primary factor in bringing about change within a social system? Discuss using about six lines.

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- ii) List the factors, which contribute towards building up of strain in social systems leading to a new equilibrium. Use about eleven lines.

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- iii) Tick (✓) the correct statement.

- a) Rationalisation is the process in which new values, beliefs, attitudes, etc. get institutionalised.
- h) Rationalisation is the process of progressive growth of rational, individualistic and innovative attitude towards work, personal commitments and social institutions
- c) Rationalisation is the process whereby individuals internalise the values, beliefs and customs of their society

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## 28.5 CHANGES OF SOCIAL SYSTEMS: EVOLUTIONARY UNIVERSALS

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You have so far learned about Parsons's views on social change as enunciated mainly in his early work *The Social System* (1951). In his later

writings particularly. *Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives* (1966), *The Sociological Theory and Modern Sociology* (1967), *The System of Modern Societies* (1971) and *The Evolution of Societies* (1977), Talcott Parsons contributed substantially to an evolutionary theory of social change. His approach to social change, however, remained primarily functional, that is, he still considered all processes of change emanating from strains towards differentiation and adaptation to be system maintaining in the longer time scale. But he introduced two new factors.

- i) First, he postulated the concept of “evolutionary universals”. By this he meant to say that despite the specific historical particularities of each social system or society (because of its boundedness in its own culture and material environment), if one looked at societies in a longer time scale there were some general directions of evolution through which societies tend to evolve. Parsons called the direction and nature of this historical process of social evolution of all societies “evolutionary universals”.
- ii) The second main departure in Parsons’ views on social change during this period can be noticed in his emphasis on historical and comparative analysis of major types of evolutionary stages of social systems at a global level. Through this exercise he offered a comparative treatment of societies ranging from the primitive to the modern industrial society.

The evolutionary typologies of societies are described by Parsons in the following terms.

### **28.5.0 Primitive or Archaic Societies**

These societies are the most elementary in terms of social organisation. According to Parsons in order that any human society may exist they must have

- i) elementary forms of economy taking care of procurement for the survival of human beings (main forms being food gathering, hunting, animal husbandry and cultivation)
- ii) they must also possess elementary technology through which production of food, shelter, protection from environment and other dangers could be ensured
- iii) they should also have some means of speech or mechanism of communication through which social solidarity from the family to the community level could be established and social organisations could be managed and
- iv) some form of belief system (animism, animalism or magic and religion etc.) through which cultural and expressive motivations of people could be socially galvanised and integrated must also be present. Finally,
- v) an elementary form of political organisation is also necessary for the functioning of these types of societies. The political system may be very simple, such as that of tribal chiefdoms or control by community’s collective rules, but its presence is necessary for the integrative existence of the society.

The process of social evolution could proceed forward through either collective movement in the direction of growth in the above five factors or it could emanate primarily from any one of these social institutions. For instance, it could well be that in a particular primitive society the innovations in technology revolutionises the economy or the food production capacity of the community. Thus it could be possible for this society to sustain a much larger population. The increase in population triggers the process of social differentiation and brings into existence new strains or tensions for adaptation and integration. In yet another society, the primary impulse for change might come from the belief system, where the magical or religious outlook of the people may inspire them to explore new opportunities for economic and technological advancement. Parsons related the process of social change to two main sources of adaptive tensions existent in human societies, firstly, the existential or the material, and, secondly, the symbolic or the cultural. His own emphasis was on the primary causative impulse of symbolic or cultural institutions in societies. This is in line with Max Weber's work on the role of the Protestant Ethic in the rise of capitalism. But in general terms, both these factors, i.e., the existential and symbolic, mutually reinforce one another in most social systems undergoing social change.

### **28.5.1 Intermediate Societies**

Following the primitive stage, the second evolutionary universal stage according to Parsons is that of the intermediate type of society. This type of society results from the pressure for social differentiation. One most common form of such pressure for differentiation in social systems, according to Parsons, is that of population increase. This changes the size and composition of society. The nature of differentiation in societies like those in the organic system such as the cellular structure within the body is that of binary division that is, in which units divide into two. Following this analogy with the organic system. Parsons argued that with the pressure of population growth there is division of human settlements on binary lines between town and village. This division further brings about occupational differentiations and many types of occupations not related to agriculture emerge. This is because the growth of towns and cities also brings into existence new classes of people who control surpluses of wealth, have more power and social status, and also those who are artisans, craftsmen, people in literary and priestly professions, businessmen, warriors, etc. The primitive or tribal society is generally a society without division between classes or castes. The leaders in this society might enjoy some prerogatives, which are mainly honorific and entail no major differences in consumption pattern or life style.

In the second phase of evolution social differentiation on class lines or as in India, on caste lines, evolves. This type of growth in the nature of the social system also necessitates new rules for the administration of society. As in the past merely customs are not sufficient for the management of societies at this stage. So, more generalised rules and legal norms are codified, often in written form, for the governance of society. In this phase the political system takes on a more systematised form, such as those of feudalism and monarchy. But the two basic new institutions which constitute

the distinctive character of societies in the intermediate stage of evolution, according to Parsons are (i) emergence of an elaborate and complex system of social stratification and (ii) the emergence of generalised norms for the social control of society.

The examples of these types of societies according to Parsons are China, India, the Islamic empires and the Roman empire. But apart from these historical examples, most social systems undergo this process of evolution due to their need to be adaptive, and because of social differentiation. In the primitive society the examples of adaptive change can be drawn from several specific instances. The cultural or symbolic source of initiation of processes of change has been reported among many Indian tribal societies such as the Mundas and Birhors of Bihar through the emergence of messianic movement or *Devi* movement. The goddess appears in the dream of some tribal leader(s) and requires of him or her to implement many social reforms in the conduct of people. Often such reforms are necessary even otherwise to combat the forces threatening the vital interests of the tribal community. May be these reforms emanate from hostile nature or from the presence of other hostile communities or classes outside. Illustrations of innovative new technologies to improve the productive capacity of society are indeed numerous in many simpler societies. As a matter of fact the technology of seeding and ploughing were very novel when they were first introduced many thousand years ago.

### 28.5.2 Modern Societies

The third stage in the process of evolution of societies according to Parsons, was that of the modern social systems. These types of societies evolved from the intermediate stage of evolution (which could also be called the pre-industrial stage of societies) through the development of a number of social institutions. Technology, of course, played an important role in this process. But all this was possible because of three types of revolutions that the Western (European) society went through. These revolutions according to Parsons, were uniquely Western contribution to humanity. That is why he also held the view that the development of the modern stage of society is an entirely Western contribution, and no other civilisation, such as India or China, from the Eastern hemisphere took a lead in this direction.

This scale of change was possible in the West (Europe) because of three revolutions, (i) industrial revolution (ii) democratic revolution led by the French Revolution and (iii) educational revolution. The industrial revolution in Europe which you have already learnt about in Unit 1, Block 1 of this course (ESO-13) was caused by technological revolutions through invention of steam and electrical sources of energy. This brought about radical changes in transport, navigation, commerce, the production system and its market. Factories emerged where instead of animal power, which was the main source of energy during the intermediate stage of societal evolution, steam and electrical energy sources were used on a large scale.

The factory mode of production contributed to urban and industrial growth and increased the role of science and technology in economic and social affairs of society, providing thus a continuing element of development.

This industrial revolution both coincided with and contributed to the strengthening of the democratic revolution in Europe. The French Revolution particularly ushered in the values of equality, universal brotherhood, liberty and set the pace for the abolition of kingship and replaced it by the democratic process of elected government. In England also the reformation and political movement took away the authoritarian powers of the king and transferred it to the people's elected representative.

The democratic movement had a revolutionary consequence for the emergence of a new system of society in which not birth related status and power but acquired individual merit governed the place of individual in the power and prestige scale of society. Together with industrial revolution it set in motion a process of social mobility which ensured greater participation and egalitarianism in matters of access to opportunities. But this was largely possible through the third revolutionary development, in European society, that of education.

The educational revolution in Europe resulted primarily from the separation of education from the Church and its progressive secularisation and universalisation. The emergence of university systems of education where both teaching and research could be conducted allowed the pursuit of knowledge to take place free from any religious or sectarian presumptions. This was a great social and cultural movement in the life of the European society. It liberated the production and communication of knowledge from sectarian control and made it available to the entire society, or humanity, without any favour or prejudice. Similarly, the universalisation of elementary education strengthened the foundations of higher education in Western society. This reinforced the democratic and industrial institutions of those societies. The industrial, the democratic, and the educational revolutions were thus, according to Parsons, a unique contribution of the West to humanity.

### **Activity 2**

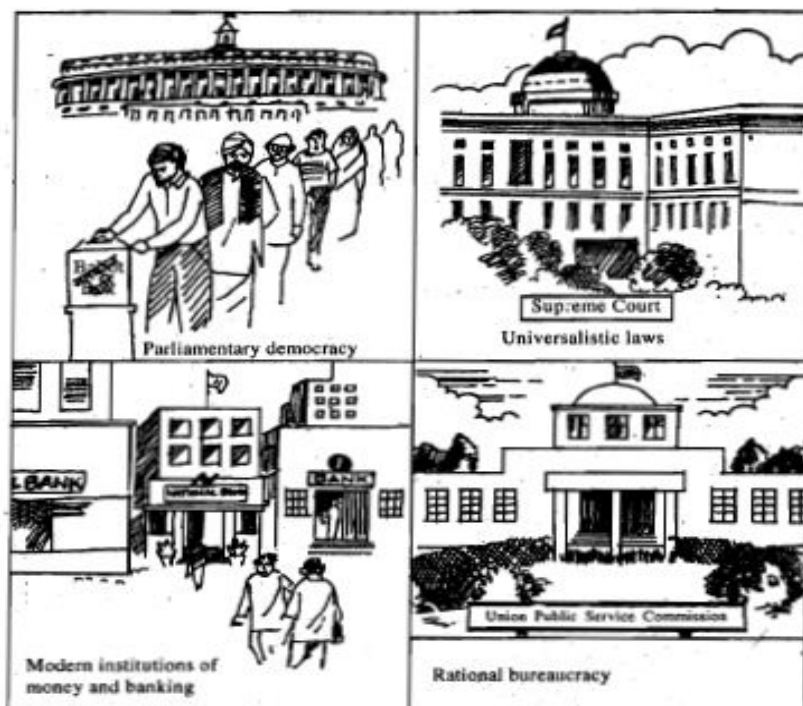
Read the section on Changes of social systems: Evolutionary universals carefully. Now keeping the different characteristics of the three types of evolutionary universals described by Parsons in mind, write a note of one page on the stage of evolutionary development you find in society in India at present. State the type in which you will place Indian society.

Compare, if possible, your note with those of other students at your Study Centre.

Following the impact of these three types of revolutions the modern system of society emerged. Its main features in Parsons views are:

- i) the growth of universalistic laws
- ii) the evolution of modern institutions of money and banking
- iii) the institution of rational bureaucracy and
- iv) the growth of democratic society.





**Figure 28.2: Features of a Modern Society**

According to Parsons, for a society to qualify as a modern society these institutional prerequisites or pre-conditions have to be met. The universalistic laws are based on universal brotherhood and freedom of human kind. It makes for the rational and uniform application of law to all human beings without favour or prejudice based on faith, colour, birth, etc. A major feature of these universalistic legal norms is the emergence of the concept of “fundamental rights” or civic rights, available to all human beings in the society. This protects an individual from the arbitrary application of state power. Similarly, the invention of money and banking rationalises the scope of trade and commerce and makes it truly global in character. One can talk about the world market rather than a city or town market. These also intensify and widen the scope of industrial and economic activities of society. The role of a rational bureaucracy is most crucial in this process. Rational bureaucracy is a concept, which was first introduced by Max Weber. It means among other things, the selection of executive or government officials on the basis of merit through examination, and the precise allocation of responsibilities and legal accountability in the realms of official duty. It also safeguards the bureaucrat from the wielders of political or economic power in the event of the latter trying to misuse their authority. Rational bureaucracy thus, is an essential institutional requirement for the implementation of public policy, for it invokes the principles of equality, universality and justice.

But Parsons also held the view that even after a society has achieved great heights in the spheres of money and banking or bureaucratic rationality it cannot yet claim to be a modern society without the institution of democracy. By democracy he meant the freedom of participation in political processes of society by contending groups of political parties with multiple and contradictory ideologies. Without such a democracy the institutions of universalistic legal norms, or rational bureaucracy might exist only in form but not in substance. Parsons also felt that as soon as a society begins to develop other social attributes of modernisation a time comes when the

pressure for real democratic reform mounts. Therefore, modern social systems are ultimately democratic in nature.

It was assumed by Parsons that in spite of historical gaps and unevenness in the process of evolutionary social change all societies would achieve the level of a modern system of society. All of them would go through the institutionalisation of “evolutionary universals”, and in due course of time would establish universalistic legal norms, money and banking, rational bureaucracy, and finally, democracy.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) Describe what is meant by Evolutionary Universals using about five lines
- ii) In the evolution of modern societies, three types of revolutions played a major role. Name them using about five lines.
- iii) List the major features of a modern system of society described by Parsons. Use about five lines.

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## 28.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you have learnt about Talcott Parsons’ concept of functionalism. The relationship between functionalism and social change has been described in some detail. Then you learnt about the two main types of social change described by Parsons. First, were changes within social systems, and the second, of changes of social systems. He has described the latter through his concept of evolutionary universals. He has classified the evolution of societies into three categories, the primitive or **archaic**, the intermediate societies, and the modern.

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## 28.7 KEYWORDS

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<b>Archaic</b>	Any society which is antiquated or old fashioned
<b>Diffusion</b>	The spread of cultural items, objects and ideas through contact between different cultures.
<b>Evolutionary Universals</b>	When social systems are viewed in a longer time scale some general directions of evolutionary developments are observed. The direction and nature of this historical process of evolution is called Evolutionary Universal.
<b>Homeostasis</b>	The vital functions which the different organs, such as the respiratory, digestive, etc. perform in the human body leading to its survival and maintenance. This self-regulatory process of the body is called homeostasis.

<b>Rationalisation</b>	It is the process by which rational, individualistic and innovative attitude towards work, personal commitments and social institutions develop.
<b>Teleology</b>	It is the explanation for the existence of a process or institution or any object or ideas in terms of the purpose it fulfils, such as, to say that we eat to live, we are giving the purpose for eating.
<b>Traditionalisation</b>	It is the process by which the values, beliefs, ideas, attitudes, etc. became institutionalised in societies leading to the rise of vested interest(s) in maintaining them.

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## 28.8 FURTHER READING

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Hamilton, Peter, 1983. *Talcott Parsons*. Routledge: London and New York

Parsons, Talcott. 1966. *Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspectives*. Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, N.J.

Parsons, Talcott, 1977. *The Evolution of Societies*. (Ed. with an introduction, by Jackson Toby). Prentice Hall: Englewood Cliffs

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## 28.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) Functionalism is an approach which views all social systems as having elements or parts such as processes and institutions which operate leading thereby to the maintenance and survival of the system. This approach is influenced deeply by the biological sciences and draws an analogy between organisms and society.
- ii) Teleology is the belief that the purpose of the existence of an institution or a process is that it fulfils a necessary function, which maintains the survival of the social system. This belief is central to the functionalist theory.
- iii) a) historical  
b) harmony, strain, change.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Population is a primary factor in bringing about change within a social system because with the increase of population social differentiation, i.e., division of labour, occurs. People do different functions in order to produce more. Growing command over food resources and production technology leads to increasing complexity of the social

system. This is proved historically in the development of caste system in India or the guild system in Europe.

- ii) Factors, which contribute towards the increase of strain in a social system, are
  - a) When the demographic constitution of a population changes through migration, social intermixture, etc.
  - b) When the physical environment such as, the quality of soil, water, weather, etc. deteriorates, or changes.
  - c) When there is more production of food and more resources available to individuals in a social system.
  - d) When there is change in the technology used in a society and when scientific knowledge is applied for the advancement of society, and
  - e) When there is a change in “cultural configuration” which brings about new religious values, ideologies, science and technology, etc.
- iii) b)

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) Every social system has its own specific historical features. But in spite of this uniqueness when seen in a longer time span there are some general directions of evolution through which all social systems pass. It is the direction and nature of this historical process of evolution of societies which Parsons calls Evolutionary Universals.
- ii) In the evolution of modern societies, three types of revolutions which played a significant role are
  - a) the Industrial Revolution
  - b) the Democratic revolution lead by the French Revolution, and
  - c) the Educational revolution.
- iii) The major features of a modern social system are
  - a) growth of universalistic laws
  - b) evolution of modern institutions of money and banking
  - c) evolution of the institution of rational bureaucracy; and
  - d) the growth of a democratic society.

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# UNIT 29 MANIFEST AND LATENT FUNCTION — MERTON

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Manifest and Latent  
Function—Merton

## Structure

- 29.0 Objectives
- 29.1 Introduction
- 29.2 Concepts of Function
  - 29.2.0 Different Meanings
    - 29.2.1 Objective Consequences and Subjective Dispositions
    - 29.2.2 Function, Dysfunction, Manifest Function and Latent Function
- 29.3 Postulates of Functional Analysis
  - 29.3.0 Postulate of Functional Unity
  - 29.3.1 Postulate of Universal Functionalism
  - 29.3.2 Postulate of Indispensability
- 29.4 A Paradigm for Functional Analysis
  - 29.4.0 The Items to which Functions are Imputed
  - 29.4.1 Concepts of Objective Consequences
  - 29.4.2 Concept of the Unit Subserved by the Function
- 29.5 Manifest and Latent Function-Purpose of Distinction
  - 29.5.0 What Appears 'Irrational' Becomes Meaningful
  - 29.5.1 New Horizons of Enquiry Begin to Emerge
  - 29.5.2 The Realm of Sociological Knowledge Expands
  - 29.5.3 Established Morals get Challenged
- 29.6 Let Us Sum Up
- 29.7 Key Words
- 29.8 Further Reading
- 29.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 29.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit you should be able to

- distinguish between the concepts of manifest and latent function
- discuss why and how Robert K. Merton gives a new meaning to functional analysis and differs from its conventional postulates and paradigms
- show how a concept like latent function enriches our perception of the social world
- look at our own social institutions and cultural practices from a refreshingly innovative angle.

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## 29.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous Units 27 and 28 of this Block you learnt about the contributions of Talcott Parsons to the field of sociology. This unit intends to make you familiar with the contribution Robert Merton made to the subject. Merton is another eminent American Sociologist and a student of Parsons. He has contributed significantly to the growth of functional analysis in sociology. You already know something about functionalism.

In this unit, particularly in the first section, i.e. section 29.2 you will learn about the special meaning that sociologists attach to the word 'function'. You will learn not solely about the meaning of function; but also about its two types, viz, manifest and latent function. In addition you will be told about the negation of function i.e. dysfunction.

In the second section, i.e. section 29.3 we will discuss the postulates of traditional functionalism, particularly the kind of functionalism propagated by social anthropologists like Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. Then, we will discuss how Robert Merton disagrees with the conventional postulates and proposed new changes.

In the third section, section 29.4 you will learn about the paradigm for functional analysis, which Merton believes, enables the social scientist to be clear about his or her priorities, the areas to be explored, and the questions to be raised. A paradigm, as you will learn, is needed to avoid chaos and confusion in your research.

And, finally, in the fourth section, i.e. section 29.5 you will learn how a concept like latent function, as Merton emphasises, enables the sociologist to expand the realm of knowledge and explore new areas of sociological enquiry.

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## 29.2 CONCEPTS OF FUNCTION

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Perhaps it is not difficult to describe the term function. You already know how your society functions. You read a newspaper. And you know that it informs you of the world around you. You go to your university or to your workplace. And you know that it provides education and knowledge and prepares you for the world you are going to enter. In the case of your workplace, it has a certain organisation and way of functioning. Or as a voter you cast your vote and elect your representatives, because you would like your views to be represented. In other words, it is not difficult for you to understand that all that constitutes of your society, be it the newspaper you read, the university you rely on for your studies, the place of your work, the democratic institutions in which you participate, helps you to relate creatively and positively to your society. In other words, social institutions tend to intensify the degree of your participation in your society as an insider, as an active member. The result is that the cohesiveness of the society is established. This is precisely the function of social institutions.

Before you begin to read Robert Merton's functional analysis, you can safely conclude that, as a sociologist, when you use the word 'function'



you are referring to how a social institution or a cultural practice intensifies the cohesiveness of the society. In other words, society functions because its constituent parts, its various institutions or cultural practices, do contribute to the formation of social unity and to order and cohesiveness. Function is precisely this contribution that brings order, unity and cohesiveness in a society.

Again there are some functions you are aware of and there are some other functions you are not aware of. Ask yourself why, as a student, you are regularly asked to sit for examinations. The examinations, you know, test your knowledge, enable you to work hard and, as a result, you get stimulated to sharpen your skill and intelligence so that you can become a better member of the society. This is undoubtedly the manifest function of the examinations. We are sure that you are aware of it.

But that is not all. The examinations serve another function which you may not be aware of. The examinations tend to convince you that there are 'good' students and 'not so good' students; not everyone is equal; merit or intelligence or knowledge is not evenly distributed. In other words, these examinations, in the ultimate analysis, induce you to accept that even in a democracy some kind of hierarchy is unavoidable. This acceptance reduces the possibility of conflict. In fact, this is a lesson of adjustment. Society retains its order, unity, and cohesiveness, despite its inherent inequality or hierarchy. This is the latent function of the examination system, the deeper meaning of which you may not always be aware of.

This brief introduction is likely to arouse your interest. You are now eager to know how Merton redefines functional analysis. But before that you ought to be clear about the concept of function. Merton wants you to examine and re-examine this concept from different perspectives so that its analytical significance comes through clearly. You will find a detailed elaboration of this in his famous book (1949) *Social Theory and Social Structure*.

### **29.2.0 Different Meanings of Function**

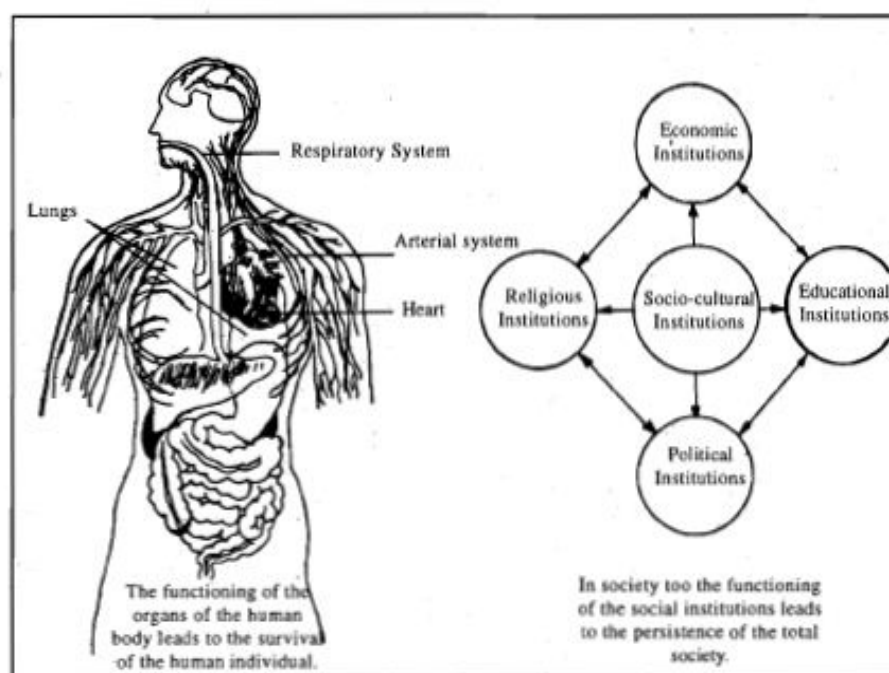
Remember when, as a student of sociology, you are using the word 'function', you have to be aware of its difference from other connotations assigned to the same word. As Merton says, there are generally five connotations assigned to the word 'function'.

First, function often refers to some public gathering or festive occasion, usually conducted with ceremonial overtones. And as Merton says, and you too may well anticipate, this popular usage of function does not have the slightest similarity with the sociological concept you are dealing with.

Secondly, the term is often equated with occupation. But this is not what a sociologist is interested in.

Thirdly, function is often used to refer to the activities assigned to the incumbent of a social status. For example, the function of a kindergarten teacher is to educate the child; the function of a doctor is to cure his or her patient and so on. Yet, says Merton, this definition is not sufficient. According to Merton such an understanding diverts attention from the fact

that functions are performed not only by the occupant of designated positions, but by a whole range of standardised activities, social processes, cultural patterns and belief systems found in society, Fourthly, function has got a mathematical meaning. It refers to a variable in relation to one or more variables in terms of which it may be expressed.



**Figure 29.1: Concept of Function in Sociology Adopted from the Biological Sciences**

But, as Merton says, it is the fifth connotation, which is central to functional analysis. The inspiration behind this usage has been the biological sciences, where the term function is used to refer to these ‘vital or organic processes which contribute to the maintenance of the organism’.

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, the noted social anthropologist, used this connotation in social sciences. ‘The function of any recurrent activity’, according to Radcliffe-Brown, ‘is the part it plays in the social life as a whole and therefore the contribution it makes to the maintenance of structural continuity’. According to Malinowski, another noted anthropologist, the function of social or cultural items is the part they play within the integral system of culture by the manner in which they are related to each other within the system.

Now it is for you to reflect on this special connotation of ‘function’ which, as a student of sociology, you are expected to use time and again. There are two things that you ought to remember.

- First, what you call society is not chaotic. It has an order, a structure. In other words, all that constitutes your society, its innumerable parts like polity, economy, religion, family, education cannot be seen in isolation. All parts are integrally related. It is this inherent relationship that sustains the society.
- Secondly, in order to appreciate the inherent relationship, you have to see how each part contributes to the maintenance of the inherent order and structure. It is this contribution that is called function. So you can say, education has got a function, precisely because the contribution of education is that it gives you knowledge and skill and, as a result, society both coheres and progresses.

### 29.2.1 Objective Consequences and Subjective Dispositions

It is at this juncture that Merton would invite you to raise a meaningful question, Who would decide the function of a social institution or a cultural practice? The participant or the observer?

It would be easier for you to appreciate the meaning of this question if you think of a living example. For instance, someone is about to get married and you ask her why is she getting herself into it. What is its function? It is quite possible that she, the participant, may tell you that she is marrying for the fulfilment of her human needs and her need for love. But, then, Merton would say that the participant is confusing her own subjective motives with the real, objective function of marriage. The objective function of marriage or family is not love but the socialisation of the child.

That is why, says Merton, the concept of function involves the standpoint of the observer, not necessarily that of the participant. In other words, social function refers to observable objective consequences, not subjective dispositions. A school child may think that he goes to school because he finds his friends there; but the function of school is something else; it is to add to and aid in the growth of knowledge that the society needs in order to sustain itself.

In other words, in order to see the function of a social institution or a cultural practice, it is not sufficient for the social scientist to remain contented with the subjective dispositions or the motives an actor attaches to it. Instead, the social scientist has to see the objective consequences: how really does the institution contribute to the cohesiveness of the society.

### 29.2.2 Function, Dysfunction, Manifest Function and Latent Function

It is now clear that functions are those observed consequences, which make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system. But, then not everything is functional. Not everything helps to make for the adaptation of a system. So Merton uses another concept called dysfunction. Dysfunctions, according to Merton, are those observed consequences, which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system.

Imagine your own society. Modern India, you would agree, intends to be mobile, democratic, participatory and egalitarian. In such a society the institution of caste, far from having a function, has dysfunctions. Instead of intensifying the democratic ideal, caste tends to lessen the degree of mobility, democratisation and participation. That is why, castes may be classified as dysfunctional.

With these clarifications it is no longer difficult for you to come to the main problem, manifest function and latent function. Be it a manifest function or a latent function, it is the objective, observed consequence which makes for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system. There is, however, only one difference and it goes to the credit of Merton that he is able to bring it out sharply and intelligently. Whereas the participants are aware of the manifest function, they are not aware of the latent function. In other words, the latent function is neither intended nor recognised.

Why is this so? This is because the participants can see what is immediately visible; they cannot always see the deeper or latent meaning of what they do. But for social scientists, the task is to go beyond the common sense perception of the participants and see the latent consequences of social practices.

Think of Emile Durkheim's famous analysis of the social functions of punishment. Its immediate, manifest function is obvious. Everyone knows it. It reminds the criminal that society would not permit his **deviance**. But, then, it has a latent function too, which is not generally recognised. The latent function of punishment, Durkheim would argue, is not what happens to the criminal; instead, it is deeper; it intensifies society's faith in its collective conscience; the punishment of the criminal is an occasion that reminds the society of its force and its collective morals.

### Check Your Progress 1

i) Write in about six lines how sociologists use the word 'function'.

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ii) What is the difference between latent and manifest function? Write in about four lines.

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iii) Give a simple example of 'dysfunction'? Use about three lines.

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## 29.3 POSTULATES OF FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS

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Robert Merton, you would realise, is no ordinary functionalist. What separates him from the traditional ones is his new insights, the way he goes beyond the boundaries of traditional functionalism. That is why it is important to know how Merton refutes the postulates of traditional

functionalism, the postulates of unity, universalism and indispensability and proposes refreshingly innovative changes, the changes that enable him to see that everything is not functional. Merton argues that society is divided into groups and sub-groups and what is functional for a particular group may be dysfunctional for others. Moreover, nothing is indispensable; there are always functional alternatives and equivalents.

### **29.3.1 Postulate of Functional Unity**

Radcliffe-Brown, says Merton, is one of the chief exponents of the postulate of functional unity. To quote from Radcliffe-Brown, 'The function of a particular social usage is the contribution it makes to the total social life as the functioning of the total social system' (Merton 1968: 25). What is implicit in such a postulate is that a social function has a certain kind of unity and all parts of the social system work together with a sufficient degree of harmony or internal consistency.

Perhaps the postulate of functional unity makes sense and remains valid in relatively homogeneous, non-literate civilisation. But in a modern complex society, the postulate of functional unity, as Merton argues, needs to be redefined. First, Merton doubts whether all societies are solidly integrated and hence every culturally standardised practice or belief is functional for the society as a whole. Secondly, Merton wants the sociologists to remember that social usages or beliefs may be functional for some groups and dysfunctional for others in the same society.

Merton's critique is very interesting. You have to understand its implications. Think of a social practice from your own society. What function, for example, does the kind of religion propagated by fundamentalists fulfil? It is true, as Durkheim showed that in a non-literate civilisation religion might have integrative functions. But in multi-ethnic, multi-religious society the religion of the kind that the fundamentalists propagate is likely to have disastrous consequences for the minorities. So you can understand that what the fundamentalists regard as a necessity is not necessary or functional for the whole society. It may be functional for the political interests of the fundamentalists, but dysfunctional for others.

This example is likely to incline you to the critique that Merton evolves. The postulate of functional unity does not make much sense in a complex world. As a result, the functionalists, says Merton, ought to specify the unit for which the given social or cultural item is functional. Moreover, they must make it clear, as the example of fundamentalism shows, that a given item may have diverse consequences, functional as well as dysfunctional for individuals or sub-groups.

### **29.3.2 Postulate of Universal Functionalism**

This postulate holds that all social or cultural forms have positive functions. Malinowski, says Merton, advances this in its most extreme form. As Malinowski says, 'In every type of civilisation, every custom, material object, idea and belief fulfils some vital function'.

What does this postulate mean? All social or cultural forms have necessarily positive functions. A moment's reflection is enough to make you see the

shortcomings of such a postulate. Because, as you have already learned, an item a social belief or a cultural practice may have dysfunctions also. And it may happen that a net balance of functional consequences is negative, not positive.

You can once again think of an example and evolve, as Merton does, a critique of this postulate. Many of you are perhaps fond of cricket. Cricket, you would argue, is a lovely game; it has got positive functions in the sense that it enables you to appreciate the beauty and art of the game, truly, a harmless experience'. It may also arouse your national identity (imagine India playing against Pakistan!); and enhance your patriotism! But at the same time, the positive functions of cricket should not prevent you from seeing its dysfunctions. Cricket has damaged other games like football or hockey, which are relatively neglected by the media. The media projects a cricketer as a star with wealth and opportunity for foreign travel, which is indeed dysfunctional for a true sports culture to evolve. So you have to see the net balance of the consequences and only then can one conclude whether an institution is functionally positive or negative.

This is precisely the reason why Merton refuses to give his consent to the postulate of universal functionalism. Merton argues and, it seems, you would agree with him that the functionalists must focus on a net balance of functional consequences, positive as well as negative, but, by no means, positive only.

### **29.3.3 Postulate of Indispensability**

Implicit in this postulate is the belief and Malinowski asserts it that whatever fulfils some vital function, be it a custom, a cultural practice, is indispensable in that society. In other words, all that persists in a society is indispensable and nothing, it seems, can be altered.

Before you understand how Robert Merton evolves a critique of this postulate, it is necessary for you to think of an example and reflect on it. Education, for instance, remains an indispensable function and unless it is fulfilled, no society can survive. This is because without education society cannot produce knowledge, wisdom, skills and trained personnel. But the question is what are the ways to fulfil this indispensable function? Now think of the prevalent education system, a system in which there is neither reciprocity nor mutual understanding between the teacher and the student. The student remains a passive recipient while the teacher imparts to him or her techniques, information, knowledge subskills. The proponents of such an impersonal system may argue that it is indispensable because it disciplines the mind of the student, it makes him obedient and therefore it results in order.

Yet, as Paulo Freire said beautifully in his masterpiece *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, there is an alternative form of education, dialogical education, in which both the student and the teacher are equally active. The student, instead of remaining a passive receiver, participates and intervenes in the process of learning. This, said Freire, is more creative, more humane. So you understand that although education is a functional necessity, there are different ways to fulfil it. In other words no cultural form is indispensable



forever because the function it claims to fulfil can be fulfilled better by alternative cultural forms.

A functional analyst, Merton says, should assume that nothing, in fact, is indispensable. There are functional alternatives, equivalents or substitutes. In other words, the same function served by a given item, under changed circumstances, may be fulfilled by another item. For example, in modern societies where women too work outside the home, some functions of the family such as, childcare can be performed by other institutions like creches, daycare centres, and so on.

**Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Who was one of the chief proponents of the postulate of functional unity?  
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- ii) Why did Merton refute the postulate of universal functionalism? Explain in about six lines.  
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- iii) What according to Merton, is the concept of functional alternative? Write in about five lines.  
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**29.4 A PARADIGM FOR FUNCTIONAL ANALYSIS**

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Robert K. Merton was extremely particular about the necessity of a paradigm as the paradigm contains the minimum set of concepts without which the sociologist cannot adequately carry out a functional analysis. Moreover, the paradigm says Merton, is intended to lead directly to the postulates and often to the tacit assumptions underlying functional analysis. Finally, the paradigm seeks to sensitise the sociologist to the political and ideological implications of functional analysis.

In other words, without a paradigm, it is difficult to properly codify a theory. The paradigm brings out into open the array of assumptions, concepts and basic propositions employed in a sociological analysis. It reduces the possibility of randomness and arbitrariness in sociological research.

A paradigm for functional analysis therefore helps to make clear how to conduct functional analysis, what to study, what to emphasise upon and how to locate one's analysis in the ideological struggle between conservatism and radicalism.

#### **29.4.0 The Items to which Functions are Imputed**

It is necessary for you to know the nature of the sociological data that can be subjected to functional analysis. Can you include anything and everything for functional analysis such as cultural practices, rituals, social institutions, machines, persons? As Merton clarifies, the basic requirement in functional analysis is that the object of analysis should represent a standardised, patterned item such as social roles, institutional patterns, social processes, cultural patterns, culturally patterned emotions, social norms, group organisation, social structure, devices for social control, etc.

In other words, something that is a regular practice can be included for functional analysis. For example, you can include cricket as well as marriage, a religious rite as well as the coercive machinery of the state. This is because all of the above are standardised social items. But you cannot include the idiosyncracies or peculiarities of a single individual for functional analysis because we are not talking now i.e., in this case, of standardised and regular social practice.

#### **29.4.1 Concepts of Objective Consequences**

You have already learned from Merton that an item may have both functional as well as dysfunctional consequences. As a sociologist, your task is to see the net balance of the aggregate of consequences.

Imagine yourself doing a functional analysis of Doordarshan. Its positive functions are obvious; it brings the world closer and informs you of the happenings on this planet. But its dysfunctions too have to be seen. It breeds consumerism and tends to stimulate violence. So your task is to balance the functions and the dysfunctions of Doordarshan and then arrive, at a reasonable conclusion.

##### **Activity 1**

Think of casteism in your own society. Try to examine its functions as well as dysfunctions. Write a note of about two pages listing the functions and dysfunctions of casteism. Compare if possible your note with those of other students at your Study Centre

#### **29.4.2 Concept of the Unit Subserved by the Function**

Every item does not necessarily have functions or dysfunctions for the whole society. Something might be functional for one group and dysfunctional for another group or sub-system.

For instance, the continual coverage of cricket by Doordarshan may have function of lowering the crime rate during those hours, but on the other hand it may breed and promote inefficiency in the work place. That is why, says Merton, it is necessary to be particularly specific about the unit for which one wants to study the functional consequences of an item. So a sociologist should be absolutely clear whether he or she is studying the functional consequences of a given item for the whole society or only for a sub-group.

A functional analyst should not assume that her or his task is to focus only on the static aspects of social structure and neglect the study of structural change in society. Merton believes that a functional analyst should be equally concerned about social change. First, as you know, nothing is indispensable; so also one might add that nothing is static either. Functional alternatives are possible. Secondly, a functional analyst should know that not everything is functional; there are many social and cultural items, which have dysfunctional consequences. Dysfunctions, according to Merton, imply the concept of strain, stress and tension on the structural level and, therefore, provide an analytical approach to the study of dynamics and change.

It has often been alleged that functional analysis is inevitably committed to a 'conservative' or a 'reactionary' perspective. But Merton says that it has no intrinsic commitment to any ideological position. It all depends, in Merton's opinion, on how you do your analysis and how you want to use it. For instance, if you concentrate solely on positive functional consequences, it leads towards an ultra-conservative ideology. But, on the other hand, if you concentrate solely on dysfunctional consequences, it leads you towards an ultra-radical **Utopia**, because you are excessively critical of all the institutions present in your society.

Choose a living example; reflect on it. If, as a sociologist, you see only the functional consequences of caste, 'how caste restricts competition and, therefore, maintains order or how caste enables one to choose one's *swadharma* and therefore reduces the possibility of career anxiety or identity confusion, you are indeed adopting an ultra-conservative ideology. But once you begin to see the dysfunctions of caste, you can no longer be accused of conservatism. Because by seeing the dysfunctions you are essentially pleading for change. That's why, Merton argues, functional analysis has no intrinsic commitment to any ideological position.

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## 29.5 MANIFEST AND LATENT FUNCTION - PURPOSE OF DISTINCTION

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What gives a new meaning to Merton's functional analysis is the way he evolves the notion of latent function and distinguishes it from manifest function. This distinction, Merton forcefully argues, helps us to go beyond the common sense perception of the world. A notion like latent function, opens your eyes, it enables you to see the deeper, hidden meaning of many of your social practices and cultural beliefs. In this fashion you are almost forced to alter the prevalent notion of 'rationality' and 'irrationality', 'morality' and 'immorality' that you had taken for granted. Because even

in an ‘irrational’ or an ‘immoral’ practice you would see a latent and necessary social function being fulfilled. The result is that the realm of social knowledge and enquiry would begin to expand.

### **29.5.0 What Appears ‘Irrational’ Becomes Meaningful**

The distinction between latent function and manifest function helps the sociologist to make his or her presence felt as a critical analyst. Once you are aware of the notion of latent function, you would not be easily tempted to regard everything that does not have an immediate, manifest function as simply ‘irrational’. Instead, you would ask a deeper question! Why is it that what appears ‘irrational’ continues to exist? Only then, perhaps, you would begin to see the hidden or latent meaning of the so-called irrational act or belief.

A concrete example that Merton suggests would help you to appreciate the point. With your secular rationality how do you look at the Hopi ceremonials? The Hopi ceremonials are designed to produce abundant rainfall. But it is not as if rain really falls on account of the ceremonials performed by the Hopis. Rainfall does not depend on ceremonials. This may tempt you to conclude that the Hopi ceremonials reflect nothing except an irrational, superstitious belief of the primitive folk.

Now it is at this juncture that Merton would ask you to resist temptation. Don’t draw such an easy conclusion. Merton wants you to see something deeper in these ceremonials. Well, the ceremonials do not produce rainfall. But the ceremonials enable the scattered members of the group to assemble together and engage in a common activity. This reinforces their group identity and solidarity, which is no mean achievement. This is the latent function of the ceremony.

#### **Activity 2**

Imagine yourself participating in a socio-religious festival like Holi. And try to see its latent function and ask yourself how it helps you to increase your perception about rituals and festivals. Write a note of one page about the latent and manifest functions of Holi. Compare, if possible, your note with those of other students at your Study Centre.

### **29.5.0 New Horizons of Enquiry Begin to Emerge**

You have already come to realise that sociologists are not lay persons. With their special skills, particularly with their awareness of the notion of latent function, they rediscover new areas of enquiry worthy of exploration. Generally, the social actors are content with immediate, manifest functions and do not bother about things having hidden, latent, and deeper consequences. But sociologists are not satisfied by external appearance alone. They delve into the hidden meanings and aspects of cultural items and social practices. Thus, they are interested even in those realms that may not have the slightest appeal to the clever pragmatist, that is, a practical person who is concerned more with the here and now of the manifest world.

There are many examples. Imagine yourself having a dialogue with an intellectual who is fond of only serious, 'art' films. He or she may tell you that all that takes place in the name of 'commercial' films is absurd and meaningless. But if you read Merton and begin to appreciate the notion of latent function, you are unlikely to be persuaded by the intellectual's arguments. Though commercial films may be absurd, what with their implausible stories, music, dances, romances and fight scenes, they may still have some positive functions. These films may strengthen the role of motherhood, celebrate the ultimate triumph of good over evil, and reinforce ideals which many fear may get lost in a rapidly changing world. It is in this regard that, commercial films may have a latent function and act like a safety valve, restoring faith. When seen in this way, a way suggested by Merton, a new area of sociological enquiry emerges, e.g. the study of commercial films.

### **29.5.2 The Realm of Sociological Knowledge Expands**

It is now quite obvious that a sociologist with his notion of latent function contributes positively to the growth of knowledge. Had he been contented merely with the manifest function, he could not have said anything new. That's why, says Merton, the distinction between the latent function and the manifest function helps the sociologist to open the horizons of sociological knowledge.

It is at this juncture that you need to know about a very interesting example that Merton has discussed in detail. The example is from Veblen's famous book, *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) in which the author sought to examine the latent function of the pattern of conspicuous consumption. Before you understand Veblen, it would be better, if you ask a simple question. Why do some people attach so much importance to new models of car, television, washing machine or even detergent powder?

Why do some people want to buy expensive and attractively packaged consumer goods all the time? Well, it is always possible to say that people buy cars because cars provide transportation; people buy TV sets because TV programmes help them to know about the world, its politics, culture etc. These are undoubtedly the manifest functions of the consumer goods and the consumers are well aware of these functions.

Everyone knows this. Wherein, then, lies the contribution of a sociologist? As Merton says, Veblen's analysis shows how a sociologist can go beyond the manifest functions of the pattern of consumption and tell us something new that seems strikingly different from one's common sense perception. Veblen says that people buy new models of car or TV sets not solely because they want transportation facilities or they want to know about the world, but also because it helps them to reaffirm their social status. In other words, buying costly goods serves the latent function of reaffirming one's social status. It is in this sense, says Merton, that sociologists help us to increase our knowledge about the world, the consequences of our beliefs, cultural practices, life-styles, etc.

### **29.5.3 Established Morals Get Challenged**

What appears 'immoral' then may have a latent function, though that does not necessarily make it moral. And hence, says Merton, it is not always

desirable to agree with the established morals of the society. Because unless the functions, i.e., the latent functions of 'immoral' practices or institutions are fulfilled by alternative practices or institutions, a moral critique, remains empty; it serves nothing. It is just a social ritual rather than a piece of social engineering.

Merton gives a revealing example from the American society. The 'immoral' political machine, says Merton, serves what the official democracy fails to accomplish. In the impersonal American democracy the voters are regarded as amorphous, undifferentiated masses. But the political machine with its keen sociological awareness regards the voter as a person living in a specific neighbourhood with specific personal problems and personal wants. In other words, in an impersonal society, the political machine fulfils the important social function of humanising and personalising, the manner of assistance to those in need.

The message Merton wants to convey is clear. It is futile to be critical of an 'immoral' practice unless one can think of a 'moral' alternative that can take its place in functional terms. A moral critique on its own is simply insufficient.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) What are the four reasons behind the distinction between the latent function and the manifest function? Use about four lines.

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- ii) How does the concept of latent function increase the realm of sociological knowledge? Give an example. Write in about eight lines.

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- iii) Which among the following statements is true?
- a) Functional analysis is necessarily conservative.
  - b) Functional analysis is necessarily radical.
  - c) Functional analysis has no intrinsic commitment to any ideological position.



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## 29.6 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you have learned how Robert K. Merton redefines functionalism as well as his disagreement with the conventional postulates and paradigms of functional analysis. You have also come to know how Merton comes forward with his own brand of functionalism which is more elastic, less dogmatic and hence capable of incorporating the societal experience of dynamics, change and dysfunctions. And what is particularly important is that you have also learned how, armed with the notion of latent function, Robert Merton proposes to expand the realm of sociological knowledge and enquiry. Essentially, he enables you to see the latent or hidden functions of many social practices, which our common sense perceptions fail to comprehend.

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## 29.7 KEYWORDS

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**Deviance** The word, sociologically speaking, implies an immoral practice, something that goes against society's established moral ideals. Drug-addiction, for instance, is a kind of deviance from socially approved normal and healthy existence.

**Hegemony** A process through which a particular section of the society, for instance, the ruling class, succeeds in imposing its values and ideas on the rest of the society. As a result, it seems that there is a consensus in the society, although, objectively, it remains divided.

**Utopia** The vision of a perfect, ideal society, something that seems strikingly different from the prevalent reality for which the revolutionaries and the oppressed often fight their battles.

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## 29.8 FURTHER READING

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Merton, Robert K. 1968. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Free Press: New York

Turner, J.H. 1987. *Structure of Sociological Theory*. Rawat Publications: Jaipur

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## 29.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) When sociologists use the word 'function' they mean the contribution a social institution or a cultural practice makes to the maintenance of social order, unity and cohesiveness. And, moreover, for a sociologist, function need not be confused with the subjective meaning that a participant attaches to a social item; instead, it is observed, objective

consequence, how really a social item brings about order and cohesiveness in a given system.

- ii) Whereas the participants remain aware of the manifest function of a social item, they are ignorant of its latent function. In other words, the manifest function is immediately visible; but the latent function remains hidden that need a sociologist to get explored.
- iii) Dysfunction is the negation of function. Instead of bringing about order and unity, it causes chaos and disorder. Caste, for example, is dysfunctional for a modern society, because it is against participatory and egalitarian democracy.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Radcliffe-Brown
- ii) The postulate of universal functionalism means that all social or cultural forms have positive functions. Merton refutes this postulate because with his critical awareness he can see clearly that social or cultural forms may have negative functions, i.e., dysfunctions also. That's why, says Merton, it is necessary to focus on a net balance of functional consequences, positive as well as negative but, by no means, positive only.
- iii) Merton refutes the postulate of indispensability. No cultural form, according to Merton, is indispensable for ever because the function it claims to fulfil can be fulfilled better by alternative cultural forms. In other words, the same function can be fulfilled by alternative items. This is, according to Merton, the concept of functional alternative.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i)
  - a) What appears 'irrational' becomes meaningful.
  - b) New horizons of enquiry begin to emerge.
  - c) The realm of sociological knowledge expands.
  - d) Established morals get challenged,
- ii) The phenomenal growth of consumerism in our society, for instance, can be explained better by the concept of latent function. Because men are buying consumer items-cars, TV sets or detergent powder - not solely because of their manifest functions, the facilities these items provide. Behind the aggressive urge to consume more and more lies the desire to reaffirm one's social status.

This is the latent function; consumerism sustains a competitive, materialistic culture, which the capitalists need to retain their hegemony. And this is where a concept like latent function increases the realm of sociological knowledge.

- iii) (c).

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# UNIT 30 THEORY OF REFERENCE GROUP — MERTON

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## Structure

- 30.0 Objectives
- 30.1 Introduction
- 30.2 Concept of Reference Group
  - 30.2.0 Concept of Relative Deprivation
  - 30.2.1 Concept of Group and Group Membership
  - 30.2.2 Concept of Non-Membership
  - 30.2.3 Anticipatory Socialisation
  - 30.2.4 Positive and Negative Reference Groups
- 30.3 Determinants of Reference Group
  - 30.3.0 Reference Individuals
  - 30.3.1 Selection of Reference Groups Among Membership Groups
  - 30.3.2 Selection of Non-Membership Groups
  - 30.3.3 Variation in Reference Groups for Differing Values and Norms
  - 30.3.4 Selection of Reference Groups Among Status-Categories or Sub-Groups Involving Sustained Interaction
- 30.4 Structural Elements of Reference Groups
  - 30.4.0 Observability and Visibility: Patterned Avenues of Information about Norms, Values and Role-Performance
  - 30.4.1 Non-Conformity as a Type of Reference Group Behaviour
  - 30.4.2 Role-sets, Status-sets and Status-sequences
- 30.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 30.6 Key Words
- 30.7 Further Reading
- 30.8 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 30.0 OBJECTIVES

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After studying this unit you should be able to

- understand the concept of reference group
- explain why human beings, in order to evaluate their role-performance and achievements, choose different reference groups: membership groups as well as, non-membership groups
- appreciate the continual possibility of an experience of relative deprivation and human restlessness because of human beings' perpetual inclination to different reference groups

- look at your own biography, creatively and critically: how you choose your reference individuals and reference groups and accordingly, shape your life-style, **worldview** and behaviour.

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## 30.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit you learnt about Merton's contribution to functional analysis. This unit intends to make you familiar with the theory of reference group behaviour particularly, the way Robert Merton has elaborated and substantiated it in his famous book (1949) *Social Theory and Social Structure*.

To begin with, an attempt has been made to make you appreciate the concept of reference group, its many varieties in Section 30.2.

Then, you would come to know the determinants, structural, institutional, cultural and psychological factors that continue to stimulate human beings to choose different reference groups, membership as well as non-membership groups. This is elaborated in Section 30.3

And, finally, you would learn the structural elements of reference group behaviour the possibility of observability and visibility of the norms, values and role-performance of group members, the impact of non-conformity and the dynamics of role-sets and status-sets.

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## 30.2 CONCEPT OF REFERENCE GROUP

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Not much need to be said about the fact that you live in groups. You are a social being and to live in a society is to live amidst relationships. What else is a group? It is a network of relationships.

As a student, for example, you belong to a group of other students with whom you continually interact. You know what kind of relationship you expect from your group members; you also know what others expect from you. In other words, the way you conduct yourself, the way you behave and relate is always being guided by the group you belong to. As a student you cannot conduct yourself unless your behaviour is being shaped by the patterned expectations of the group of students. This is what stabilises your identity as a student.

Likewise, you belong to a family. The family, as you already know, is an important primary group that shapes your behaviour and expectations. Unless you are absolutely rootless, you cannot think of your being without imagining yourself in series of relationships with your parents, brothers, sisters, cousins and colleagues.

You must, therefore, realise that to lead a normal existence is not to live in isolation. You live amidst relationships and you give your consent to the expectations of the groups to which you belong. Now we are close to an understanding of reference groups.

What is a reference group all about? A reference group is one to which you always refer in order to evaluate your achievements, your role-performance, your aspirations and ambitions. It is only a reference group that tells you whether you are right or wrong, whether whatever you are doing, you are doing badly or well. So one might say that the membership groups to which you belong are your reference groups.

The problem does not, however, end here. Life is more complex. Even non-membership groups, the groups to which you do not belong, may act like reference groups. This is not really very surprising. Because life is mobile and time and again you come to know of the lives and ways of those who do not belong to your group. At times, this makes you wonder and ask why it is that there are others who are more powerful, more prestigious than you.

It is, because of this comparison that you often tend to feel deprived. You aspire to become a member of a group to which you do not belong but which is more powerful, or more prestigious. As a result, this time in order to evaluate your achievements, performance, you refer to a non-membership group.

Take an example. You are a student. You remain burdened with your course materials and examinations. You are really working hard and you have no time to relax. Then you come to know an altogether different group, say, a group of cricketers who are as young as you are. Yet, you see that cricketers play cricket, go abroad, enjoy life, earn money, and newspapers write about them. The 'success story' of the group of cricketers fascinates you. While comparing yourself with them you feel that as a student you are deprived. The cricketers, then, begin to act like your reference group. As a result, you begin to give more time to cricket than to your course materials with a hope that one day you too would become a cricketer and lead that kind of life.

The fact, therefore, is that not solely membership groups, even non-membership groups act like reference groups. Human beings look at themselves not solely through the eyes of their group members, but also through the eyes of those who belong to other groups.

With these clarifications it would not be difficult for you to understand how Robert Merton evolves his theory of reference groups in his famous book *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1949).

### **30.2.0 Concept of Relative Deprivation**

Merton's understanding of relative deprivation is closely tied to his treatment of reference group and reference group behaviour. Essentially, Merton speaks of relative deprivation while examining the findings of *The American Soldier*, a work published in 1949. In this work an attempt was made to examine how the American soldiers looked at themselves and evaluated their role-performance, career achievements, etc.

Now reflect on the simple, yet meaningful finding of *The American Soldier* from which the meaning of relative deprivation will become clear:

“Comparing himself with his unmarried associates in the Army, the married man could feel that induction demanded greater sacrifice from him than from them; and comparing himself with the married Soldiers, he could feel that he had been called on for sacrifices which they were escaping altogether”. Herein we find the kernel of what Merton called relative deprivation. This is not surprising. Happiness or deprivation are not absolutes, they depend on the scale of measure as well as on the frame of reference. The married soldier is not asking, what he gets and what other married soldiers like him get. Instead, he is asking what he is deprived of. Now his unmarried associates in the army are relatively free. They don’t have wives and children, so they are free from the responsibility from which married soldiers cannot escape. In other words, married soldiers are deprived of the kind of freedom that their unmarried associates are enjoying. Likewise, the married soldier feels deprived when he compares himself with his civilian married friend. Because the civilian friend can live with his wife and children and fulfil his responsibility. The married soldier therefore, feels deprived that by virtue of being a soldier he cannot afford to enjoy the normal, day to day family life of a civilian.

It is precisely because of the kind of reference group with which the married soldier compares his lot that he feels deprived. Likewise, as another finding shows, “The overseas soldier, relative to soldiers still at home, suffered a greater break with home ties and with many of the amenities of life in the United States to which he was accustomed”.



**Figure 30.1: Concept of Relative Deprivation**

An Indian student in a prestigious university in the United States may have sufficient reasons to feel happy. He has access to a better academic atmosphere - more books, more research materials, more seminars, and so on. But if he refuses to remain contented with this academic world and thinks of an alternative scale of evaluation which values above all else a home life with his parents, brothers and sisters then his ‘happiness’ would begin to disappear. So while comparing himself with his Indian friends enjoying the intimate company of their family members, he may feel deprived. This is what makes the study of reference group pretty interesting. Men and women always compare their lot with others. This explains their restlessness and continual search for change and mobility.



### 30.2.1 Concept of Group and Group Membership

Perhaps a study of reference group requires an elementary understanding of what a group is all about. Merton speaks of three characteristics of a group and group memberships.

- i) First, there is an objective criterion, viz., the frequency of interaction. In other words, the sociological concept of a group refers to a number of people frequently interact with one another.
- ii) A second criterion is that the interacting persons define themselves as members. In other words, they feel that they have patterned expectations or forms of interaction, which are morally binding on them and on other members.
- iii) The third criterion is that the persons in interaction are defined by others as 'belonging to the group'. These others include fellow members as well as non-members.

It is in this context that you should know how groups differ from collectivities and social categories. There is no doubt that all groups are collectivities, but all collectivities are not groups. The collectivities that lack the criterion of frequent interaction among members are not groups. Nation, for example, is a collectivity, not a group, because all those who belong to a nation do not interact with one another. Nation as a collectivity contains groups and sub-groups within it.

Again social categories are aggregates of social statuses, the occupants of which are not necessarily in social interaction. For instance, all those who have got the same sex or age or marital condition or income form social categories but not groups.

In other words, unlike collectivities or social categories, membership groups shape human beings' day-to-day behaviour more clearly and more concretely. Group members are conscious of their identities, they are aware of what to do and what not to do. As a result, for them, group norms are morally binding.

### 30.2.2 Concept of Non-Membership

As Merton says, there is nothing new in the fact that men and women conform to their own group. But what makes the study of reference group particularly interesting is that "they frequently orient themselves to groups other than their own in shaping their behaviour and evaluations".

It is at this juncture that Merton wants you to appreciate the dynamics of non-membership. It is true that non-members are those who do not meet the interactional and definitional criteria of membership. But, at the same time, as Merton says, all non-members are not of the same kind. Broadly speaking, non-members can be divided into three categories.

- i) Some may aspire to membership in the group
- ii) Others may be indifferent toward such affiliation
- iii) Still others may be motivated to remain unaffiliated with the group.

Think of an example. Suppose your father is an industrialist owning a factory. Naturally, as far as the workers in the factory are concerned, you are a non-member. You do not belong to their group. There are, however, three possibilities. Suppose you are deeply sensitive, you have read Marx and you tend to believe seriously that it is the working class that alone can create a new world free from injustice and exploitation. In other words, despite being a non-member, you want to belong to the workers, share their experiences and, accordingly, alter your life-style. Then, as Merton would say, a non-membership group becomes a positive reference group for you.

Then, there is another possibility. You do not bother. You are contented with your contemporary existence and as a result the workers do not have any impact on your life. In other words, you remain a non-member and never do you want to belong to the group of the workers.

Now think of the third possibility. You remain a non-member, but instead of remaining indifferent you hate the workers, you feel that the workers are neither intelligent nor educated, and that there is nothing to admire in their culture. In order to retain your status and separate yourself from the workers, you evolve counter-norms. Then, the workers, Merton would say, constitute a negative reference group.

### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) What is ‘relative deprivation’? Give an example. Write in about six lines.

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- ii) Give an example of a non-membership reference group. Use about three lines.

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### **30.2.3 Anticipatory Socialisation**

Merton speaks of anticipatory socialisation in the context of non-membership reference groups. It is simple. It is like preparing oneself for the group to which an individual aspires but does not belong. It is like adopting the values, life-styles of a non-membership reference group. For an individual, says Merton, anticipatory socialisation ‘may serve the twin functions of aiding his rise into that group and of easing his adjustment after he has become part of it’.

Think of a living example and then what Merton says would become clearer to you. Suppose a village boy born in a lower middle class household accepts Doon School boys as his reference group. As a process of anticipatory socialisation he begins to emulate the ‘smartness’ of Doon School boys. Now if this village boy really succeeds in getting an entry into Doon School, his anticipatory socialisation would indeed be functional, it would be easier for him to adjust himself to his new role.

While Merton speaks of the possibility of functional consequences of anticipatory socialisation, he however, does not fail to see its dysfunctional consequences. If the system is very closed (and it is for you to see whether it is really so) then this lower middle class village boy would never get an entry into Doon School. In that case anticipatory socialisation would be dysfunctional for him. There are two reasons. First, he would not be able to become a member of the group to which he aspires. And secondly, because of anticipatory socialisation, imitation of the values of a non-membership group, he would be disliked by the members of his own group. As Merton says, he would be reduced to being a ‘marginal man’! That is why, says Merton, anticipatory socialisation is functional for the individual only ‘within a relatively open social structure providing for mobility’. By the same token it would be dysfunctional, in a ‘relatively closed social structure’.

Merton makes another interesting point. In a closed system the individual is unlikely to choose a non-membership group as a reference group. That is why, in a closed system where the rights, prerequisites and obligations of each stratum are generally held to be morally right, an individual even if his objective conditions are not good, would feel less deprived. But in an open system in which the individual always compares his lot with relatively better off and the more privileged non-membership reference groups he remains perpetually unhappy and discontented.

#### Activity 1

Look at your friends. And try to examine what kind of non-membership reference groups they choose. Write a note of about one page. Compare, if possible, your answer with those of other students at your Study Centre.

### 30.2.4 Positive and Negative Reference Groups

Reference groups, says Merton, are of two kinds. First, a positive reference group is one, which one likes and takes seriously in order to shape one’s behaviour and evaluate one’s achievements and performance. Secondly, there is also a negative reference group which one dislikes and rejects and which, instead of providing norms to follow, provokes one to create counter-norms. As Merton says, “the positive type involves motivated assimilation of the norms of the group or the standards of the group as a basis for self-appraisal; the negative type involves motivated rejection, i.e., not merely non-acceptance of norms but the formation of counter-norms”.

It is not difficult to think of an example. Imagine reaction of the colonised to their **colonial masters**. Now you would always find some “natives”

who get hypnotised by the success story of the colonisers, they follow their life-style, speak their language, emulate their food habit. In other words, for them, the colonisers act like a positive reference group.

But then again you would find some natives who hate the colonisers for their exploitation, arrogance, and brutality. Instead of emulating their norms, they create counter-norms in order to separate themselves from the colonisers. In other words, for them, the colonisers act like a negative reference group.

### **Check Your Progress 2**

- i) Which of the following statement is true?
  - a) Under all circumstances, anticipatory socialisation is functional for the individual.
  - b) Anticipatory socialisation is functional in a closed social structure.
  - c) Anticipatory socialisation is functional only within a relatively open social structure providing for mobility.
- ii) What is the difference between positive and negative reference groups? Write in about four lines.

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## **30.3 DETERMINANTS OF REFERENCE GROUP**

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It is necessary to know the factors that determine one's choice of reference groups. That is why, Merton speaks of innumerable possibilities, the way men choose reference individuals, select among different membership groups and finally even their choice of non-membership group. Merton goes on to elaborate on the determinants that stimulate the same individual to choose different reference groups for different purposes. An understanding of all these determinants would definitely help you to comprehend the dynamics of reference group behaviour.

### **30.3.0 Reference Individuals**

It is necessary to remember that men select not only reference groups, they select reference individuals also. This is because individuals with their charisma, status, glamour often attract people. For instance, cricketers as a group may not have much appeal to you, but Sachin Tendulkar as an individual does. Thus, in spite of the fact that cricketers as such do not constitute your reference group. Sachin Tendulkar may, however, become a reference individual.

The reference individual has often been described as a role-model. Yet, says Merton, there is a difference. The concept of role-model can be thought of as more restricted in scope, denoting a more limited identification with an individual in only one or a few selected roles. But the person who identifies himself with a reference individual will seek to "approximate the behaviour and values of that individual in his several roles".



Figure 30.2: Concept of Role Model

In other words, when you accept Sachin Tendulkar as a reference individual, you tend to identify yourself with the innumerable roles and habits of Sachin Tendulkar, the way he speaks and smiles, the kind of clothes he wears, the way he deals with women, the way he acts like a model! As Merton says, biographers, editors of ‘fan magazines’ and gossip columnists’ further encourage people to choose their reference individuals.

Take up a glossy magazine at random. You will see that the columnists do not write solely about the professional activity of a film star, a cricketer, or a musician but they also write about their “affairs”, their “private lives”. The assumption is obvious. When a celebrity is chosen as a reference individual, one tends to accept everything he or she does, from their hair style to their food habit.

### 30.3.1 Selection of Reference Groups among Membership Groups

You belong to innumerable groups, right from your own family to a neighbourhood club, to a caste group, to a political party, to a religious organisation. The question is do you take all groups seriously while shaping your behaviour or evaluating your achievements and role-performance? As you know, not all membership groups are equally important, only some of them are selected as reference groups by you.

How do you select? A question of this kind cannot be answered unless you know that there are different kinds of membership groups. As Merton says, a “suitable classification” of groups is therefore necessary. Merton evolves a provisional list of twenty six group properties.

For instance, Merton says, groups differ widely in the degree of distinctness with which membership can be defined, ranging from some informal groups with indistinct boundaries to those with clear-cut and formalised processes of “admission” to membership.

Again group may differ on the degree of engagement that the group encourages or promotes among its members. There are many other properties on the basis of which groups can differ; expected duration of the group, its open or closed character, degree of social differentiation, and degree of expected conformity to the norms of the group.

Now once you understand the nature of non-membership groups, it is for you to decide how and why you select some of these as reference groups. You need examples. Your engagement with your family members is much more than, say, with the members of a film club and so it is quite likely that, as far as the major decisions of life are concerned, not the film club, but your family is likely to serve as a reference group.

Likewise, a membership group which is not going to last for long (for instance, a class of undergraduate students which is not going to last for more than three years) is unlikely to be chosen as a reference group. But, instead, a group, which is, really going to last, a kinship, or a caste group, or a professional group, does indeed serve as a reference group. This is perhaps the reason why there are many for whom not their college friends (college is, after all, a temporary affair) but their caste or kinship groups play a decisive role in shaping their lives. A Brahmin boy, despite being a student of a modern institution, prefers to marry a Brahmin girl!

### **30.3.2 Selection of Non-membership Groups**

You must understand why and under what circumstances men choose non-membership groups as their reference groups. According to Merton, there are primarily three factors. First, the selection of reference groups is largely governed by the capacity of certain groups to 'confer some prestige in terms of the institutional structure of that society'. This is simple. Not all groups are equally powerful or prestigious in the society. For instance, it has often been found that the university teachers in India often compare their lot with the IAS Officers. In other words, for the university teachers, the IAS officers become a reference group. The reason is simple. In terms of the institutional structure of modern Indian society, the IAS officers enjoy more power, more prestige than the university teachers do. The non-membership group that does not have much power or prestige hardly becomes a reference group.

Secondly, it has to be examined, what kind of people generally accept non-membership groups as their reference groups. As Merton says, it is generally the "isolates" in a group who may be particularly motivated to adopt the values of non-membership group as 'normative frames of reference'. The reason is obvious. The 'isolates', because of their sensitivity or rebelliousness or because of their intense urge for mobility, do not remain contented with the groups to which they belong. As a result, it is more likely that they would be stimulated to adopt the values of non-membership groups. For example, Merton speaks of 'the disenchanting member of the elite' who adopts the political orientation of a class less powerful than his own.

Thirdly, as has already been discussed, a 'social system with relatively high rate of social mobility' will tend to make far widespread orientation to non-membership groups as reference groups. This is naturally so for



only in an open system people come to know of groups other than their own and feel tempted to alter their positions continually.

### Activity 2

Draw a list of possible reference individuals you may like to choose in order to give a new meaning to your life. For example, a film star, a politician, a cricketer, etc. Write a note of one page. Compare, if possible, your answer with those of other students at your Study Centre.

### 30.3.3 Variation in Reference Groups for Differing Values and Norms

Why do you choose a reference group? There may be many reasons. For instance, you choose the Gandhians as your reference group because you feel that the Gandhians are a dedicated lot and you accept their politico-economic ideals. But that does not mean that you give your consent to everything that the Gandhians do. You may not agree with their 'conservative' attitude towards life - brahmacharya, vegetarianism etc. Regarding your life-style, food habit or sexual morals, you may take the liberals as your reference group.

That is why, says Merton, "it should not be assumed that the same groups uniformly serve as reference groups for the same individuals in every phase of their behaviour"

So, ultimately, the choice of reference groups depends on the nature and quality of norms and values one is interested in. The group that serves as a reference group for one's political ideal may not have any meaning as far as one's religious ideals are concerned. It is, therefore, not difficult to see that the same individuals who vote for the Communist Party may have positive inclination towards a religious institution like the Ramakrishna Mission!

### 30.3.4 Selection of Reference Groups among Status-categories or Sub-groups involving Sustained Interaction

Think of a student's dilemma, having two identities. First, she is a member of a status category of students. Secondly, she is also a member of a sub-group along with her parents, husband, brothers, sisters and friends as co-members.

Now is it always reasonable to assume that the student's union may provoke her to boycott classes in defiance of her sub-group's opinions. Because of her direct and sustained interaction with the members of her sub-group - parents, husband, brothers, sisters and friends - she may eventually be convinced that it is not correct to boycott classes no matter what the provocation. In other words, not her status-category (student as a different group), but her sub-group becomes a reference group, as far as the question of student politics is concerned.

In other words, the selection of reference groups is complex. That is why, while speaking of voting behaviour, Merton says that a formal organisation

like a trade union as a whole serves as a potential reference group for only some members of the union, while for others immediate associates in the union serve as the reference function.

This, however, does not mean that a sub-group (a primary group such as, the family for instance) always serves as a reference group. Merton says when conflicting value orientations obtain in the primary group, its mediating role becomes lessened or even negligible and the influence of the larger society becomes much more binding.

You can perhaps experience the truth of this statement from your own life. There may be divergent opinions on love marriage in your own family. Your parents perhaps dislike it, your elder brother is ambivalent, and your sister gives her consent to it. Under these circumstances, it is quite likely that instead of relying on your own family, you tend to give your consent to what your generation thinks, the way young boys and girls like you think of marriage. This explains a phenomenon called ‘**generation gap**’.

### **Check Your Progress 3**

- i) What are the factors behind the selection of non-membership reference groups? Write in about five lines.

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- ii) Is it true that a ‘status-category’ always serves as a reference group? State your reasons. Write in about five lines.

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## **30.4 STRUCTURAL ELEMENTS OF REFERENCE GROUPS**

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Not to know the structural elements of reference groups is to miss a great deal. Without this awareness you would not be able to appreciate the fullness of Robert Merton’s contribution to the study of reference groups. He questions how, for example, the structure of a group allows its authorities and members to have knowledge, partial or complete of the norms, values and role-performance. Merton demonstrates how non-conformity to the in-group (which is not the same as deviant behaviour) shows the possibility

of non-membership groups serving as reference groups. Moreover, Merton clarifies how one minimises the degree of conflict resulting from the structural consequences of role-sets and status-sets.

#### **30.4.0 Observability and Visibility: Patterned Avenues of Information about Norms, Values and Role-performance**

It is quite obvious that while comparing one's lot with that of others one must have some knowledge of the situation in which those others find themselves. In other words, as Merton says, the theory of reference group behaviour must include some treatment of channels of communication through which this knowledge is gained.

Before you go further, think of a concrete situation. Suppose as a student you belong to an institution having its own norms and values. Naturally, you would like to behave and orient yourself according to the norms and values of that institution. The question you can no longer escape is whether your role-performance can be compared to that of others in the same institution.

But how do you really know how other group members are performing? How do you really know what sort of norms and values others have accepted? It is really difficult to have complete knowledge of these norms and of actual role-performances. Your own friends, other students or co-workers in the same institution may not always be willing to tell you what they are really doing and how seriously they take the norms and values of that institution. So it all depends on the structure of the group. Perhaps in a democratic or egalitarian group in which members are free and open, uninhibited communication is possible and it is easier to have knowledge of the actual happenings of the group. But does it always happen this way?

It is at this juncture that Merton raises an important point. Not everyone can have equal knowledge. Generally those in authority have substantial knowledge of these norms, far greater than those held by other individual members of the group. Merton believes this happens because both norms and role-performance have to be visible if the structure of authority is to operate effectively. The head of your institution and other authorities have access to a series of mechanisms through which they observe the students and have better knowledge of their actual role-performance.

Yet, Merton says, there is a limit to the degree of visibility and observability. There is also the "need for privacy". For example, the student members are likely to resist if the university authorities exceed their limits and try to keep themselves informed about every detail of student life. What is, therefore, needed is a "functionally optimum degree of visibility".

So, as you can see it is very difficult to have complete knowledge of the norms and values of a group as well as of the actual role-performance of its members. The impossibility of complete visibility is likely to make you somewhat skeptical or uncertain about the norms and values of the membership group.

Perhaps one tends to feel that there is a gap between the ideal and the real. But this uncertainty or disillusionment about one's own membership group does not prevail while one looks at non-membership groups. This is what is meant by the saying that the grass appears greener on the other side of the fence. Generally, the outsiders tend to develop unrealistic images of non-membership groups.

Think of a simple example. As non-members, there are many Indians who believe that the Americans have resolved all their problems, and that there is no scarcity, or corruption in America. But this is not true since we can tell from a closer look that American society too has its own problems. There is a high crime rate there with a rising rate of divorce, delinquency, etc.

### **30.4.1 Non-Conformity as Type of Reference Group Behaviour**

The study of reference group is going to make you aware of another structural consequence, the impact of non-conformity.

First, you should understand what non-conformity is all about. Non-conformity to the norms of an in-group is equivalent to conformity to the norms of an out-group. But, as Merton says, non-conformity should not be equated with deviant behaviour. There are many differences between the two.

First, unlike the criminal, the non-conformist announces his dissent. Secondly, the non-conformist is not an opportunist. They challenge the legitimacy of the norms and expectations and reject them. But the criminal does not have the courage to reject their legitimacy. He does not agree that theft is right and murder virtuous, he or she simply finds it expedient to violate the norms and evade them. Thirdly, the non-conformists believe that they are gifted with a 'higher morality' and want to alter the norms of the group accordingly. The criminal does not have, however, any such vision of morality.

The experiences of the non-conformists in the context of non-membership reference groups are likely to have structural implications for the membership group. In Merton's view, the non-conformists are often considered to be 'masters'. They are felt to have courage and have demonstrated the capacity to run large risks.

The fact that the non-conformist "tends to elicit some measure of respect" implies that the membership group begins to become uncertain about itself, about its norms, and values. The non-conformists conformity to the non-membership group is the beginning of conflict and tension in the membership group. It is in this regard that one can say that the non-conformists with their conformity to the non-membership reference group begin to initiate the possibility of change and conflict in their own membership group.

### **30.4.2 Role-sets, Status-sets and Status Sequences**

The study of reference group behaviour needs an understanding of the dynamics of role-sets, status-sets and status-sequences. Suppose, for

example, the teachers as a reference group attracts you, and you intend to become a teacher. Not surprisingly then, you should try to understand what the status of a teacher implies, the kind of people he or she has to continually interact with, the difficulties involved in the process of fulfilling his or her responsibility.

It is in this context that Merton speaks of role-sets. Merton says that a particular social status involves not a single associated role, but an array of associated roles. This is called role-set. For example, the single status of a teacher entails not only the role of a teacher in relation to the students, but also an array of other roles relating the occupant of that status to other teachers, the authorities, the parents of the students, etc.

An understanding of role-sets is important. It makes you realise how difficult it is to satisfy everyone in the role-set. It is in this context that Merton speaks of, 'structural sources of instability in the role-set'. The basic source of disturbance in the role-set is the structural circumstance that anyone occupying a particular status has role-partners who are 'differently located in the social structure'. A teacher's role-set, for example includes not solely his or her professional colleagues, but also the influential members of the school board. Now what the influential members of the school board expect from the teacher need not coincide with what the professional colleagues expect from the teacher. And this is the source of conflict.

But Merton says that there are ways to minimise the degree of conflict. First, not all role-partners are equally concerned with the behaviour of those in a particular social status, so the occupant of a particular status need not bother much about the expectations of those who are not directly involved.

Secondly, the occupant of a status does not engage in continuous interaction with all those in his or her role-set. For instance, while teaching in the classroom the teacher is engaged only with the students, not with other members of the role-set. This 'exemption from observability', as Merton would argue, helps the teacher to avoid a conflict that may emerge because of divergent expectations from role-partners.

Thirdly, the occupant of a social status is not alone, there are many like him or her. And as Merton says, occupational and professional associates constitute a structural response to the problems of coping with the power structure and with the conflicting demands made by those in the role-set of the status.

Not solely role-sets, even status-sets constitute a problem that needs to be understood in- the context of reference group theory. But what is a status-set?

The same individual may find himself or herself in different statuses: teacher, husband, mother, father, brother, sister, political worker etc. This complement of social statuses of an individual may be designated as his or her status-set. Each of the statuses in turn has its distinctive role-set.

The fact that one occupies not a single status, but a status-set makes one's task difficult. It is not always possible to reconcile the demands of all the statuses one is occupying. For instance, a politician, because of his commitment to a larger public cause may not do Justice to his other statuses, the status of a husband or the status of a father. Therefore if for instance, the politicians become your reference group, then you must know of the conflict inherent in the status-set of a politician and the possible ways by which such conflict could be resolved.

Merton suggests that there are many ways of avoiding the tension in the status-set. First, people are not perceived by others as occupying only one status. Even an employer, Merton would argue understands that an employee is not just an employee, he is a father, a husband, and a son. That is why, an employee who is known to have experienced a death in his immediate family is held to "less demanding occupational requirements".

Secondly, there is something called empathy, which helps you to sympathetically understand the lot of others. Empathy serves to reduce the pressures exerted upon people caught up in conflicts of status obligations. Because everyone faces the same problem as they all have a status-set, there is a sense of shared destiny, which facilitates the development of empathy.

Thirdly, the components of status-set are not combined at random. This form of combination reduces the possibility of conflict. According to Merton, "Values internalised by people in prior dominant statuses are such as to make it less likely that they will be motivated to enter statuses with values incompatible with their own".

This is an interesting point to note in the context of reference group theory. An example would make it clear. Suppose you are born and brought up in a family with a culture of learning. Let us understand that because of this family socialisation you become a scholar. Now it is unlikely that with such a background, you would choose to become an army officer because you realise how difficult it would be to reconcile your two statuses, the status of an army officer and the status of a scholar. Perhaps you would like to become a professor and then it would not be difficult for you to reconcile your two statuses, the status of a professor and the status of a scholar! In other words, behind the choice of a reference individual or the desire to occupy a status lies a design, a symmetry. So all statuses in the status-set need not necessarily be in conflict with one another.

#### **Check Your Progress 4**

- i) Why does Merton say that a 'non-conformist' is not a criminal? Write in about six lines.

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- ii) Which of the following statements are true?
- a) All role-partners remain equally concerned with the behaviour of those in a particular social status.
  - b) It is empathy that, to a large extent, reduces the pressures exerted upon people caught up in conflicts of status obligations.
  - c) The components of a status-set are necessarily combined at random.

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## 30.5 LET US SUM UP

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To conclude we can safely say that the study of the reference group behaviour is important chiefly because

- i) it helps you to understand when and why men compare their lot with that of others and, how this helps to shape their behaviour, life-styles, and role-performances.
- ii) it helps you to understand when and how membership and non-membership groups serve the function of reference groups.
- iii) it helps you to examine the structural consequences and implications of reference group behaviour, how a relatively open social system stimulates men and women to choose non-membership groups as their reference groups and, as a result, how non-conformity to the in-group causes the possibility of change, conflict and further mobility.

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## 30.6 KEYWORDS

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- Colonial Masters** The colonisers often think that they are great masters, great educators; it is their duty to ‘civilise’ the world! That is ‘the white man’s burden’
- Generation Gap** Sociologically speaking, it means the conflict between the young and the old, how their values, morals, ideals differ.
- Worldview** Generally, it is assumed that each social group, be it a gender group or a caste or a class or an ethnic group or a nationality, has its own distinctive ways of looking at the world. As a result, one’s worldview implies one’s political attitude, religious belief, cultural ideal - in short a set of ideas about the world and the society. Worldviews differ from group to group and helps in distinguishing one group from the other.

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## 30.7 FURTHER READING

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Merton, Robert K., 1968. *Social Theory and Social Structure*. Free Press: New York

Turner, J.H., 1987. *Structure of Sociological Theory*. Rawat Publications: Jaipur

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## 30.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i) If a human being compares his or her destiny with others - as they often do it is quite likely that, at times, they may feel relatively deprived because others may look happier, more powerful, more prestigious than they may. An example is the experience of a bright Indian scientist who, while comparing his lot with another Indian scientist settled in the United States, begins to feel deprived of many infrastructural facilities conducive to research.
- ii) When a college teacher in order to evaluate his status, power or prestige in the society compares himself with the IAS officers, he, as Merton would argue, is choosing a non-membership group as his reference group.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) C
- ii) A positive reference group is one that a person accepts with admiration and, accordingly, internalises its values and norms. But a negative reference group is one that a person hates and rejects and, instead of accepting its norms, evolves counter-norms to distinguish his or her separate identity.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) When a non-membership group appears to acquire more power and prestige in terms of the institutional structure of the society, it is selected as a reference group. Moreover, the isolates, i.e., those who feel discontented and marginalised within their membership groups are provoked on account of this alienation to select non-membership groups as their reference groups.
- ii) No, it is not true that a 'status-category' always serves as a reference group. As Merton demonstrates, a status-category, being too large and too impersonal may not always have a direct impact on its members. Instead, a sub-group, which is characterised by sustained interaction among its member is likely to be accepted as a reference group.

#### **Check Your Progress 4**

- i) A non-conformist is not a criminal because, unlike a criminal, a non-conformist does not hide his or her dissent or disagreement. While a criminal is weak and is an opportunist, a non-conformist is courageous enough to challenge the norms and values he/she rejects and questions their legitimacy. Moreover, unlike a criminal, a non-conformist is gifted with a 'higher morality' out of which he/she intends to create a new value system.
  
- ii) b

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## **UNIT 31 CRITIQUE OF PARSONS AND MERTON**

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### **Structure**

- 31.0 Objectives
- 31.1 Introduction
- 31.2 Parsons and Merton: A Critique
  - 31.2.0 Perspective on Sociology
  - 31.2.1 Functional Approach
  - 31.2.2 Social System and Social Structure
  - 31.2.3 Sociological Theory and Social Change
- 31.3 Let Us Sum Up
- 31.4 Keywords
- 31.5 Further Reading
- 31.6 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

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### **31.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After studying this unit you will be able to give a critique of Parsons and Merton on such themes as their

- perspective on sociology
- functional approach of social analysis
- understanding of social system and social structure
- sociological theory and social change.

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### **31.1 INTRODUCTION**

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In the previous four units you have learnt about the contributions of Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton. You learnt about the concept of social systems and about functionalism and social change as enunciated by Parsons in Units 27 and 28. In Units 29 and 30 you learnt about Merton's concept of latent and manifest function and of his theory of reference group.

In this unit you will be presented with a comparative critique of Parsons and Merton on some selected areas, in their functional approach. The varying perspective of Parsons and Merton in their study of sociology is discussed in sub-section 31.2.0. The similarities and differences between Parsons and Merton in respect of their approach to functionalism are discussed in sub-section 31.2.1. The sub-section 31.2.2 explains their views regarding the concept of social system and social structure. Finally, sub-section 31.2.3 gives a general perspective on how Parsons and Merton understand sociological theory and social change.

## 31.2 PARSONS AND MERTON: A CRITIQUE

You have read about some important sociological contributions made by Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton. Both of them are considered to be the two most outstanding American sociologists who have left a lasting mark on our understanding of concepts, theories and methods of sociology. Both of them give us an insight, through their contributions, into the mainstream concerns of American sociology during the decades 1940s to 1960s. It was a historical stage in the developments in sociology when American contributions held a sway over most of the traditions of sociology in Europe, Latin America and the Asian countries. Though Parsons and Merton were contemporaries and shared many common concerns in sociology, they were drawn into this discipline from different traditions and backgrounds. Moreover, their styles were different as also the scope of their concerns with social problems and social theory. Their views, too, on the role and relevance of sociology in contemporary world were quite divergent.

In order to have an understanding of some of these commonalities and differences in the contributions of the two sociologists, especially in the context of what you have studied in the previous four units (i.e., Units 27, 28, 29 and 30), the discussion has been organised around selected themes. The themes selected are perspective on sociology, functional approach, social system and social structure, and the sociological theory and social change. Let us now discuss each of these themes separately.

### 31.2.0 Perspective on Sociology

The common elements in the perspective on sociology in the writings of Parsons and Merton are that both considered sociology to be a scientific discipline. This meant that sociologists not only had a set of concepts and hypotheses about social structure and change but that these hypotheses were also subjected to continual tests. Subjected to, in order to establish their validity through objective empirical studies. For this sociology used its own specialised methods. Sociological studies were therefore explanatory and also diagnostic, i.e., they could also identify problems. The emphasis in the writings of Parsons and Merton on the scientific character of sociology has been criticised by many later sociologists as 'positivism'. These later authors accuse the two sociologists of neglecting the unique historical and symbolic features of social reality which require entirely different methods of study than what is available through empirical methods of science. In particular, they attack the implicit assumption in Parsons and Merton that there exists a similarity between a biological system and a social system.

#### Activity 1

Read the newspapers of the past one week. Keeping in mind the various socio-political events taking place in the country, write a note of about two pages on 'The Role of Consensus or Agreement and Role of Conflict in the Contemporary Indian Society'. Keep in mind Parsons' and Merton's functionalist approach of social analysis and state in this note whether you agree or disagree with this approach.

Compare, if possible, your note with those of other students at your Study Centre.

Apart from these elements in the perspective on sociology which are common in the writings of the two sociologists you will also notice differences in their vision, of sociology. Parsons has a universal and general approach to theory in sociology. His conceptual schemes are more abstract and relatively free from the limitations of space and time. Merton, on the other hand, takes a more modest view of sociological theory. His emphasis is on specific and not universal questions of theory and methodology. For instance, Merton illustrates his application of sociological theory to such specific issues as “reference group”, “anomie” or “nature of science”. Parsons on the other hand talks of a “general theory of action”.

### **31.2.1 Functional Approach**

Both Parsons and Merton have followed a functional approach of analysis in their sociology. But functionalism as dealt with by Merton is located in time and space. It deals with empirical reality. He particularly draws our attention to the reasons why functional theories of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski which were formulated to deal with the realities of a simpler tribal society, isolated from rest of the world, could not be applied to contemporary societies of our own time which are complex and where historical traditions have overlapped on social institutions over several centuries. Therefore, Merton says that an institution such as religion, which is universally integrative in simpler tribal societies, may cause disharmony in our own society where there are many religions, which often compete against one another. So religion instead of being functional (integrative), may become dysfunctional (disintegrative) in society. Similarly his concepts of latent and manifest functions are also based on the historical experience of modern society. Parsons on the other hand does not take such a specific or historical view on the issues of functionalism. His concepts of functional prerequisites such as “adaptation”, “goal-orientation”, “integration” and “latency” which you have studied in Unit 27 are independent of time or place. They are general and a historical, that is, they are found in all societies at any point of time.

Functionalism of Parsons and Merton have been criticised by many sociologists for their various limitations. One of the major limitations pointed out by critics is the over-dependence of functionalism on the assumption that a social system is based on principles of agreement or consensus. Functionalism thus assumes that all institutions largely reflect values and goals, which are commonly accepted by most of the members of the society. It thus neglects aspects of dissent and conflict in the social system. Marxist sociologists criticise functionalism for its neglect of class conflict or class antagonism that exist in society. Political sociologists have criticised it for neglecting the role of power and domination in the structure and function of social institutions. But the main drawback in functionalism is not of total omission of these issues because both Merton, and also Parsons, deal with aspects of dissent and conflict in society. What is neglected perhaps is the balance in the role played by both consensus and conflict in society. This is a question, which remains largely unresolved in their sociological theory.



**Check Your Progress 1**

- i) Fill in the blanks.
  - a) Both Parsons and Merton considered sociology to be a ..... discipline.
  - b) Their emphasis on scientific character of sociology has been criticised as .....
  - c) In their vision of sociology, Parsons has a much more ..... and ..... approach to theory while Merton has emphasised the ..... questions of theory and methodology.
  - d) The Marxist sociologists have criticised Parsons' and Merton's functionalism for its neglect of the class ..... in society.

ii) Compare and contrast Parsons' and Merton's functional approach of analysis. Use about seven lines.

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**31.2.2 Social System and Social Structure**

Both Parsons and Merton have dealt with the concepts of “role”, “status”, “social structure”, “social system”, “group” and so on. These are the basic units for understanding the nature of society. But you will notice behind this commonality there lies a subtle difference between the approaches of the two sociologists. This difference is probably due to the difference in their vision of sociology. For Merton the basic problem in sociology is to utilise the conceptual packages of sociology and its methods for the understanding of social problems. These problems can be more clearly resolved given the existing state of theory in sociology. Therefore, he is more modest and specific in his analysis of social structures, as we found in his theory of “reference group”. Like Parsons, Merton takes not only social but also psychological factors into account in defining social structure, status and role. Particularly you may have noticed his emphasis on the psychological element in the membership of a group (marginality and centrality), or again in his concept of “anticipatory socialisation”. Parsons also places a lot of emphasis on motivational orientation in his understanding of social action.

But unlike Parsons' general and highly abstract approach to the understanding of social system, Merton talks of theories of the “middle

range”. In middle range theories conceptual abstractions emerge from the need to understand certain concrete empirical situations. There is no presumption in this case of providing an overall theoretical scheme for societies in general.

### **31.2.3 Sociological Theory and Social Change**

Considerable importance is given, both by Parsons and Merton, to the role of theory in sociology and what should be the nature of such theories. Merton approaches the problem more cautiously emphasising the need for limitations of empirical verification of hypotheses. He cautions sociologists not to indulge in too general or abstract constructions of theory. Such a view of theory neither has a clearly defined sets of hypotheses nor the tools for their empirical verification. For this reason Merton does not favour a general theory in sociology but prefers the “middle range theory” instead, which is of a limited but well-defined nature and covers a specific problem of study. The “reference group theory” that you have studied in Unit 30 is a good example of this kind of theory. According to Merton, tools of logical classification called paradigms are necessary steps in constructing such theories of the middle range.

Parsons on the other hand treats theory in a very general and abstract manner. He favours a rigorous logical method of classification of concepts such as you studied in his formulation of “pattern variables” or “types of orientations” in Unit 27. He considers a general and universally applicable theory possible in sociology, which can be applied to any society at any period of time. This is particularly so in the understanding and analysis of social system. However, in the analysis of social change, and especially when he discusses the evolutionary universals he is talking about specific societies at different evolutionary stages in history. Also when he is talking about types of social systems he is referring to specific societies. Yet these specificities do not stand on their own but are part of a broader and more general scheme. Evolutionary universal, for instance, tells us of the stately progression of stages through which all societies must necessarily pass at different points of time. His delineation of different types of social systems also rests on his abstract and general formulations of pattern variables.

The explanatory sweep in Parsons’ general theory of action is indeed very vast ranging from the study of personality systems to the examination of social systems and cultural systems. This indeed covers the total gamut of social reality. Parsons’ view of theory is also cross-disciplinary with relevance not only for sociology but also for psychology, political science, economics, cultural anthropology and other social science disciplines. His perspective on theory therefore is much wider than that of Merton.

This is also true in respect of the analysis of social change. Parsons makes a distinction between “changes in systems” and “changes of systems”. He puts forward his analysis of both these aspects of change, as you have already studied in Unit 28.

Merton on the other hand takes into account mainly the changes in social structure. He does not, like Parsons, propose a direction of “evolutionary universals” in the process of systemic social transformation. However, in the analysis of changes within social systems on which both Parsons and

Merton focus, there is much commonality of approach. Both sociologists explain changes within the social system as arising out of “strain” or pressure on members of groups in society to constantly relocate their roles and statuses. Role and status mobility arises out of tension of redefinition of aspirations, which Merton called “anticipatory socialisation”. According to Parsons strain arises because of conflicting motivational orientations in the context of a plurality of interests. Thus essentially both Parsons and Merton share a common view of why there is a continual tendency in social systems or social structures for internal differentiation and social change. Parsons, however, also brings in the forces of social movement and mobilisation of interest groups to bear upon the processes of social change. He in addition attempts to advance a general evolutionary direction of social change through a set of stages of transformation as you studied in Unit 28. Merton has largely ignored such aspects in his study of social change

**Check Your Progress 2**

i) Discuss the main similarities and differences between Parsons and Merton in their study of social system and social structure Use about seven lines

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ii) Fill in the blanks

- a) According to Merton constructing too general and abstract theories neither has clearly defined sets of hypotheses nor the tools for their ..... verification
- b) He feels that testing a single hypothesis does not lead to ..... of theory in sociology
- c) Tools of logical classification called ..... are necessary steps in constructing theories of the middle range, according to Merton
- d) Parsons favours a rigorous ..... method of classification of concepts, such as his concept of .....
- e) Parsons’ general and abstract theory is best illustrated by his general theory of .....
- f) Unlike Merton, Parsons has also discussed changes of social systems through his ..... universals

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### 31.3 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit you have read the critique of Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton on such selected themes as

- i) their perspective on sociology
- ii) their functional approach
- iii) their understanding of the concept of social system and social structure and finally
- iv) their sociological theory and social change.

Both Parsons and Merton considered sociology to be a scientific discipline. But both of them had a different vision of sociology. Parsons' approach is much more universal and general than Merton's is. Merton's approach is much more empirical and application oriented than Parsons' formulations. In their functional analysis too they had a lot of similarity. Yet, Merton's approach is time and space bound while Parsons' is universal and can be applied to any social system at any point of time.

In this unit you have learnt about the common ways in which both Parsons and Merton have studied social systems and social structure. Both studied concepts of role, status, social structure, etc. However, Parsons gives a general abstract theory while Merton provides a theory of the "middle range". Finally, both of them have a theory of social change. Parsons described social change within the social system as well as change of social systems. Merton however, has given theory of social change within the system and has largely ignored the changes of social systems

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### 31.4 KEYWORDS

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<b>Ahistorical</b>	It refers to any aspect of knowledge, which is not rooted in time or place and therefore has no history.
<b>Diagnostic</b>	The process of deciding the nature of a diseased condition by examining the symptoms. In this context the reference is made to social diseases or problems.
<b>Hypothesis</b>	A theory or a proposition, which is tentatively accepted to explain certain facts and which is not yet verified.
<b>Methodology</b>	It refers to the study of methods, such as the tools and techniques of conducting research in sociology.
<b>Positivism</b>	A term originally used by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) refers to two facts. First that it takes natural sciences, such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology etc. as the paradigm of human knowledge. Second that it involves taking a particular view of natural sciences.
<b>Vision</b>	It refers to the mental image that Parsons and Merton had of sociology, which includes their perspective on sociology and also what they expected from it.

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## 31.5 FURTHER READING

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Hamilton, Peter, 1983. *Talcott Parsons*. Routledge: London and New York

Turner, J.H., 1987. *The Structure of Sociological Theory*. Rawat Publications, 4th Edition Jaipur

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## 31.6 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- i)
  - a) scientific
  - b) positivism
  - c) universal, general, specific
  - d) antagonism
- ii) In both Parsons and Merton functionalism assumes that there is similarity between a biological system and social system. But while Merton deals with functionalism in a more specific way, which is both time and space bound or rooted in empirical reality Parsons' functionalism is highly abstract and general. For instance, his functional prerequisites of a social system, namely, Adaptation, goal-orientation, integration and latency are not time and place bound. They are found in all social systems at all points of time.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Parsons' and Merton's concepts of social system and social structure have certain similarities. They both use concepts like role, status, groups etc. and considered psychological factors in their analysis of social behaviour. For example, Parsons used "motivational orientations" and Merton used "anticipatory socialisation". However, they differ in their approach to the study of social system and social structure. Parsons is general and highly abstract, while Merton is modest and specific in the development of his theory.
- ii)
  - a) empirical
  - b) verification
  - c) paradigm
  - d) logical, pattern-variables
  - e) action
  - f) evolutionary

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