

Unit 1

Social Theory and its Context

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Learning objectives

After you have studied this unit you should be able to

- describe the context of social theory
- discuss the role of Comte, Marx Weber, and Durkheim
- describe some early British social theorists
- assess the role of context in the rise of social theory.

1.1 Introduction

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

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

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

1.2 Prominence of Socialism

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

Box 1.1: Context of Social Theory

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

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

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

1.3 Individual vs Collectivity

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

1.4 Comte and The Enlightenment

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

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

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

Thus in this theory we have first the

- 1) Theological stage (circa 1300) in which supernatural powers, and religious icons are the most important factors impacting on society, and even the world is believed to be a product of God
- 2) The metaphysical stage (circa 1300-1800) was one in which "nature" was held to explain everything about man and society.
- 3) The positivistic stage (1800-) came next and was fundamentally influenced by science, and the laws that it discovered. Thus there was no God or nature in this stage so far as explanations are concerned. Comte's position is that it is intellectual confusion that leads to social anarchy. According to him to positivistic stage dominates only when even the traces of the theological and metaphysical stages have been finally reduced if not completely eliminated from society. Only then would order prevail and the evolutionary scheme be proved correct.

Since Comte's position was evolutionary it is clear that he did not believe in violent type of revolutions (Lenzer, 1975).

Reflection and Action 1.1

Discuss and describe Comte's evolutionary scheme for the progression of society.

We can mention some other aspects of his work and this includes his observations on social structure and social change. Comte stressed the inter-relatedness of all the components of a society. He also believed that consensus in society was a major requirement. Further he did not believe in the exploitative view of the production processes i.e. capitalists and workers. Comte further recommended that there was a need for theorising and also of research. Finally Comte as a sociologist believed that sociology would ultimately emerge as a dominant force due to its excellence in understanding social processes.

1.5 Durkheim and The Enlightenment

We now turn to Durkheim (1858-1917) as the sociologist who took on the mantle from Comte who was his predecessor. Durkheim believed unlike Comte that the Enlightenment was not all negative but in fact did have some position aspects such as emphasis on scientific method. Durkheim was against anarchy and social chaos, and large positions of his work deal with studies of social order which he felt was the need of the hour.

Durkheim was a prolific writer and wrote many classical works in sociology. Thus in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) he stressed that sociology is the study of "social facts." These social facts are such that they are *external* to and *coercive* of individuals in society. This emphasis of study had a great influence on other sociologists. He demonstrated the usefulness of this approach in his study of *Suicide* (1897) in which he showed how social forces have an impact on individuals and their actions within society. His emphasis however, was not on the individual but the social causes behind it. He was keen to study differences in the suicide rate in different social

categories and groups (e.g. groups, regions, countries). According to Durkheim it was the variations within the social facts which explained different rates of suicide in different groups. Durkheim enunciated two types of social facts (a) material and (b) non material. Material facts (bureaucracy, law) differ from non material facts (social institutions and culture) and it was the latter that Durkheim focused upon in most of his work.

Box 1.2: The Division of Labour

In *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) Durkheim tried to pin down the various factors which acted as the binding glue of society. He felt that early or nascent societies had a moral basis for being integrated, and this was what he called the collective conscience. However, the more advanced society had a relatively weak collective conscience and was held together through a complex division of labour which interconnected members of society. This was, however, not without its problems and was at best a measure that had an interim effect. Nevertheless Durkheim's solution to the problems inherent in the division of labour was to suggest social reforms which could redress imbalances and keep the system going on functioning.

In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* 1912/1965 Durkheim studied a primitive society so that he could find religion in a primitive form. In doing this the research would also shed light on religion in the modern world. For Durkheim society itself is the basis for religion itself. This insight implied that Durkheim was for the status quo so far as society is concerned for "society as God" is sacred and cannot be over thrown only ameliorated.

Durkheim's work ensured that sociology had made a place for itself in France by the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. Durkheim in 1898 set up a scholarly journal called "L'annee Sociologique" which was very successful in promoting the Durkheimian brand of sociology to the other schools and academics. Thus the context of the French Revolution and the rise of industrialisation met with an academic response in the shape of Durkheim's analysis of society. After Durkheim there was a plethora of his students and disciples who carried on the work. Thus with Durkheim and his disciples sociology rose in stature and had begun to be widely accepted in France, as a distinctive discipline.

1.6 The Marxian Ideology

Let us now turn to sociology in Germany in the same span of time. In Germany there was since the beginning a distinction between Marx and Weber and other sociologists. Thus Karl Marx (1818-1883) was himself deeply influenced by Hegel (1770-1831) but was to later contradict him. While some disciples remained with Hegel's ideas others began to criticize his system.

Hegel's philosophy emphasised the 'dialectic' and 'idealism' of which the latter was a second concept. Thus dialectic itself provides a view of the world as well as an 'image' of the world. Thus the dialectic stresses the great importance of processes including those of conflict. Similarly, the image or idea of the world is also dynamic while Marx accepted the use-value of the dialectical processes he wanted to apply it in the study of economics rather than to leave it as a concept applied to ideas alone. Further Hegel's "idealism" stressed the mind and ideas, and not the material world. That is the say it is the mind that is significant, and that the mind and psyche alone that exist. This is admittedly an extreme position and Feurbach tried to ameliorate

it by saying that Hegel had overemphasised “consciousness” and the spirit of a culture. In order to critique Hegel Feurbach pointed out that it was society that projected God and put him in a hallowed position above themselves, getting separated/distanced from God himself but nevertheless imbuing God with various uplifting attributes.

Marx though aware of Hegel’s and Feurbach’s positions was critical of these theories. For Marx everything could be reduced to a material base not to the mind and its processes. For Marx capitalism was the problem which led to alienation, polarisation and revolution. And for Marx revolution by the proletariat was the answer to this “evil”. Marx’s approach led him to the work of Ricardo and Smith who use political economists and it was these studies which finalised Marx’s approach which pointed out that the profit of the capitalist was at the expense or exploitation of the wage earners/labourers. Thus the ‘surplus value’ was the very basis of exploitation and the root of the capitalist system. In fact the fast growth rate of the capitalist systems siphoned off profits large enough to reinvest into the economic system (Marx, 1862).

Box 1.3: Marxian Ideology

There is a sociological theory within Marx’s economic works, but Marx’s radical ideas also fit into politics and it is perhaps this reason that his ideas were questioned even as he had questioned Hegel and Feurbach. That Marx’s work was ideological created much opposition to it especially by the scholars with conservative learning. It was Marx’s polemical style that created problems not simply the presence of ideology perse.

Marx’s sociology created many critics in its wake and many works focused on the type of activist orientation that was part of his approach. There were other reasons that led to an eclipse of Marx’s dialectical materialism but his ideological aspect was a major area of difficulty for other sociologists and thinkers. This radical approach was not appreciated by the conservative sociologists who had been bred to hate traces of anarchy in the social fabric – not just the disruptions of the Enlightenment or the industrial revolution. Instead Marx was fueling through his studies a mood of hostility and aggression which Marx felt would lead to a “polarisation” of classes and the poor exploited proletariat would violently dispossess the capitalist class of their factories, industries, banks and so on. Thereafter a period of social harmony would begin in which there was a societal/community ownership of the means of production. There would be an end to exploitation of the ‘have-nots’ by the ‘haves’.

This thumbnail sketch indicates the kind of radical approach that Marx had was basically oriented to a violent overthrow of the exploiting capitalists by the exploited proletariat. Marx’s emphasis therefore was on the exploitative/oppressive nature of capitalism. His theoretical analysis was aimed at removing this aspect of capitalism. This according to Marx meant a violent, bloody anarchic kind of overthrow of capitalism. Such a revolution would by itself remove the alienation and other negative aspects of the capitalist social formation.

1.7 Weberian Ideology

We can turn now to another major German sociologist that of Max Weber (1864-19 20). It has often been observed that Max Weber developed his ideas

and theories keeping Marxian thought as a counterpoint or point of reference/ departure to begin his theorising. According to Weber Marx had developed a uni-causal theory in which every social aspect was driven or propelled forward by the economy and the economic factors. This criticism can be expressed by pointing out that Marx's theory of "economic determinism" did not go down very well with Weber, who in contrast pointed out that there were several factors or causes which are at work simultaneously in a society and make it operate. In short Weber's idea was that any aspect of social process had several causes that made it operate and no single complex of factors (e.g. the economy) could be given primacy so far as social processes are concerned.

For the materialists who believed in economic determinism it was the material factor that determined ideology. However, we find that in the case of Max Weber the sequence is held to be the other way round — that is it is the ideas that determine what is done with the economy. Weber was especially concerned with the effect of religious ideas on economic development. Thus in his study on Protestantism he showed how ideas themselves are capable of generating economic development. Weber also studied other religions than Protestantism, including Hinduism of which he felt that its lower rate of economic development was due to a constricting segmentation of society into a large number of castes or *jatis*. This meant that once again the landlord or person with land holdings began to exploit the lower castes with unfair sharing of the produce if it was sharecropping and many related demands if it was possible to exploit them further. This however does not bear great depth because sociologists in the fifties conducted studies and came to the conclusion that Hinduism does not create economic impediments and caste adapts to a new economic challenge, in a positive manner. Weber was interested in how the process of rationalisation led to economic development and to the creation and existence of large bureaucracies and other social institutions (Weber, 1904). Weber was concerned with how a social actor makes decisions regarding his goals. He pointed out however, that these decisions were themselves influenced by the rules and regulations that exist in the society.

Box 1.4: Formal Rationality

Weber was concerned with what is known as formal rationality, was thus enveloped by the development of bureaucratisation. Thus Weber pointed out there are three types of authority in political structures. These are the 1) traditional, 2) charismatic, and 3) rational legal systems of authority. While the traditional systems and charismatic authority have been witnessed historically it is the rational legal system which was involved with the development of bureaucracy in the modern sense. Traditional authority derives from a sanctity of belief patterns, like that in monarchy where succession is in a line of kings. Thus the prince who becomes king by succession is an example of traditional authority. On the other hand charismatic authority is based on something "extraordinary" which the incumbent has which creates leadership. The belief among the adherents of the Charismatic leaders powers is enough for the phenomenon to exist. Thus these two types of authority are historically embedded we find that rational-legal authority is the basic modern modality of leadership. Most political systems derive leaders from a rational legal procedure e.g. the President; Prime Minister etc. of modern states generally adopt a rational legal procedure.

Ultimately Weber's theories proved more acceptable than those of Marx, especially the political and economic applications. They were liberal in some ways and conservative in other ways and unlike Marx he did not espouse total radicalism and violent revolutions in order to find a solution to the "problems" of capitalism. Weber in fact was quite against such "solutions". Thus the western sociologist found Weber reassuring after the polemical writing of Marx. Weber's writing was formal and academic and this made it easier to understand and holistic in the outlook. It is little wonder that Weber was the most prominent German sociologist of his time. At the same time in Britain the Sociologists were also busy responding to their social context in which they were embedded. British sociologists tended to study the individual and his role in societal existence and development. Thus here sociology was built around the factors of political economy, social reform, and that of the social-evolution theory.

As regards political economy, it was a theory of capitalism which had been discussed by Adam Smith who spoke of an "invisible hand" that controlled the market forces. The market was over and above the individual and regulated his behavior. Thus the market forces were viewed as a source of social order and cohesion in society. Following this perspective the sociologist was not involved in criticizing market forces on society at large. Rather his job was to study societies, primitive and contemporary and draw out reports for use by the government to fulfill societal goals.

1.8 The British Sociologists

At this point of time British sociologists collected field based data and then combined these findings into a collective picture. The emphasis was on statistical presentation with little or no theorizing. However, the need for theorising was clearly felt by many sociologists. The statistically oriented sociologists were also extremely close to the government and therefore failed to see any flaw in the overall political and economic system.

Reflection and Action 1.2

Which were the most important early British Sociologists. Give their theories in brief.

Now there was another basic characteristic in British sociology and this was the concern for reforming individuals and then keeping them to fulfill the larger goals of society. Although these sociologists saw the flaws in the social system of the time they were nevertheless still interested in solving problems by laying the blame on individual behavior and attitudes. In following this approach these sociologists showed a high degree of respect to the society in which they were members. This was clearly a conservative stand, yet it was felt to be necessary to ward off the ogre of Marxian Socialism.

There were some paradoxes in the situation that the British sociologists found themselves in. Thus even problems such as poverty were not held to have systematic basis. Instead it was the individuals themselves, alone or in groups who were blamed for their poverty. This is a somewhat circular argument and put the individual at the centre of any kind of social ills or problems. Individual problems of many types were analysed, including factors such as 'ignorance', 'crime' or 'alcoholism'. These were all aspects of the individual especially alcoholism which was regarded yet again as an individual condition or pathology and not in any way connected to the whole of

society. As can be seen here was once again an extreme position. However, it was a matter of time that social structure became more prominent especially in the theories of social evolution. This was forwarded by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Spencer was a relative liberal and believed that the state should not interfere with the market. That is Spencer believed in *laissez faire*. This indicated that he was not an advocate of social reform but wanted social dynamics to be without external interventions.

1.9 Spencer's Evolutionism

Spencer was a 'Social Darwinist' and was of the opinion that society would progress by itself and that this evolution should not be interfered with. Spencer went to the extent of comparing social institutions with plants and animals. Thus he felt that social institutions would progressively adapt to their environment by themselves without any definite impetus. Spencer took Darwin's premise of "survival of the fittest" where those people who could adapt to the social and natural environment would live while those who could not so adapt met with their end (Buttel, 1990).

Spencer also saw society as an organism, in which different parts or 'organs' were interconnected and each had a role or function to perform in the overall working of the organism. Thus unlike Comte whose evolutionism was in terms of ideas, Spencer had the real material world which he wanted to explain analyse and interpret.

The evolutionary focus of Spencer is at least twofold. In the first instance Spencer speaks of the "size" factor in social evolution. Thus as the size of the society increases so do the various infrastructural and institutional need and requirements. Differentiation and specialisation begin to manifest in every sphere and the fact is that both the size and complexity of a town is very different from a metropolitan. According to Spencer the size of a society increases by various groups amalgamating and bonding to form larger societies. Thus Spencer viewed increase in size from that of a simple community to that which is complex or "compound".

Another evolutionary schema that Spencer offered was that of militant to industrial societies. Militant societies are early forms of organisation meant mainly for defense of a society or aggression towards another society. Such violent attitudes were in themselves responsible for increase in the size of a society which was so important for social evolution. Yet when industrial societies are established and warfare becomes dysfunctional and obstructs evolution. Industrial societies are noteworthy for their human interaction and high specialisation. The state is simply a monitoring agency and its basic role is to keep law and order. This is because industrial society represents in Spencer a quantum leap from militant societies and such societies move towards their own perfection. Provided a society is strongly bonded and harmonious it will survive. But if there is weak bonding and internal social fissures it would, according to Spencer, die out.

1.10 Conclusion

The early ideas of sociologists were very important indications of how the context creates an impact of the mind of the sociologist. The sociologists we have discussed were all affected by their social and psychological environment. However, as we have seen that each one of them tended to

interpret the social world in their own individualistic ways. However it would be clear to you by now that the context of theory is essentially society and culture at a particular time and place. It can then be said that social theory is in itself a reflection of the social environment and the time in which it was developed also put its stamp on the theory. Therefore, each era, each 'Age' responds with newer and more different theoretical interpretations which are the most apt for that time. There is then an 'inner' and an 'outer' context from which social theory derives. As noted in our introduction to this unit the 'inner context has to do with the individual himself and his personal way of analysing developments in the 'outer' or encapsulating society. This is not to say that is any seriality from the 'outer' to the 'inner' context. Rather they exist in an interrelationship between the individual mind and the societal developments and societal consciousness. Only when this interrelationship is clearly explained and analyzed by a thinker does social process 'inner' and 'outer' create a theory of society as a whole. It might then be said that the early social theorists and theories which they developed was a clear headed response to the social upheavals and developments, e.g. the Industrial Revolution, the French Revolution and so on. Finally there is a feed-forward and a feedback effect in each situation which can partly help explain the rising of early social analysis and their implications.

1.11 Further Reading

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Unit 2

Concept and Theory

Contents

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Words and Language
- 2.3 The Nature of Concepts
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- 2.8 Further Reading

Learning objectives

After having read this lesson you should be able to,

- Link concept and theory
- Learn about concept and sociological theorems

2.1 Introduction

- Common day experiences provide the starting point for understanding words by a group of speakers in the same sense; as knowledge grows more technical, the words are defined for their properties and examples of how a scientific vocabulary develops are given.
- Technical meaning of words is commonly understood and we call them concepts.
- Concepts are then used to signify a relationship with one another like various measurements of medical tests that ultimately lead to a conclusion – normal or pathological state.
- Such concepts are used in physics, chemistry and biology as well and they help in the measurement of things/forces, formation of equation and conduct of experiments.
- Social sciences have limited scope for experiments, but indirect experiments through comparative method are used.
- Differences in societies and groups are significant for explaining their effects on human actions.
- At times universality of explanations works, at others uniqueness and historical setting becomes significant.
- There is greater use of history on social sciences than of natural science for the conduct of fresh studies.
- Concepts in interaction lead to the formulation of theory, that needs constant revisions.
- Examples have been given from Durkheim and Weber; Parsons and Merton.
- Students are advised to enrich examples from own experience and related lesson units.

2.2 Words and Language

As human beings we use language to describe analyse and evaluate our

actions and convey our ideas, feelings and concerns. We interact through words and a group of words we call sentences, there are other persons who do the same. We understand the words they use. Gradually, we begin to use a word that means or signifies same objects to all in a community. Language is a social product. Words are given a meaning and that meaning is commonly accepted by others. Thus, social interaction gets facilitated. A story is told about nine different lineages living in separate valleys of the Naga in the north eastern India. They sat down to take a thing (in local dialect). Others did not understand which thing was wanted. Then each of them opened a small packet. It contained salt; but salt was described in nine different words. So we can understand the value of one word meaning or signifying the one chosen object. Two more examples will help. The word chair indicates a piece of furniture used for being seated. At a time in the Parliament, members used to sit on benches. Those who were in the government and controlled the finances were said to occupy 'Treasury Benches', those on the other side were seated on 'opposition benches' and the person who was addressed as 'The Chair'. Here objects are associated with positions and the meaning understood by persons occupying those seats. In the court 'The Bench' signifies the judges. The lawyers are separated by a bar from the dias. Lawyers are thus said to belong to the 'bar'. Here again objects : the bar and the bench, get associated with their respective position of persons who are differentiated from each other, in cricket the white coat used to indicate the umpire. Different dress codes are laid down for different ranks in the army and the police.

When one word is used many times to convey the same meaning, it becomes possible for other persons to share it and thereby to communicate with each other. Even signs can be used to convey 'yes' or 'no'. In Andhra Pradesh, if one move the head or the neck from left to right, it means 'yes'; in northern India that means 'no', whereas for 'yes' the movement has to be up and down. Showing 'thumb up' in the west means 'ready to go'; in the traditional Indian setting, it stands for discarding the other. In Hindi '*thenga dikha diya*' means 'I damn care for you'. These few examples show there is a need for a shared meaning of words/signs to be able to communicate with each other. Human beings are distinguished from animals for possessing the capacity to have language for interaction.

Box 2.1: Consensual Meaning

This is most effectively done when words have the same meaning that is understood by all at least in a defined group. It has to be understood that the choice of a word for describing is a human activity. Things are described through an agreed meaning of words. Some writers refer this as an inter-subjectivity agreement among persons. They deny any objectivity to things. In this sense reality is a social construct. This view has been put forward by philosophers from Vienna and carried forward through their influence.

Karl Popper and Wallerstein's names are among of the foremost among them, as scholars from that significant academic centre got spread over to English speaking countries making their mark in Philosophy Economics, and Sociology, and might of them brought up in the classical trends of music continue to illustrate the argument from the same. Be it recalled that German as a language linked the scholarly traditions of Austria and Germany.

2.3 The Nature of Concepts

When scientists use a word, it gets a technical meaning. It becomes a concept. In referring to a human being, biologists use the phrase 'homosapiens' or 'wise man' to describe the modern man. If a person falls ill, in common language people say he / she has got fever. As discoveries get advanced, words like 'malaria' 'influenza' indicate the nature of the fever. They also describe which parts or insects have affected the body. Then we understand the nature and causes of the disease. The next step is finding the cure for the same through the use of tablets or injections. So when fever or disease is described in terms of its components and their behaviour or misbehaviour is known, we begin to know how things or bodies associated and recognised get inter related. Each measurement helps the physician to analyse the nature of the disease. Thus, temperature, blood pressure, 'sugar' or blood sugar content in urine can be measured. Each of these words and their measurements have a definite meaning, thus tests can be carried out by persons other than physicians; the words that describe each measurement become concepts and are commonly understood in the same sense by technicians. A common understanding helps locate the normal and pathological distribution of the bodies or anti-bodies and their particular combinations tell how they lead the physician to determine the disease and where to look for a cure.

Chemistry as a science came into its own when the atom was discovered as the smallest particle of matter that could take part in a chemical reaction. Atomic Weight of Hydrogen was taken to be 1 and of Oxygen 2; thereby weights for 92 elements were calculated. These were arranged in a table called the Atomic table. Further, researchers on unstable elements carried their number to 110. The elements could mix up in a reaction soon it was found that there was no loss of weight in a chemical reaction. This was a theoretical statement. Atomic weight was a concept. The inter relations among concepts that could be proved to hold in a number of trials or experiments became a theoretical proposition. Further, inter relation among such theoretical conclusions became a part of theory. The chief characteristic of theory is that it constitutes a series of conclusions stated in terms of concepts and their inter relations. Thus theoretical proposition gets linked to others and one/all taken together constitute the theory in a subject.

The process of theory formation then requires the following steps:

- i) Identification of the smallest unit and its characteristics.
- ii) The interactions among these units that lead to the formation of compounds and complexes in determinate ways.
- iii) Statements that use concepts and their interrelations to indicate the nature of interactions and their results.
- iv) Frequent experimentation to arrive at the stated results; and if results show a difference. Then, explain the difference and arrive at a revised statement.

Box 2.2: Conceptual Abstraction

A little further explanation of a concept is in order. We do not see a concept. We arrive at a concept. It is an abstract. When we see a person and come to know his/ her name, it is described as a proper noun. Som Nath or Abul Kalam are proper names but when they refer to the speaker of the Lok

Sabha or the President of India, we are referring to their characteristics. Thus speaker, or president are abstractions. Pushpa may be the name of teacher and Shashi the name of a student. Here again, teacher and student are abstractions. We arrive at abstractions by converting proper nouns into common nouns. Sachin and Kaif are cricketers, and Gulam Ali a musician and so on. Can you try to convert the following places into their characteristics. Delhi, Mumbai, Bhopal; choose from among the following : a port city, a national capital a state capital. Match the characteristics. The second list is of abstractions.

2.4 Concepts in Sociology: Some Illustrations

Now let us look at some concepts that sociologists use frequently.

We use one word to signify one object or a meaning. We use different words to signify other objects. Thus we try to have same meaning for describing similar things; different words to make differences clear. Human beings can be put into different categories eg. Male, female. Brother and Sister belong to the same generation. Father and son to different generations; So do mother and(You try).. and add your own example.... mother-in-law and (1) in law (2)in law. Thus we begin to describe a relationship among two persons. These relations are found among many such units of two persons. Relations among two persons are called dyadic (di means two); the unit of two persons is called a dyad. Radcliffe Brown, a British social anthropologist suggested that the first social relationship is dyadic in nature.

When we talk of a relationship, we ask a question: Is the relationship limited to one event or is it repeated time and again? Then we raise a second question: Is the relationship limited to two persons only, or many people in similar situations are involved in it. 'A student-teacher' relationship is found among two persons, but then there are many teachers and many students. There is a common acceptance that students will get related to teachers in some defined way. Here let us introduce a few concepts : A student in getting related to the teacher performs a **Role**. It gets defined when repeated time and again it acquires a **pattern**. This **pattern** is expected to be performed, An individual performing the role has been defined as a **person** by Nadel. Let us go ahead. The **role** of a student is performed by many students. Hence Nadel says one role is performed by many individuals: or a person is many individuals. Now our individual enters into more than one interrelationship every day. In the family he may be a brother or a sister of some one else. Next he may a son related to father, a son related to mother, and in a three generation family, a grandson related to the grandparents and so on. This situation is described (or conceptualised) by saying that one individual is many **persons**.

2.5 Concepts to Theorems: Natural Sciences

It is useful to recall the difference between arithmetic and algebra. In the first case, we try to solve every question that is posed to us. Add two sums, three sum and so.....on, or exercises 1, 2, 3 is subtraction; or to go further to multiplication and division. Each exercises is solved individually. In algebra, we have a formula or a method of solving a problem. If $(a + b)$ is multiplied by $(a + b)$, we start with a in the first set and get the following results: $a \times a + a \times b = a^2 + ab$. Then we start with b of the first set and multiply

with each letter, we get $b \times a + b \times b$ or $ba + b^2$. Now we add both the results. We get $a^2 + 2ab + b^2$. So we have a formula $(a+b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2$ and likewise we can go to $(a + b)^3$ to get further results. But let us remain with the first sum. $(a + b)^2 = a^2 + 2ab + b^2$. This formula will be valid for all the values of a & b ; it can be that $a = 2$ and $b = 3$; and our results will be $2^2 + 2.2.3 + 3^2 = 4 + 12 + 9 = 25$. We can go on increasing the value of a or b and get the desired results. Here we need not calculate each exercise, but use this formula to answer various values of a or b , be they 4 and 5; or 7 and 9.....and so on. The algebraic exercise applies to many cases. This is something like discovering a principle or a common method for doing each calculation individually. The discovery of a method common to several cases of a type is a step forward in evolving a formula, something like a theorem.

Let us now move to a set of theorems. Remember our school days learning geometry. We learn about a point, a line, an angle, a triangle — then say a triangle has three angles and their sum is 180° . If one angle is of 90° , the other two have to share the remaining 90° in any combination – say 60° and 30° or 45° and 45° . In the latter case two sides will be equal in length. If all the three angles are of 60° each, each side of the triangle will also be equal in length. Here a relationship is posited between the degree of the angle and the length or size of a side. We can go on further to read about triangles and quadrilaterals..... and reach the connected 28 theorems. The interconnection of theorems then leads to theory in general, or an all embracing theory.

Reflection and Action 2.1

Read section 2.5 and give your explanation, interpretation and commentary.

In the example last given words like a point, a line or a straight line, and angle are concepts, Their interconnection a theorem. The interrelation among them a theory.

In natural sciences, say in Physics and Chemistry, we come across words (Concepts). Their interrelations and then inter connections among concepts (expressed in quantities) that lead to theory or better 'laws'. We take an example of an apple. It fell down from the tree, a normal occurrence. But Newton asked the question why did the apple fall to the ground. He propounded the theory of gravity. not apple alone, but all objects fall towards the ground. If the earth is round then why do people on the other side of the earth do not fall away. This doubt was expressed by our villagers — why do the Americans on the other side of the globe do not fall away. Newton had an answer. All things fall towards the centre of the earth. This explained all falls. Thus the theory of gravity came into being; The explanation came with Newton — though apples or other objects had been falling that way ever since the creation of the earth. Here we can sum up the process of theory formation.

- Theory is an explanation of recurring event and is a valid explanation universally in space and time.
- The condition under which the theoretical statement would hold true need to be spelt out.
- The theory can be modified if subsequent experiments create new situation that have to be considered afresh. The theory is a revisable

proposition. Examples are the theory of the atom being indivisible part of matter had to be revised after the splitting of the atom. The case of discovery of elements beyond 92 has earlier been stated. The theory of gravity was given a new look when a non-matter or a force like light was found to be subject to gravity by Einstein.

- Science is impersonal in the sense that the laws and theories do not depend for their truth value on the status of a person, be he a king, a prime minister, priest or even the scholar himself/ herself.
- When an inquiry is conducted or a problem solved on the basis of existing knowledge about concepts and theory and illustrated as a case of a more general application, it is called a deductive approach. We move from theory to facts.
- When we move from facts and arrive at an explanation that process is called induction.
- The inter-play between inductive and deductive processes constitutes the method of science, or sciencing. Here conclusions are only provisional, and are under consent testing and revision. As a process body of science consists of revisable propositions.
- Some authors are of the opinion that science grows double, say every 10 years, and after 50 years quite a few conclusions or theoretical statements need modification.

2.6 Towards Social Science: Durkheim, Weber and Beyond

There has been a lot of discussion whether social sciences can follow the method of natural sciences. These need separate discussion. Comte 'Durkheim, and Radcliffe-Brown answered 'yes'. Dilthey, a historian took the other view. Weber tried to follow the middle path. On different occasions systems of explanation have been tried and these have been called 'grand theories' which could be applied to several inquiries / cases. At least that is the claim. Marxism and Parsonian systems belong to that category. Then there are descriptions at an empirical level – facts gathered and put into tables, without any explanation. These are not theories *per se* but theories can be made through proper analysis. Durkheim's study of suicide rates and explanation of their variations is the best example of theory formation from the existing data. It will be helpful to understand his method:

- Firstly, Durkheim clarified the term, and located three (or four) types of suicides and their nature.
- For each type, the existing data available in official records were classified in terms of their distribution in various social categories. This classification needed intelligence and brilliance of the author.
- Each type of suicide rate varied according to the data on social facts, and comparisons were made.
- Explanations were given for each type.
- A theory of suicides was formulated in terms of the variations of the degree of integrated (solidarity) in society.

Let us recall how Max Weber formulated his theories:

- The key words: 'The protestant ethic' and 'capitalism' were defined after going through the literature. Their ideal types were defined.

- Cases where both were present, and not present were identified.
- Comparisons in the historical settings were attempted and existing data on the type of education prevalent in each religious group were compared.
- A conclusion on the coincidence of the rise of capitalism in protestant dominated regions was confirmed.
- Why this inter relationship holds is examined.
- How is the explanation of this case related to the general history of civilizations is attempted.

Path breaking studies such as these continue to receive attention among scholars from related subjects as well as the main discipline over a period of time. It happens that certain parts of a theory receive greater attention in subsequent studies. Durkheimian studies on suicide received attention at the hands of psychologists and social psychologists in particular and they began re-examining the loss of sense of security as a possible explanation, besides others. One of the types of suicide was classified as anomie. A group of writers considered this concept as central to the analysis of modern societies. In turn they began to de-link the concept from that of solidarity, introduced more psychological variables in it; while Merton retained the social component as control. Thus succeeding social scientists find an alternative relevance of the concept and try to look at the problem of a different age through it (with some modifications).

a) Max Weber

The second example refers to Max Weber. His treatment of the protestant ethic gave rise to the counter-point at the hands of writers treating the Catholic, Hindu, Shinto and Confucian faiths suggesting a sort of 'negation of negation'. Marxist scholars principally pointed on 'structural' factors as being more decisive than the 'cultural' as propounded by Weber. Yet most of the Asian dialogue on entrepreneurship kept alive the debate with Weber within the cultural frame. Mario Rutten in the article on the 'Study of Entrepreneurship in India' neatly summarizes the position and calls for greater interaction among the two major approaches (2003 : 1319-41). There have been ample discussion on Weber v. Marx, and a sort of convergence signifying Marx and Weber as complements of each other. Yet other variations of Weber are found in the conceptualisation of ethno-methodology and phenomenology wherein actor's point of view is being given primacy over 'others'. Within Marxism one comes across increasing emphasis on empirical studies of the sub-altern as well as other political forms of dominance. The classical writers who developed ways of looking at social facts, currents, and actions, in their own times, are being increasingly discovered for their relevance to addressing the problems of the new societies, or our contemporary periods. This dynamism constitutes the process of science linking concepts and theories of the classical writers and modern situations.

b) Parsons and Merton

Among the twentieth century writers Talcott Parsons is the most significant for conceptualising human actions and connecting economy, polity, institutions and pattern maintenance. This exercise required contribution from economics, anthropology, psychology and sociology, and their integration into a general theory of action. As Parsons grew mature, he examined economy, polity, family and professions, specially medicine, as sub-systems and in cooperation with valued colleagues looked into specifics of the American society. In

discussing writers of significance spread over a life time, with some contributions appearing posthumously, a question is raised about the continuity of the academic effort involved. Critics at times find that 'the young' author was different from the 'mature' 'one; the 'younger' being more general and the 'mature' being more specific. This is what one gets by looking at Marx with 1848 serving as the dividing line, more or less. The *Philosophical* manuscript and the *communist Manifests* belong to that period, the *Capital* to the next. A similar exercise on Parsons suggests that the publication of *Towards a General Theory of Action*, (1936) and to an extent *Social System* mark the first phase.

c) Theories of Society

Thereafter specifics gained currency, and the treatment got manifestly grounded in the empirical situation of the American Society. We have hinted at the influence Parsons had on Indian scholarship in a different unit. Some critics commented upon Parsons as if he was guilty of using too many concepts to state his position and synthesize the effects. Their use earned him more critics than supporters. Yet from among the galaxy of his students and co-workers. We get more and more specific studies of various aspects of society.

Merton was among the most serious of the students who attempted a fresh combination of empirical studies and grand theory taking some aspects selectively at a time. Harry M. Johnson passed on the gains of the entire approach in a text book entitled *Sociology*, which got translated in Hindi by Yogesh Atal who had spent a semester with Merton. Other writers studies the family, religion, economy and polity. Merton is important for having coined the phrase 'theories of the middle range' — middle between grand theory and pure description. He thought at that level, theory had a heuristic purpose i.e. acting as a guide for further research (including field studies). Accordingly, he systematised classical explanation for use as tools of research of modern societies and to an extent modified old concepts giving them a new relevance and vibrancy. He did this for 'function' by pin pointing three categories, function, dysfunction and non-function and to look for a 'balance of consequences' of the three. He devised a protocol of 'for observation' that would permit gathering of information with a potential for being understood in the functional perspective. At the conceptual level, he had a fresh look at the analysis a comparison between the sociology of knowledge, and at the level of nature cosmopolitan and local press. He clarified social aspects of anomie, the conflict between the accepted goals of a society and the use of rather open means for achieving the same; and then the specification of the Theory of the 'Role-Set' and the 'Reference Group' as examples of middle range theory developed at different stages of the inquiry. Merton's other contribution lay in attempting some questions set by financing agencies; and using the opportunity for developing concepts that would acquire explanatory power in the broad frameworks of *Social Theory and Social Structure*. In the preface to a volume on *social problems*, he distinguished between social problems and sociological problems, a point well taken by M.S. Gore in most of his presentations and deliberation in the Indian setting.

Conceptualising for studying special features of the Indian society has been attempted by M.N. Srinivas through 'SANSKRITIZATION' and 'Dominant Caste'. Adrian C. Mayer found it useful to study municipal elections in Dewas town of Madhya Pradesh through the operation of quasi-groups (half formed groups)

for a specific situations in the nature of 'actions sets'. There is an increasing trend in sociology in India for showing the limits within which some of the concepts made popular in the west can help us grasp the nature of social processes operating in India. 'Little community' and 'Peasant society' are some of the examples and others can be added.

2.7 Conclusion

Words and concepts are products of mind, and when their meaning is shared, communication of ideas takes place in daily life as well as in academic circles. The development of science made the meanings more and more specific, as also grammar and logic. Natural sciences connect concepts with experiments, and conclusions affect the inter connection among various concepts, and their combinations. Science keeps on growing and doubling itself faster than social sciences or humanities. History of ideas is more significant for the latter, as old formations and theories are discovered to provide insight into current problems. Yet, refinements keep on happening. This has been illustrated chiefly with respect to the methods and approaches used by Durkheim and Weber; and the nature of the middle range theories initiated by Merton over the grand theories of Parsons. In the body of the Unit, the manner in which words like structure and function have developed has been briefly touched upon. Students are advised to study the related material supplied in specific unit. Merton also developed 'protocols' for observation, and paradigms for studying questions in a theoretical or structural perspective. The next lesson deals with the Paradigms and Theories.

2.8 Further Reading

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Unit 3

Theory and Paradigm

Contents

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Sociological Theories
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- 3.4 Law of three Stages
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- 3.8 Recent Advances in Sociological Theories
- 3.9 The Concept of Paradigm
- 3.10 Conclusion
- 3.11 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After having studied this unit you should be able

- discuss the meaning of theory
- compare the contributions of Marx Durkheim and Weber to social theory
- describe classical and contemporary theories.

3.1 Introduction

In simple words theory refers to the explanation of general principles of an art or science which is constructed with practice. It is true that on the basis of practice we derive certain rules and at times we are able to separate these rules from whatever we have seen in practice. Thus we begin to differentiate between theory and practice. Theory is generally helpful in explaining practice, theory refers to the much higher level of abstraction whereas practice to the empirical situation. If we look at the relationship between theory and practice then broadly speaking there emerge two possibilities like: (i) theory and practice might be seen as quite distinct from each other and (ii) theory and practice might be conceived as complementary to each other. According to the first point of view it seems necessary to make a distinction between theory and practice. Thus we come across the statements like it is a very good idea in theory but in practice it just might not work. According to this point of view theory and practice are two quite different things. According to the second point of view it appears that theory and practice are not two different things but can help in understanding each other. From our point of view although it is important to understand the difference between theory and practice, but there is a need to see the relationship between the two. In fact both theory and practice constitute a whole which could well be examined in its own right. However, all this concerns with the general understanding of the term theory, which is often contrasted with practice. But in the area of logic and philosophy the term theory has been treated in a slightly different way. Accordingly, theory refers to a set of interrelated propositions. Proposition refers to the statement which could be proved either true or false. Here the emphasis should be given to the nature of the statement itself which bears the quality of being

proved true or false. In our daily life — experiences we come across such statements which could neither be proved true nor false. Such statements are to be kept out of the preview of proposition as well as theory. In the process of theory-building it seems necessary to formulate propositions carefully. Hence the proposition must be formulated in such a way so that it bears the quality of being falsified. Such an approach is very much helpful in formulating not only sociological theories but also reflects its required scientific status. The basic quality of scientific research is that it progresses forward through the process of falsification, it means that in the light of new data, the existing theories are tested again and again. Till these existing theories are found capable of explaining the data, they don't face any kind of challenge to them. But if these theories fail to explain the new data, they begin to be questioned. The community of scientists is busy in continuously examining these existing theories in the light of the new data. The moment these existing theories fail to explain the new data, these theories are put under a question mark and sometimes these theories can be rejected — also paving the way for new theories to take their place. Rejection of the existing theories is known as 'falsification' and scientific research proceeds ahead through this process. Here we would like to return back to our original question concerning the structure of theory itself. As discussed earlier any theory is composed of a certain number of interrelated propositions. These propositions normally display the conditions that they could be falsified and this very condition of propositions bring them on the track of scientific research. Thus before constructing any proposition we must ensure that it fulfills the conditions of falsifiability so that it could be accommodated well in theory. After this we shall try to understand the nature, meaning and types of sociological theories.

3.2 Sociological Theories

Broadly speaking, the discussion on the nature, meaning and types of sociological theories could be divided into five parts. In the first part we shall try to understand the nature and meaning of the sociological theories during its classical age or period. Considerable amount of work was done by the pioneers of sociology during this period to establish the credentials of the discipline. Sociology could well emerge as a separate discipline only due to the great efforts made by prominent scholars in its classical age. Next, in the second part we shall discuss about the nature and types of contemporary sociological theory. In fact, this period reflects to the time when the subject sociology could come out of its classical period both chronologically as well as conceptually. During this period certain important advances were made in sociology and some of the shortcomings of the classical period were also addressed to. In the third part there is a discussion on the recent advances made in sociological theories. Here we come to see of sociology not only emerging as a new discipline but also maturing as a subject. During this period sociology got established as an important mature and independent subject having its own identity. Next, in the fourth section, we shall come to know about theories and perspectives in sociology that characterise the subject with some new efforts and rigour and here we shall see how several doubts over the nature and types of sociological theories were clarified. After this, in the fifth part we shall examine how certain challenges were put forward before the sociological theory and how it responded to such problems and challenges. But one point can be added here that although sociological theory as it exists today has been able to overcome many obstacles and problems in its own way, but nevertheless this has never been an easy task to do so.

3.3 Classical Sociological Theories

The period of classical sociology belongs to the era when sociology emerged as a new discipline with the one central assertion that the scientific study of society is possible. Prior to that period philosophers, intellectuals as well as layman thought of and conceived of society in their own ways but the science of society could not emerge out. Philosophers' reflections, literary romanticism and criticism and people's own individual conceptions about society had been the characteristics of the era prior to the emergence of sociology. Although intellectuals belonging to different streams of thought as well as common people have had reflected upon the nature of society but their efforts were primarily individual efforts. On the other hand society had existed for a longer duration which displayed its own internal statics and dynamics. How does society behave as an entity in itself? How can it be studied scientifically? Can it be done? If yes then how? All such questions dominated the earlier era in the development of sociological theory. This era belongs to what is today known as classical sociological theory. The following discussion refers to the same.

The term sociology was coined by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) a French sociologist and philosopher. He is also known as father of sociology. Although he has made some significant contributions to the subject – a part of which shall be discussed here too, but the most creditable work done by him related to his efforts in establishing sociology as a scientific as well as an independent discipline. Before him instead of sociology, we rather had philosophy, literature and art through which reflections on society were used to be made. Thus, in other words how society could be conceived of philosophically, literally or through art had been the only available ways and tools to reflect upon society. The modern method of scientific-analysis of society as suggested by Auguste Comte was not just available before him. Therefore, the contributions of Auguste Comte must be seen as the pathbreaking ones helping to establish sociology as a new and independent discipline in its own right. Auguste Comte, in short discussed at length, of course philosophically to argue that the scientific study of society is possible and when such efforts succeeded the new subject would be known as sociology. What we must realise at the moment is the simple fact that this had never been an easy task. After establishing sociology as a new and independent scientific discipline, Auguste Comte had made some of his own contributions to it. Auguste Comte's own contributions to the subject sociology are referred to, although briefly, in the following discussion.

3.4 Law of Three Stages

Having established sociology as a separate and independent discipline, Auguste Comte divided sociology into two parts known as social statistics and social dynamics, former dealing with the questions of equilibrium in society and latter with the problems of change in society. Auguste Comte has also referred to hierarchy of sciences like : astronomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and sociology. He was of the opinion that sociology can't be reduced to other sciences be it mathematics (especially statistics), biology or political economy. Auguste Comte has also talked about the law of three stages namely theological, metaphysical and scientific. According to him, every society passes through these three stages. In the theological stages all the explanations concerning the events happening in nature were attributed to God who was supposed to be in full command of the situation. The second

state i.e. metaphysical refers to the transitional stage where neither as the events taking place in nature were considered neither as a supernatural act nor as based upon scientific explanations. This sort of transitional stage existed somewhere around fourteenth century. The third stage is known as scientific stage, where neither theological nor metaphysical sort of explanations about society are considered sufficient. In the scientific stage of society the explanations are examined rigorously and no explanation is considered as a final one. Each explanation is considered as valid explanation only for the time being until a better explanation arrives on the scene. Auguste Comte believed that scientific methods could be applied for the study of society as well. The assertions like that one although look simple but it actually contains an important philosophy, widely known as positivism. It was the philosophy of positivism which dominated the academic scene not only in France but over the entire Europe. In fact the name of Auguste Comte has been associated with the philosophy in such a way that it is sometimes considered as the only important contribution that he had made as it cut across the geographical boundaries of France and the academic limits of the discipline of sociology. The scholars from some other disciplines have commented widely on the notion of positivism. Auguste Comte suggested that his scientific method for the study of society would be based upon comparison, observation and experiment. Auguste Comte has explained these and allied concepts in detail, but in short it could be said that he was able to establish sociology as a new scientific as well as an independent subject. Although it was Auguste Comte who had made the earlier but essential beginnings, it was Emile Durkheim who carried forward the fate of sociology by providing it new strides. His contribution to sociological theories is discussed next.

Box 3.1: Durkheimian Approach

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), a prominent sociologist from France continued with the tradition of positivism established by his predecessor fellow countryman and sociologist Auguste Comte. In a sense we can say that Emile Durkheim continued from where Auguste Comte had left. Durkheim was still grappling with the questions like whether it was possible to apply the laws of natural sciences for the scientific study of society or not and his answer to this question was surely in the affirmative. Emile Durkheim went ahead and virtually demonstrated how could it actually be done. He elaborated his sociological approach in his book, *The Rules of Sociological Method*.

Although his book deals with some of the complicated details regarding what according to him would be the sociological approach in future, but one illustration might be given here, Durkheim's method of social analysis emphasises on the study of what he calls it, 'social facts'. His discussion on social facts not only clarifies his methodological as well as theoretical formulations but also helps in establishing sociology as a new, important and independent scientific discipline. In fact we can say that the first serious sociological formulation in the history of the subject begins with Durkheim's detailed treatment of the idea of 'social fact'. His other formulations like the division of labour in society, the study of suicide, the notion of elementary forms of religious life and views on education and sociology are all concerned with the formulations built around social facts. We shall briefly attempt to understand some of the issues related to the notion and methodology concerned with the formulation of social facts. According to Durkheim, "social facts are ways of feeling, thinking and acting commonly spread among the

people, external to individual and exercising a constraint upon him". This quite compact notion might appear difficult to understand and comprehend. But we shall attempt to explain some of the complex issues related with it. These social facts are different from facts concerning us at the individual or the psychological level. Additionally, Durkheim has also clarified that these social facts are 'external' and exercise constraints upon individuals. According to him we can identify these social facts when we attempt to go against them. Some of the social facts identified by Durkheim himself in his various research works are like: rate of crime, rate of suicide, division of labour in society and religion. How to use these social facts for the purpose of social-analysis? In this context Durkheim has given two clues: one, he suggests that social facts should be treated as 'things' and two, one social fact must be explained with another social fact preceding it. In this, way Durkheim has tried to achieve mainly two objectives : one, to ensure that sociology virtually becomes a scientific discipline and two, to take care that sociology remains as an irreducible subject and doesn't split into several parts belonging to other subjects. Durkheim has also referred to 'normal' and 'pathological' aspects of society in this context. Durkheim's approach regarding how to deal with various theoretical and methodological issues could be seen in his book. *The Rules of Sociological Method* in detail. After understanding the theoretical contributions of Emile Durkheim, we shall try to explain the efforts of yet another pioneering scholar Karl Marx.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a philosopher, social scientist as well as a sociologist from Germany. The academic scholarship of Karl Marx is widely known throughout the world. Although Marx attempted to solve several academic problems, he never claimed to be a sociologist. What is today known as the Marxist sociology is based upon his various formulations that are basically sociological in nature. In other words, we have to find out or make out the sociological contents from his writings. This additional task has been done by the sociologists at later stages. Marx's theoretical formulations that were basic for him and useful for sociologists are referred here. Some of the basic formulations of Marx include : historical materialism, classes and class-struggles, theory of surplus value and alienation. Marx's formulations provided a departure from the earlier discussed engagements for sociological analysis. Marx's theory was also used as a political ideology by various Leftist political parties of the world and a sizable part of the world had been under the rule of the communist parties of the world till recently. In and around 1989 several political — systems in different countries belonging to the 'Second World' collapsed at the end of the cold war period between the two then existing superpower countries. All such countries had practiced Marx's theoretical formulations as their political guidelines.

Marx's theoretical formulations reflect a departure from the ones by the previously discussed authors by exhibiting one major point. Marx's method includes the principles of 'dialectics' which was not discussed by any of the sociologist earlier. As in principle the use of the notion of dialectics was not an entirely a new discovery by Marx, it was used earlier by his fellow countryman G.W.F. Hegel. What was significant and new in Marx's theoretical formulation was materialistic interpretation of society with the help of dialectical method. As in the case of Hegel, he saw the progress of society through idealism, achieved through dialectics, in the case of Marx the progress of society was possible through materialistic dialectics. Another significant departure in the writings of Marx was his emphasis on the historical method. When the principle of dialectics was applied for the study of history, it was

called historical materialism. Materialistic interpretation of society mainly includes the social situation, which helps in shaping-up the ideas of people. At some places the notion of historical materialism has been used interchangeably with that of dialectical materialism. Marx's emphasis on history and dialectics was also related to his formulations on classes and class-struggles. Karl Marx alongwith his academic collaborator and lifelong friend. Friedrich Engels, had clarified that all the known periods of history upto present time could be seen as having class-struggles. For example, according to Marx and Engels in the slave society we have classes like masters and slaves, in the feudal society there are feudal lords and serfs and in the capitalist society we have capitalists and workers. These are the main classes struggling against each other for the sake of ownership and control over means of production.

Box 3.2: Working Class

Marx and Engels could however, foresee the victory of the working class which was struggling against the capitalist class. There are several other issues that are discussed by Marx and Engels especially in the context of capitalist society like exploitation, theory of surplus-value, alienation and the revolutionary potential of the working class. With the victory of the working class Marx and Engels could foresee the emergence of the socialist society, which would be the society without any class and finally coming of the communist society. In the writings of Marx we can see a lot of clarity of thought, new interpretations about society, progressive ideology and a call for the emancipation of people in general. Although Marx has written extensively, his ideas have been coherent as well as precise. The importance of his ideas and its application has been important to such an extent that almost no sociological interpretation of the existing reality was considered complete until and unless it has examined the phenomenon from the Marxist perspective.

After understanding the theoretical formulations of Karl Marx, we shall try to know about the contributions of yet another scholar namely Max Weber.

3.6 Weberian Ideology

Max Weber (1864-1920) was a prominent sociologist from Germany who belonged to the era of classical period in sociology. Max Weber is known in sociology for his brilliant writings on a variety of topics. Max Weber gave a new direction to sociology to which he offered, different as well as new ways of thinking and research. His ways of thinking and analysis were different from Auguste Comte or Emile Durkheim. In our opinion Max Weber presented his ideas which were basically concerned with the German sort of understanding but still reflecting the European and the Western flavour. Max Weber has written on a variety of topics from social action to bureaucracy and also contributed in the vital areas like methodology of social sciences. Although Max Weber attempted to define sociology in his own terms and ways, certain formulations made by him like *Verstehen* still require clarifications. Sociologists are still struggling with the idea of how exactly to proceed on the lines of thought developed by Max Weber.

Reflection and Action 3.1

Outline the ideologies of Marx and Weber. What are the commonalities in these sociologists.

How to go for experimentation with some of the formulations developed by Max Weber like social action, Verstehen or phenomenology ? It still remains an area where much remains to be understood and subsequently done. However, some success has been achieved for example around the conceptions like bureaucracy. Max Weber's concepts of course carry higher values in terms of its theoretical contents, but its actual operationalisation has largely remained a problematic area. Max Weber for example defined sociology as an interpretative understanding of social action. Max Weber continued to speak of social as having two qualities : one, while doing such an action, the actor must take into account the presence of another actor and wholly or partially be guided by it and two, the actor must attach a subjective meaning to it. Max Weber has also written about the subjectivity versus objectivity issues in social sciences. His ideas about the importance of Verstehen and ideal-types are brilliant and excellent in terms of its theoretical value and rigor. But how to make them operational at the practical and empirical level still remains a problematic area. On the one hand the subject sociology has been widely enriched by the writings at the theoretical level but otherwise not much has been achieved at the experimental level as Max Weber during his own lifetime worked on different topics without clarifying much on the topics on which he himself had worked earlier. However, Max Weber's formulations on the Protestant ethics and its relationship with the rise of capitalism are widely accepted and acclaimed. Max Weber was able to demonstrate in his study that there was a positive relationship between the Protestant ethics and the development of capitalism. We must ensure making before any sort of a sweeping generalisation that Max Weber had presented it as a unique case in the context of Western Europe only. In spite of his brilliant ideas, Max Weber's work has to some extent remained unexposed due to various reasons. But in spite of all this there is no doubt that Max Weber's formulations have contributed to a large scale in the area of developing sociological theories. Thus after examining the theoretical contributions of some of the classical authors like Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber, here we come to the end of the contributions made by these scholars in the classical era of the development of sociology. After this we shall attempt to see the contributions made by the sociologists in the contemporary period.

The contemporary period of modern sociological theories could be seen as an important departure from its classical period. During the classical period the central question has been to establish sociology as an independent discipline but during the contemporary period the main concern has been not only to come out of that classical image, but also to carry on the subject further. During this contemporary period the scholars tried to learn from some of the previous shortcomings in the works of the scholars who did some researches after Durkheim, Weber and Marx. During this period, learning from the mistakes of the immediate past, taking the inspirations from the works of the classical sociologists and rebuilding the subject have been the main concerns. In this context, it seems relevant to mention the names of two important sociologists who have made their significant contributions. Their works have also been accepted and recognized as important ones after the classical period. These two scholars are Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton. Although the works of these scholars from the U.S.A. have been accepted internationally, but here only some of their important contributions are being discussed.

3.7 Parson's Action Theory

Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) was an important sociologist from U.S.A. who had contributed on the theory of social action, discussed about the action frame of reference and social-system and lately on evolution. His contribution on what he calls it AGIL — Paradigm and Pattern-Variable Scheme are also well known. We shall discuss about them briefly. Talcott Parsons had the advantage of reviewing several scholars from classical sociology and some other social scientists as well. He believed that he could present an integrated theoretical point of view where all the formulations of previous social scientists would lead to. His theoretical constructions, later integrated the points of view of psychologists like Sigmund Freud, economists like Alfred Marshal and sociologists like Vilfredo Pareto, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber to name a few. He also believed that all the contributions made by various social scientists lead in one direction to arrive at or rather converge at one single notion of what he calls it 'social action'. Parsons also wanted to understand how social and cultural values are internalised into personality system. In his later work *The Social System* (1951), Parsons said that the three essential components of action are 'personality system', 'social system' and 'cultural system', although each one being a part of action, but none being reducible to the other. In yet another work, *Working Papers in the Theory of Action* (1953), Talcott Parsons alongwith his colleagues like Robert Bales and Edward Shills has explained about what he calls it the 'AGIL Paradigm'. Accordingly, A refers to Adaptation, G to Goal — Attainment, I to Integration and L to Latency. Thus AGIL — Paradigm developed by Parsons provided him much higher respect as he ascended towards formulation of sociological theories at a much higher level. His another important theoretical formulation has been what he called it, the "Pattern Variable Scheme". It suggests that either an individual or community as an actor has important choices to make against two polar opposite categories. For example, whether an individual or community in general promote ascription or achievement, alternatively universalism or particularism. Talcott Parsons has referred to five sets of such alternative choices. Additionally, within these five sets of choices, some permutations and combinations could also be made out. For example, from the earlier referred choices mentioned here, it could be ascertained whether the choices made are for universalist achievement or alternatively particularistic ascription sort of orientations. A detailed discussion on these issues could be seen in his book *The Social System* (1951). As stated earlier Talcott Parson has also written on medical profession and theories of evolutionism. In general the theories of Parsons are also seen as his contribution to developing the theories of functionalism. But regarding the theories developed by him, several scholars from the Western societies as well as from elsewhere have expressed the opinion that his formulations are difficult to understand and there is a need to present it all in the simpler form. There is another criticism which is associated with his work. It has been stated by several scholars that the works of Talcott Parsons are too much theoretical in nature, sometime they appear as 'grand theories' and generally have very little to do with the existing life of today or with the empirical reality. Agreeing with all such criticisms that it is true that Parsons theoretical formulations might appear difficult to comprehend, might not refer to the empirical material but nonetheless, they could be considered as important contributions. In the views of the preset author, such theoretical formulations are required in sociology and the learners of sociology must attempt to comprehend such rigorous material. Talcott Parsons himself clarified that his works had remained concerned with the tasks of providing theoretical schemes only. According

to him then it remained the task of some other scholars/sociologists to verify and test his theories. But in order for sociology to grow as a subject, it was necessary to strike a balance between theoretical formulations and factual informations. Another sociologist namely Robert K. Merton has tried to move exactly in that direction. His contributions to sociological theory are discussed in what follows.

Box 3.3: Mertons Contributions

Robert K. Merton (1910-), another prominent sociologist from the U.S.A. has tried to strike a reasonable balance between theory and fact. He was somehow convinced that neither theory nor facts alone would suffice to move in the desired direction. Basically, he argued to develop research methodology in such a way as it not only included a meaningful balance between theory and fact but also attempted to improve the quality of both. For example, on the one hand Merton never accepted the formulations of his predecessor sociologists as such and on numerous occasions he has tried to make corrections in the writings of various scholars including Radcliffe - Brown and Malinowski. Robert K. Merton, who attempted to rebuild and reformulate "functional theory" has identified several mistakes committed unknowingly by earlier scholars and later he attempted to reconstruct functional theory.

Robert K. Merton firmly believed that the whole of functional theory could not be abandoned or discarded because some of the mistakes were committed by some of the contributors to it at the earlier stages. His approach was to learn from the mistakes, identify them, try to remove them and make functional theory as a viable approach for research investigations in sociology. Regarding social research he explained it as an interplay between theory and facts. Merton's views on social research could be found in his book, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968). his views on the functional theory could also be seen in the same book. While reconstructing functional theory, Merton has referred to three postulates one, the postulate of functional unity of society; two, the postulate of universal functionalism and three, the postulate of indispensability. He later suggested that such postulates which once upon a time guided the works of some earlier sociologists were no longer necessary. Additionally, Merton has explained about what he calls it, "Middle Range Theories" and its necessities in the contemporary period. Merton has also clarified in detail about what he calls it "Reference Group Theory". In this way we could see that in his own way, Robert K. Merton tried to build-up the much required ground and created the environment for the development of sociology as a scientific discipline. From the above discussion it is now clear that both Talcott Parsons as well as Robert K. Merton made great efforts to carry forward the discipline of sociology and in this endeavor they were quite successful too.

3.8 Recent Advances in Sociological Theories

Recent advances that were made in sociology are quite important and meaningful. Besides the works of Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, A.R. Radcliffe - Brown, Branislav Malinowski, Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton which were mainly influenced by and to a large extent remained concerned with the philosophy of positivism, there was another stream of thought emerging out during the same period. The development of sociology has witnessed, apart from the philosophical background of positivism another stream of thought initiated and encouraged by the German sociologists like Max Weber.

Reflection and Action 3.2

Provide an outline of recent advances in sociological theories. Write down your answer in your notebook.

It was Max Weber who defined sociology as an interpretative understanding of social action. Max Weber initiated the debate on why the elements of subjectivity, subjective understanding and Verstehen should be included in sociology. Max Weber, never impressed by the formulations centered around positivism wanted to give a new direction to the formulations in sociological theory. In fact the whole debate centered around the issues of subjectivity versus objectivity was initiated and inspired by Max Weber. In fact, sociology as a subject has been strengthened by the efforts made by Max Weber. Here a reference to only two such new areas of research namely phenomenology and ethnomethodology shall be made. These two topics represent the main areas concerned with the recent advances made in sociological research. Two other topics require a mention here as they have emerged in the recent times, they are postmodernism and globalisation. We hope that at various stages of learning sociology all such concepts shall be discussed. Although sociological theories initially developed to strengthen the subject and establish it as a core discipline in itself, but with the advancement of the subject certain perspectives clearly emerged in the process. Here a reference shall be made to only such perspectives which have had a direct bearing upon the development of sociology. Sometimes the terms like theories and perspectives have been used interchangeably also. Some of the popular perspectives developed in sociology are known as functional perspective, conflict perspective, exchange perspective and symbolic interactionist perspective. Although several scholars in one or another way have been associated different perspectives but here only those thinkers shall be mentioned whose names are generally familiar to us. The names of Emile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton have been associated with the functional perspective, Karl Marx represents the conflict perspective, B. Malinowski discussed the material related to the exchange perspective whereas Herbert Blumer discussed about symbolic interactionist perspective. Here it might be advised that while discussing about sociological theories it would be relevant to keep in mind the role of thinkers, as well as that of various perspectives to which they were associated.

3.9 The Concept of Paradigm

It was Kuhn, who first suggested that development within a discipline, especially science is not a gradual process but in fact takes place quite suddenly. Hence, Kuhn's books entitled the structure of scientific revolution. Kuhn calls these sudden changes as "paradigm shifts".

According to Kuhn, science and by extension social science undergoes its process in three phases which are discernible.

- i) Prescientific phase
- ii) Normal science
- iii) Paradigm shift

In the initial phase theories of explanation are incomplete and completing with one another. At some point one of the theories establishes itself bringing in the phase of normal science. In this phase a single theory or a set of theories emerge dominant which Kuhn calls a paradigm.

When there is a paradigm shift the situation is one where the previous theories have proved to be redundant. For Kuhn this a natural process and it repeats itself over time as the new and established theories themselves become incomplete as knowledge expands. At this point the solution lies in modifying the theories or to abandon them for another set of dominant or competing theoretical explanations which offer more complete and better explanation for both science, social science and world-view as whole.

We can give an example of paradigm shift by referring to Copernicus who pointed out that it was the earth that revolved around the sun rather than the sun revolving around the earth as was Ptolemy's position. Copernicus gained adherence to his views with scientific data to prove them. A sudden shift in terms of theories concepts and perspectives emerged with great speed and there was a paradigm shift. A new theoretical explanation emerges and establishes itself ushering in the new set of theories and perspectives. Another example of paradigm shift occurred when Einstein's theory of relativity replaced Newton's theory of gravity.

We must point that according to Kuhn the paradigm shift implies a rather drastic if not total replacement of the previously established theories of science and social science. In short the earlier theories are non comparable. The shift is total. The way language is used, the development of new concepts, words and meanings is part of a paradigm shift so are norms, values and mores.

To put it differently a paradigm shift implies a new view of the world, its perception, perspective, and overall attitudes of the world community changes and changes with great speed. In the era, of globalisation which witness the postmodern paradigm shift in which the local context is considered to be the focus of study and the consideration of general or mega theories is not considered either wise or practical.

Thus the concept of paradigm has two aspects to it. The first is that which engulfs the whole and subsumes its various parts on subsets. It comprises all the procedure of science or social science. This is a global paradigm. At the second level we find there are theories and practices which bolster the existing paradigm of the society/globe.

We must clarify it here that although some efforts have been put in to make sociology a distinct, independent and a scientific discipline, by some great scholars included, but the sociological theories thus produced have also been challenged on several grounds. This once again highlights the scientific nature of sociology where every theory can be put to test and liable to be rejected if found wrong. Thus, in sociological theories, as in other sciences as well, there is nothing like an eternal a universal truth that remains a truth under all the conditions and at every moment of time. Sociological theories should also not to be confused with something like religious or meta-physical assertions. Nor sociological theories are comparable to philosophical guidelines to be followed. Sociological theories have come out of such problems and the challenges faced by them today are of another nature and most of them are of scientific type. And in order to achieve that scientific nature, sociology has travelled a longer path since the writings of Auguste Comte who had established it as a positivist science. The first challenge to sociological theories has come from the huge amount of data that have been generated throughout the world, especially after the World War II. For example, data

generated in the area of demography has led to several new innovations at the theoretical level. Similarly data concerning Human Development Index has helped in making transnational comparisons. The second challenge to sociological theory has come from the processes of change that are taking shape at various levels of society. To put it in simple words it could be said that the processes of social change keep on going in society, independently of the fact whether sociologists study them or not. In fact in the contemporary world the processes social change are not only complex in nature but they are taking shape at a much faster pace today. As a result of it, many a times sociologists are not actually in a position to study them all. There are several such phenomenon which require some serious sociological studies like for example, the consequences of AIDS and that of terrorism. Much remains to be done in these areas. The third challenge to sociological theories came when society at large had undergone some significant periods of time. These important periods include the end of the World War II, end of the colonial rule at various places in the world and the emergence of various independent nation – states. The sociological theories have had to accommodate itself several times when such important changes were taking shape in the world. The fourth challenge to sociological theory has come due to some misconceptions about sociology as a subject that is basically meant to solve the current problems of society. In fact sociology is quite capable of solving the problems of society too, but so far it has kept itself limited upto their scientific study only. But at the level of response to some of these problems and challenges faced, sociologists have attempted to address some of them. As a consequence of the efforts of the sociologists we have seen the emergence of certain theoretical formulations centered around the conceptions like rationality, postmodernism, globalisation and civil society. At the level of sociological theory, intellectuals and academicians from the subject have also responded meaningfully on the topics like democracy, socialism and secularism. Sociologists to some extent through their writings have made their presence felt in the area of the reconstruction of society.

3.10 Conclusion

We have seen what comprises a theory and what a paradigm means. We have taken an analysis of classical sociological theories, and seen how Comte enunciated the law of the three stages, Marxian ideology, Weberian ideology, Parson's action theory and some recent advances in sociological theory. Finally we turned to the concept of paradigm and explained what it means in terms of the intellectually violent stuff's in the dominance of theories, which have been termed paradigm shifts by Thomas Kuhn. We have adequately indicated the subject to which we addressed ourselves to.

3.11 Further Reading

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Unit 4

Social Construction of Reality

Contents

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Learning Objectives

Once you have studied this unit you should be able to

- define “reality” and “social construction”
- describe construction of reality
- indicate the relation between language legitimation socialisation and reality
- describe social reality and the symbolic universe.

4.1 Introduction

In this lesson we are going to try and understand what exactly is meant by the “social construction” of “reality”. What do we mean by these words? Unless we understand each of these interrelated concepts it would be difficult to proceed with our presentation of this most important aspect of social reality. Social reality indicates quite clearly that what we are referring to is in fact basically the capacity of society to develop different ways of looking at the constituents of the visible aspects of reality. Thus in fact as we will see that there are many societies and many cultures, but what is common among them is that social reality tries to perpetuate itself through the younger generation, but this does not usually succeed and the social reality of each generation has several points of departure from the preceding generation.

What is being said is that members of any society live by certain beliefs and principles but these were not always there and there have been significant shifts in each generations point of view and perspectives. The points of importance in discussing the social construction of reality is that in most societies the version of reality is not a single monolithic construct but rather consists of several layers of meaning and existence. That is to say that there are many social constructions of reality which differ from category to category. So we must point out that while the method of social construction of reality remains similar in most societies it is also very clear that there are “multiple synchronic realities”, that is many versions of culture and reality

are available especially in plural societies where these realities then intermesh and interact and influence each other in various ways. Thus it is clear that “reality” is constructed in a specific way but this does not mean that all versions of reality are the same. There is often much difference in their expression. Society which creates reality, as we will see, provides many different points of ingress and is responsible for creating a socially intermeshed reality. What we are saying then is that there are plural indeed multiple reality systems available for us to observe in our daily life which is really the very root of any social constructions and sustains the same even through periods of lawlessness and disruptions.

Once we have read and understood the points made above it should be clear that what we are discussing concerns the secure and integrated way in which society perpetuates its attitudes and beliefs. It is also clear that each generation brings with a whole lot of perceptual expectations and a minimum acceptable standard of living so that it can lead a meaningful existence. So it has to be noted that society as a whole contains and keeps in balance that entire social process from cradle to the tomb.

4.2 Construction of Reality

Now it would be natural to ask how is all this construction of multiple and synchronic realities achieved. What are the ways and the mechanism in which we as members together create a perception of the world process. Surprisingly social realities are created as soon as the new members of society are ready a particular imprinting is begun to be ingrained in them. Among the important areas of life include the economic, political, psychological, and so on and each of them is put together by training the new generation to act and behave in some particular manner which they deem to be fit and worthy of them.

The social fabric of any society is a fragile construct which has to be constantly renewed through ritual and sustained interactions. Thus reality itself is “fragile” so that any disturbing or conflictual situations lead to a breakdown of order and mayhem rules. After such social breakdowns which occur in interaction, in times of war with another nation or even chronic lawlessness. It takes much time to recover from such breakdowns of reality and the time they take to repair the social fabric may last many years or even make a lifetime impact on some of the members. Thus as we introduce the lesson we have to point out that culture is many faceted and the construction of reality though similar in many societies does in fact differ from individual to individual and from nation to nation. There is doubt that in the mind of the young and impressionable that has to develop certain capacity to be bounded say by religious or economic status. Thus there is different life style created by the different castes and classes which have a full blown ideology and interaction in everyday life. These are not mere ways of looking at things out of curiosity. Rather it is a critical situation where the constructed reality has to be continuously fed and bolstered so to speak into the social system or systems.

As such when we discuss how social reality is constructed then it becomes very clear to us that in order to perpetuate itself society takes recourse to both socialisation and education and continues to control the individual to some extent and even bring within him a sense of responsibility to further perpetuate his reality.

We are going to explain in this lesson how social process constructs reality and thereby goes further to establish that very pattern of culture and ideology which they themselves were taught and learnt to make the appropriate judgments and decisions within that very frame work. Thus in such a delicate and precise operation it becomes obvious that not all members would be able to fit in fully into the social fabric, and these are deviant individuals and society attempts through various other therapies to bring the deviant back into the centre or the "mainstream" of society.

We have pointed out in various ways that our reality and experience are all constructed by human beings in communities, large groups, nation states, and at times by much larger concerns than the nation state itself. The task of the sociology of knowledge is to indicate how precisely these constructions of social reality are evolved by human beings and groups and community of human beings. Thus the interrelationship between knowledge and the social context in which it has evolved is an important ingredient in understanding how society is able to create and recreate itself over the ages.

According to some social scientists it is believed that the societal context was the basis of the existence of ideas but not the precise ideas themselves, and therefore gave the individual some critical degree of voluntary actions and freedom of action. On the other hand there are other social scientists who believe that human thought per se is never safe from ideology and the intellectual climate prevailing in the environment as a whole. It is thus clear that, as the social scientists have pointed out that the acquisition of knowledge is accretional and it gathers relatively slowly, and only when sufficient aspects of the knowledge sought are examined does the view of any reality become focused and clear. Thus knowledge is accumulated over time and it is not possible for it to be given full blown to the new members, and existing members are continually given fresh inputs through media, institutions, family and work environment and so on to keep them abreast of the events that are happening in society as a whole.

4.3 Phenomena of Social Reality

Berger and Luckmann feel that to study the phenomena of social reality implies that we use everyday common sense reality as a point of departure. This is what knowledge ultimately comprises: the interaction and participation in social life and process. Thus "commonsense ideas" are the most important ingress into understanding the sociology and phenomena of individuals, groups and society. Thus it is clear that society has at the very least two sides to its existence and ontology- one is subjective and the other is objective. Together these facts give rise to the understanding that while there is a group life for an individual there is in fact an objective reality, rules and regulations which have to be adhered to, unless the individual or group wants to be ostracized. Thus first of all the reality of social life is sui generis that exists over and above and beyond any single individual. Thus Berger is interested, as are we, in finding out how humans produce and perpetuate social life in all its manifold facets and aspects. Thus by attempting to understand social reality we are really asking how it was constructed, because this is what will give us the cues to proceed further with our line of enquiry.

4.4 Everyday Social Reality

Berger and Luckmann point out that everyday life and its basis is such that it is best apprehended by the method of phenomenological analysis, which

happens to be a descriptive method. Thus we observe that consciousness has the basic property of existing in several dimensions and several types of reality. Thus human beings are aware to a greater or lesser extent that the social world comprises of many or “multiple realities” in everyday life. These multiple realities are themselves well ordered and more or less fully developed and quite capable of influencing each other. Thus phenomena are, such that a particular pattern can be discerned by human beings, and these social facts are imposed upon them. In other words a new entrant into a society sooner or later finds that he or she has a particular social order which is imposed upon him or her. Thus we find that common sense knowledge is what human beings share intersubjectively through interaction with other human beings. This becomes very clear in the structure of routine that human beings follow in the course of their daily life. Pursuing an enquiry into common sense knowledge and its social context is relatively simple, but Berger and Luckmann point out that the difficulty exists in the comprehension and “translation” of those areas which are not classifiable as common sense knowledge but are in fact non everyday reality.

Box 4.1: Indexical Constructions

The entire social world..... is a set of indexicalities, which are taken for granted. They are rarely called into question, and when they are, the questioning stays at a superficial level, accepting fairly quick and easy classifications instead of pursuing the search for objectivity to its end. For there is no end: the search for objectivity definable reality is a bottomless pit. (Randall Collins 1988, *Theoretical Sociology*. Onlando : Harcourt Brace p: 277).

To understand the social construction of reality we have to be aware of the time-structure of daily life since this sheds an important insight on the overall social order. As Berger and Luckmann point out that temporality reflects and is a basic property of consciousness itself. Again we find that the temporal structure of daily life is an extremely complicated matter. This is because consciousness exists and interacts at many different level and all these different levels of reality have to be seen as interrelated and arranged in a specific pattern. Thus the temporal structure existing in society indicates clearly defines the situation for members of the particular society they belong to.

Let us consider the question of daily interactions between human beings in any particular society. In these interactions it is the direct or face to face situations which define much of the structure of reality in everyday life. This is because when there is face to face interaction the self and the other an inter subjective understanding by each of the other. Self reflection is also an outcome of the behaviour with others, as it makes us conscious of what we are and stand for in society, since it creates or even “gives” us our attitudes and subsequently our behaviour, which in turn is the basis of human social reality, or “realities”.

It may be pointed out however that everyday reality itself has many components and these itself could generate specific situations and attitudes. It is therefore clear on observation that while there are basic similarities in social reality there are also areas that create rules of their own and impose them on the members of a given reality. This reality again although it is so

clearly present in social situations is in fact influenced and bounded by the rules of social reality.

4.5 Language and Social Reality

Another area where social reality is present is that of the area of language. All languages have a particular grammar and syntax, and is the most significant and important sign system of all societies. It helps to create a fund of knowledge which is continuously going expansion and contraction as different words and ideas which enter into the overall fund of knowledge and ideas. And there are some aspects of knowledge and understanding which 'fall out' of the overall system of ideas and knowledge. Thus for example the English language has compiled vast dictionaries which are revised, edited and updated, and in these social procedures many new words and concepts enter into the language. There are also words and ideas that become defunct and are removed from the dictionary and language.

So we can say that language as a social reality accumulates knowledge and transmits it to other members of the human system, which in turn create a socially ordered environment.

It may be pointed out here that language itself is a highly complex aspect of social reality and research into how a human being leans and adapts to the social order or reality. Thus it is pointed out that language is symbolic and therefore capable of apprehending social reality. Therefore, it is a social fact which exercises control or restraint over human members, and yet remains an externalisation, and outside the individual. This is because the ontological reality of language is such that it is the backbone of social order and its main artery of communication.

Reflection and Action 4.1

Is society socially constructed or is it a divine religiously raised structure?
Reflect and comment.

We can therefore say that language is a vast repertory of knowledge, reason, morality, politics and social attitudes. It can then be added that if the language is changed the particular ideological leaning of a linguistic framework would also be deeply affected. Thus social reality can be apprehended by a study of language and its application to varying situations within the societal context. Related to this is the idea that not only does language provide us an ingress into the overall structure of society, it is basic to human progress and the shift in the prominent features of social reality form a basic component on the history of theories and ideas so far as sociology and the sociology of knowledge is concerned.

4.6 The Objective Reality of Society

Let us now consider the objective reality of society. By objective reality we mean that society exercises control over the individual, and is beyond the control of any single individual. Let us see how this happens in society with the specific focus on institutions. How does an institution direct and control the behaviour of its members, and how is it that while individuals are born live and die, institutions can exist indefinitely in time. This is why we are choosing this area for the exemplification of the social reality which exists and how it continues to exist.

Let us look at the phenomena of institutionalisation, a procedure that creates a space and certain goals and aims that would be reached through various rules that define institutional behaviour. It has been pointed out that every institution exists in both a physical environment and a social environment. The fact is that both these are “given” and cannot be altered at will. In fact it is his overall social and physical environment that makes man a human being. It is this interaction with the physical and social environment that creates the existence of all human activity. This is because no human activity can be begun or completed without the due impact of the overall or “total” environment.

Now the question arises regarding how institutions themselves begin continue and establish themselves. In short we are now asking the origin of human institutions. It may be pointed out that institutions arise when there is the “reciprocal typifications” of the habitualized behaviour that make for strictly patterned behaviour which should not go out of the limits of the overall control pattern. Thus the various different tasks that members carry on lead to an institution taking over social control of its members. When this has happened we may say that the institutions has “arrived” or has become crystallized. Thus institutions which were initially humanly created over time soon develop a socially objective reality of their own.

Box 4.2: Experience and Interpretation

...We cannot claim that this embedded ness is absolutely universal... the world is not always taken as ordinary by all people and all occasions. Buddhist mediators and other mystics have devised deliberate methods for withdrawing the mind's assent to ordinary assumptions about reality and have claimed to experience an illumination by looking at whatever transpires without putting any interpretation upon it. (Randall Collins 1988, *Theoretical Sociology*, p:279 Orlando : Harcourt Brace).

Berger and Luckmann point out that the relation between man and his social world is dialectical, that is each phenomena acts, interacts and reacts to the other. Thus man and nature cannot be separated as each has an effect on the other which can be beneficial or detrimental. Thus we can say that social reality has three interrelated aspects. These are the facts that society is produced by human beings; further it becomes clear that society is an objective reality; and that as a consequence of these factors man becomes a social product himself.

Now society requires to be accepted or realised, that is to say it is in need of legitimation, which is done by socialising the new generation of members into the preexisting patterned ways of interaction. Socialisation it may be pointed out is done steadily and almost continuously during the growing years, and it never ends even unto death and attitudes towards the beyond. That is to say institutions provide for rules of birth, life and death and how these processes can be made more efficient. However socialization is never wholly able to keep all members in the line of control and as such there are some percentage of deviants in any society.

The inner control or the control of attitudes is what makes the institution such a powerful force. However social reality, shared experiences, and common compliance lead to an inner and outer congealing of experience

which settles down in the subconscious and exercises control and this is what makes socialisation firm, steady and perpetual. It is through institutions like the family that we learn to become human beings and to exhibit behaviours that are socially beneficial. However again there is no perfect correlation between legitimation socialisation and overall behaviour. And there are "lapses" in socialisation which can sometimes lead to a tear in the social fabric in the form of riots or other violent disturbances just because the social control of institutions and how it is passed on sometimes break down, and such a situation could be dangerous for social harmony.

Apart from the above we find that human beings have to enact a particular learned role behaviour which is essential to the wellbeing of the fabric of society. Roles set up mutual obligations and reciprocal links. When these roles are repeated often enough an elaborate role structure develops. This is so even if a role play is relatively simple, and much more so as the role has wider implications and much greater social control.

Thus a role defines the social self and the other way round. Roles have their origin in reciprocal typifications, just as do institutions. Roles create a social fabric that is linked both in time and space, and has further to conform to the role limits and thereby forming the very backbone of institutions and social life as a whole.

This is to say it is institutions that shape the individuals and then start depending upon them. Therefore to play a role properly the player or member must know the wholeness of the role, and realise it in its many intricacies, including the cognitive and the behavioral aspect. This implies that there is a social distribution of knowledge in society which occurs as the members play and enact their social roles, leading to a basic understanding of how a member is supposed to respond to some other social person in interaction or reflection. It has been pointed out that the study of roles is very important in the sociology of knowledge since that is what leads us to learn about how the macroscopic institutions impact upon the individual and the group and create "real" experiences which are part of the construction of social reality. Thus as we go along we find that construction of social reality is in fact an elaborate cooperative effort of all the members of society, and is not something that any one individual can undertake.

If a society is relatively coherent and orderly it will have institutions that are respected and shared by members of a society. On the other hand if there is much conflict and disorder in society it is clear that the institutions within society are breaking up or at least not being subscribed to in any great measure. In other words if there is a society that is highly balkanized its institutional base will also have multiple synchronous societies, or subcultures. In fact it is the existence of subcultures which indicate quite clearly that we cannot talk about "reality" in the singular and it must be realised that "reality" is not the same throughout a society or a nation state. In fact there are plural perceptions of society depending on the precise position that a member is located within his or her community. This is because knowledge is the product of interaction between its knowledge base and the social context. However we need to point out here that there are such institutions which become so powerful, that they indeed become "reified" and take on an almost independent course sometimes disturbing the given arrangements in society in anomic situations where social order breaks down temporarily.

4.7 Legitimation and Social Reality

Let us now turn to another aspect of the social construction of reality, and this is the process of “legitimation” which provides an institution within society its overall rationale and rules of conduct. It provides the society with a set of rules and regulations which are taken to be the actual or true meaning of the purpose or ideology of an institution. By being legitimated the institutions in society are able to provide guidelines of the work conditions that members of each institution are supposed to follow or face sanctions which could range from the nominal to the extreme forms of the same existing rules that apprehend conduct that is not in the interests of the organisation.

Reflection and Action 4.2

Why does social institution need legitimation? Reflect and comment.

Thus legitimation provides a total rationale regarding what the actor or actors are supposed to do, could do and even want to do. In short we cannot say that institutionalisation is relatively successful unless all actions are legitimated by the ideology of the institution which is normally an extension of the overall national or globe society. However we need to keep in mind that the theoretical-ideological axis that upholds most institutions is often a fragile one and the indifferent or different behaviour within an institutional context can make it breakdown and cease to exist effectively. At this point we must indicate that another dimension of legitimation concerns the symbolic universe. These symbolic universes take the social construction of reality to another level, which help to make society cohere. The symbolic universe is a matrix of total meaning both objective and subjective and it is actually the apprehension of the symbolic universe is necessary to be able to be a member of society and thereby living within the prescribed social order and be a member of any specific society. Thus it is the symbolic universe which is a cognitive tool to apprehend, be a member of, or even to subvert the process of social construction which as we pointed out earlier suffers from being in a fragile condition and therefore has to be bolstered by various institutional modalities to give it continuity and to go on from generation to generation, all the while adapting and reordering itself to meet the challenged of a new generation, which has grown up with different values. As such no matter how legitimate an institution within society is, it definitely undergoes changes and new legitimation links have to be brought in to explain new, even threatening situations. As such the process of legitimation may be spread out over time ns that may prove to be much greater than even the total life of any of its members. Thus it is the symbolic universe which is of prime importance in the overall “hierarchy” of a human being can experience.

Box 4.3: Mind and Society

The symbolic universe is what arranges a society in the mind of the members so that what is perceived through the senses, in fact all possible experience is filtered down through the cognitive process both objective and subjective. It is thus the binding glue of society and we have briefly indicated that it takes control of all the discrete bits of knowledge and social procedure and is able to combine and resolve it within the given frame work of societal membership. As Berger and Luckmann put it that “it makes sense of the entire universe”. By this we mean the social and cultural states of being

that exist in any culture have to be apprehended as cognitive aspects of gaining membership. This is so because each group of members who share similar situations will be coerced into trying a finding meaning in the world of everyday life, because it is in part a projection of the desires, fears and expectations of other members within an institution or institutions in society.

Thus it becomes clear that the symbolic universe is a method for not only apprehending reality but creating it also, and thus what we are talking about is the fact that there is an intermesh between the subjective and the objective side of reality, both of which are perceived by human beings who are members of any institution or group of institutions in any society.

Thus it is pointed out that “placement” within a symbolic order or symbolic universe is really very important and the very basis of the perception that will be available to any member in society. Thus we can clearly see how members of any society are keenly engaged in the task of socially constructing a reality that is able to cope with all unforeseen situations. However such total control is very difficult and in every society we find that there are problems which cry for a solution. Further it is also absolutely clear since Durkheim that any socially constructed system “leaks”, that is there are always some people or groups of people which see reality in a way different from the majority of the members. This is what often causes “tears” in the social fabric of society with no matter how much care the members have helped to construct or build it up. In short human beings have not only to be apprehending legitimate structures but maintaining their continuity. Indeed there are some groups or institutions like family, polity, commerce and so on which also find similarities among them but they are also quite different in their scope and spread in any group no matter how large or small it is.

4.8 Socialisation and Legitimation

Let us now turn to how the human mind uses various concepts to uphold the symbolic universe that is related to and is a part of societal processes. Thus if an institution is to be a part of the members existence it has to be appropriately legitimated, by being located or placed in some particular part of the symbolic universe. This is what gives it meaning and power to social reality. If the symbolic universe undergoes a shift over time then new legitimating structures and discourses are invented by the human mind, to bolster the social reality that has been disturbed or “shaken”, and make it whole again. This happens in times of great stress political, economic or social, but the symbolic universe remains even though in a somewhat attenuated form.

Now further if the symbolic universe is confronted with a pattern of socialisation that is paradoxical or even contradictory to it then a problem of lack of meaning arises and has to be dealt with the establishment of a new ideological framework or concepts that can deal with the altered reality. When this happens the societal forces and institutions begin to repress the groups who are perceived as threatening for the symbolic universe, in an attempt to retrieve all that can be kept from the old symbolic order into the new, and thereby salvage something from the past or the social order which has readjusted itself to deal with the new situations in social processes.

Thus we find that the construction of social reality is also dependent on the precision of the concepts that are there to deal with it. If these concepts are traditional they will usually require a new or modern interpretation. On the other hand the concepts and attitudes that are retained will now be placed differently in the new ideology that has been both created and accepted by members of a society. Thus this process requires cognitive and normative bolstering or legitimation.

We may say then that mythology itself provides the conceptual apparatus for the symbolic universe, and this functions as a adaptive mechanism so far as the society is concerned. It has been pointed out that mythology itself was created to overcome paradoxes and inconsistencies in the overall environment. Berger and Luckman point out to maintain the symbolic universe there are several types of conceptual equipment including:

- 1) Mythology
- 2) Theology
- 3) Philosophy and
- 4) Science

Now while mythology is associated with the mass construction of social reality we find that the other three elements mentioned become increasingly the domain of the specialists and the elites. Such a body of knowledge is quite different than what the specialists in theology, philosophy and science are concerned with. That is to say that the relation between the lay person and the expert becomes very different from each other as the latter are a specialised activity of the social elites

We may ask at this point that what are the implications and applications of the creation and maintenance of the symbolic universe. There are in fact two features of the symbolic universe maintenance. These are:

- 1) Therapy and
- 2) Inhalation.

In the case of the therapeutics of symbolic universe maintenance what happens is that the attempt of the concepts that form the symbolic universe are used to re-socialise members so that they can play their role in society. Yet it may be noted that therapy itself does not claim or reclaim all the members. In such a case the symbolic universe and its implications have not been properly understood, if they have been understood at all.

In the case of the concept of inhalation we find that all areas of meaning and existence that are not subsumed under the symbolic universe have to be erased or eliminated so that they do not start challenging the legitimacy of the same.

Thus in both these approaches or applications we find that the aim of the exercise is to ensure integration and incorporation into society. If this is not done the society will undergo anomic disturbances, and the social order will become dysfunctional. Thus a truly representative symbolic universe is one that covers conceptually each and every aspect of reality and leaves nothing out whatsoever. It is obvious that such a system does not exist and in practice each member is basically approximating the concepts of the symbolic universe. In doing this the members of a society come to have many ideas in common but there is still room for individuation of the members.

4.9 Social Reality and The Symbolic Universe

Now what is the implication for social organisation and the maintenance of the symbolic universe? We have already made the point that reality is socially defined, and that it is human beings and human groups that define its contours. Thus we find that the specialists in a society provide complete legitimisation of the social reality. Such experts usually hold very different views from lay members on definitions of reality. Thus we may point out again that there can be differences of view and opinion between the experts and the laymen. There is thus a sort of competition on whose definitions and concepts are going to be beneficial and become operative in social interaction.

As we can see there are different ways of apprehending and perceiving social process. Which way is seen as the best course of action depends on the ideology which is invoked and which concepts are used to explain any aspect of the symbolic universe that has become the area of concern, eg. societal conflict over the distribution of resources. Groups often subscribe to an ideology which will benefit them and invoke theories which will help them achieve their goals, social, economic or political.

Box 4.4: Pluralism and Reality

It may be noted that most modern societies are pluralistic comprising many races ethnicities and religions. In such pluralistic societies the room for conflict is much reduced and outright conflict is rare. Pluralism itself arises in times of rapid change and erodes the strong foundations of traditions and make them form new structures and patterns of interaction, and new theories are invented to legitimate the new social structures in society.

Such legitimations are necessary as we have pointed out, because without them no new ideology can be formed or if formed it cannot be successful in maintaining and propagating it. On the other hand we find institutions themselves are changed or altered in some way to fit into the existing social reality, and there is thus a dialectic between institutions and social reality. Again the definition of reality itself projects that reality and these definitions often have a self fulfilling aspect to them and begin to change the contours of reality itself in social process. Thus social change can only be understood as a dialectical process between the new theories that legitimate new institutions.

These institutions are also affected and themselves change to have a closer correlation between themselves and the theories and ideologies used to legitimate them. It may be added here that the social construction of reality is a human product and has been realised by the efforts of human beings alone and is experienced by them as a set of complete experiences. The sociology of knowledge maintains that the existence of the symbolic universe is reflected in the lives of the members of the society. As a corollary to this we may add that the existence of a symbolic universe has its base in individuals and has no existence apart from their lives. In short although we are saying that man produces the reality within which he then lives, procreates and expires, he is not quite capable of altering it alone and requires a group or community to do the same.

Let us now turn to the description of society in relation to subjective reality. We shall first dwell on primary and secondary socialisation as ways

in which human beings create their own reality. Thus society exists both as objective and subjective reality. To understand this fully we need to appreciate that society is an ongoing process which comprises the elements of:

- 1) Externalisation
- 2) Objectification and,
- 3) Internalisation

As the human externalises social reality it acts back upon him and he internalises it. This means that the existing social situation has been apprehended and subscribed to in such great measure that certain actions and interactions become most mechanical and their existence is never called into question. Thus there is a time sequence involved in the imparting of certain basic and essential points of social reference, which means it takes time to become a fully fledged member of any society. Being a fully fledged member of a society means that the member has acquired membership, and is able to make decisions, interpretations and even plan and pursue an objective or a goal over time. Thus as Berger and Luckmann put it that the individual becomes a member "through a temporal sequence" and as the social reality is apprehended more and more the members of a society are able to predict the outcome of certain actions and interactions. This is to say as social reality is apprehended more and more the human being is able to be an aware member of society, being able to realize and live up to his expectations within limits set by society itself.

It may thus be pointed out that primary socialisation comprises the understanding of roles of the personal others and the generalised other. In short such socialisation proceeds from the inner circle or close circle of a human being to wider and wider circles until it encompasses the whole of society. Now this does not happen in a majority of cases and primary socialisation in some cases does fail to bring about the desired uniformity within the society. This type of deviance within the society however is not a matter of alarm but of serious concern. Thus when the gestalt of the generalised other has been learnt we find that both the objective and the subjective sides of social reality balance and successful primary socialisation has been completed.

Secondary socialisation in fact is a necessary aspect of the division of labour, and how knowledge has been distributed within the society. At this point we find that the institutional sub worlds have been internalised and role specific knowledge has been generated, concerning the social activity and output that any role required. Thus secondary socialization adds new layers of data and knowledge which in some cases even supercede some aspects of primary socialisation. However to establish overall consistency we find that secondary socialisation presumes conceptual clarity to bring together different bodies of knowledge under a single umbrella. We may point out here that while in primary socialisation of the members or group that is acting upon a human being is relatively small.

In the case of secondary socialisation the people who act and influence ones mentality and behaviour are very many numerically speaking. One has entered the ocean from the pond and in secondary socialisation one is in the midst of society at large. There is inevitably a formality and lack of personal depth in the secondary socialisation, which is there because of the complex division of labour, which in itself demands that the institutional reality is not disturbed

too much and there are institutions like marriage which have been there in human society since time immemorial and continue to be with us.

As can be readily seen both primary and secondary socialization are delicate procedures and have to be carefully imparted and acquired. Thus socialisation is a process that occurs as part of every human society, but to maintain the objective and subjective structures does not always happen. There is a certain level of deviancy in every community. To contain this deviancy society has to develop some control procedures to protect its disruption and eventual disintegration. Thus reality maintenance procedures such as mass media or mass contact programmes become part of the overall attempt to perpetuate social reality and to make the human perception of it be integrated and coherent.

In this regard it can be pointed out that usually it is primary socialisation which has a greater durability and is much more strongly ingrained than the procedures of secondary socialisation whose layers of gloss of meaning often do not stand up to scrutiny and start breaking apart. Well established rules of conduct may be challenged and a new set of rules may take their place or at least effect some part of their existence. Thus secondary socialisation is more “artificial” by nature, and is less deeply lodged in the human than the primary socialisation. As we shall now discuss it is casual conversation which is what is responsible for the continuation of both the objective and the subjective states of reality.

Thus we now turn to a description of the role language plays in reality maintenance.

4.10 Maintaining Reality and Language

It may be pointed out here that the language that a society uses is a strong foundation and process for the maintenance and perpetuation of socially constructed reality. In language society finds an institution so to speak, and maintains social reality through its incessant use both in formal and informal settings. In fact there are prominent theories which indicate that language itself may be at the base of reality and helps greatly in constructing it. It needs to be indicated just as language is a social fact then the reality and conceptualisation of social reality is an aspect of ongoing social reality.

Box 4.5: Paradigms of Social Reality

Language needs to be modified over time and this itself indicates that social reality is malleable to a certain state and undergoes changes especially in the dominant ideology, as a whole of the society under consideration. This in itself implies that over a process of time new paradigms of social reality emerge and posit their own challenges to the members of society. Such new paradigms of social reality however take time to settle down into the consciousness of the members, and we can have two or more paradigms working at the same time in a society. Thus as we pointed out earlier there is in fact a multiple social reality, rather than one single overarching model of society. It is then obvious that such a complicated and delicate man oeuvre as constructing reality is an ongoing process and can be subverted only to an extent by rival groups in the society or community who give different versions and different choices to the members. In terms of life options and work options so that the relationship is dialectical.

Thus if language structures and usage help construct reality, it is also clear that life experience and life situations also feedback into language structures effectively modifying them and influencing their overall content. It needs to be kept in mind that language is indispensable in creating compatible consensual social constructions, and that it is what connects people. We need to mention here briefly that when we consider language and we are entering into the realm of a vast system of symbols, gestures, hints, clues and even moral prescriptions, and the fields of semiotics and kinesthetics, all of which are an aspect of societal process, and are central to human communication. Thus the role of language in the construction of reality cannot be undermined or minimised. In fact without effective communication, sharing of information, ideas and knowledge, there is no culture in a society. Language in its widest sense is a tool par excellence in the hands of society, and with its help both the subjective and objective aspects of socially constructed reality come together and cohere. It can also provide alternative models for reality construction. And in plural societies different communities or groups do have the capacity to raise appropriate models of reality, which then act back on that community creating a two way bridge for communication.

4.11 Conclusion

The whole question then is that of the internalisation of the social reality, both objective and subjective, and this happens as a dialectic between man and his social structure. In fact the entire idea is to strike a balance between nature and culture if the persistence of the social reality is not to be disrupted. Thus successful socialisation is that in which there is a high degree of consonance or adjustment. Between the outer and inner realities, so that the human is an active participator in social process rather than being simply at the mercy of societal procedures and rules.

At this point we reach a caveat and this is the fact that often socialisation is not effective. This happens when the phenomena of individualism takes root in a society and creates humans who do not subscribe wholly to the social order and social reality. In such instances we find that there are various socially available procedures to bring the deviants from the overall ideology back to the common fold. Such is the role of counselors, psychiatrists, shamans, saints and others.

We may ask at this point why socialisation does not work in many cases? One reason could be the fact that the concerned human child is being subjected to two different discourses on the social reality. Thus if husband and wife are not consonant in their behaviour it the child or children which are now unable to adopt in to any existing discourse on reality and may have two or more systems in their consciousness. Such instances may often turn so serious, and the deviance is so disruptive of social process that such members may have to be isolated in a hospital to help them get over their conflict and confusion regarding the apprehension of one single reality, usually backed by the dominant version of reality.

This is a fascinating area of research, and we find that problems of internalising the social structure by members is becomingly increasingly difficult in the modern and postmodern worlds, where the stress on individuality is very great. Individuality implies putting ones own perspective in the place of the given perspective of social reality. This usually causes a rupture in the socially

accepted definition of reality where all members are supposed to be integrated and cohere and cooperate with each other. Instead in present day global society what is valued above all is creative integrity, and this implies evolving some basic model or paradigm which is not really subscribing to the total paradigm but to a very specific and important part of it. This implies that we can study the social construction of reality in different ways, and modern man is realizing increasingly that individual or community interpretations of social reality and social order, are not to be rectified, except in extreme situations, where it is not a dissonance with society but a breakdown of the entire edifice of social reality. However as all plural societies indicate plural versions of reality will dominate so long as the social structure is capable of taking the strain. In fact now-a-days the move is away from monolithic models of societal explanation to micro models of social behaviour.

4.12 Further Reading

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