# PREFACE

In a bid to standardise higher education in the country, the University Grants Commission (UGC) has introduced Choice Based Credit System (CBCS) based on five types of courses viz. *core, discipline specific, generic elective, ability* and *skill enhancement* for graduate students of all programmes at Honours level. This brings in the semester pattern, which finds efficacy in sync with credit system, credit transfer, comprehensive continuous assessments and a graded pattern of evaluation. The objective is to offer learners ample flexibility to choose from a wide gamut of courses, as also to provide them lateral mobility between various educational institutions in the country where they can carry acquired credits. I am happy to note that the University has been accredited by NAAC with grade 'A'.

UGC (Open and Distance Learning Programmes and Online Learning Programmes) Regulations, 2020 have mandated compliance with CBCS for U.G. programmes for all the HEIs in this mode. Welcoming this paradigm shift in higher education, Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU) has resolved to adopt CBCS from the academic session 2021-22 at the Under Graduate Degree Programme level. The present syllabus, framed in the spirit of syllabi recommended by UGC, lays due stress on all aspects envisaged in the curricular framework of the apex body on higher education. It will be imparted to learners over the *six* semesters of the Programme.

Self Learning Materials (SLMs) are the mainstay of Student Support Services (SSS) of an Open University. From a logistic point of view, NSOU has embarked upon CBCS presently with SLMs in English/Bengali. Eventually, the English version SLMs will be translated into Bengali too, for the benefit of learners. As always, all of our teaching faculties contributed in this process. In addition to this we have also requisitioned the services of best academics in each domain in preparation of the new SLMs. I am sure they will be of commendable academic support. We look forward to proactive feedback from all stakeholders who will participate in the teaching-learning based on these study materials. It has been a very challenging task well executed, and I congratulate all concerned in the preparation of these SLMs.

I wish the venture a grand success.

**Professor Indrajit Lahiri**
Authorised Vice-Chancellor
Netaji Subhas Open University

# Netaji Subhas Open University

**Four Year Undergraduate Degree Programme
Under National Higher Education Qualifications
Framework (NHEQF) & Curriculum and Credit
Framework for
Undergraduate Programmes**

**Bachelor of Arts (Honours) (SOCIOLOGY) [NSO]
Course Type: Discipline Specific Core (DSC)
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## Notification

**Netaji Subhas Open University**

**UG: Public Administration (PA)**

# COURE: Sociological Thinker II
## [Course Code: 6CC-SO-04]

## Module-IV: American Sociologists

## Module-V: Max Weber

# Unit-1 □ Herbert Spencer

## 1.0 Learning Objectives

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

- The biographical details of Herbert Spencer
- Compare and contrast the approaches and the ideas of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer
- Herbert Spencer's ideas on Organic Analogy

- Herbert Spencer's ideas on Social Darwinism
- Herbert Spencer's ideas on Social Evolution

## 1.1 Introduction

Herbert Spencer was a 19th-century British social thinker, philosopher, and is considered a founder of sociology. He was born in 1820 in Derby, England. He is widely recognized for his contributions to the field of sociology. He coined the term "survival of the fittest," which became a cornerstone of the Social Darwinism theory. Spencer has a strong influence on American and British sociology.

Comte and Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer were contemporaries and were active during the Century of Great Hope, and both sought to establish sociology as the study of society. Spencer and Comte are often grouped in terms of their contributions to the development of sociological theory. Spencer was also introduced to Auguste Comte's theories and took the word "Sociology" from Comte. He is also referred to as the "second founding father of sociology. However, Spencer vigorously contested any intellectual debt to Auguste Comte.

In contrast to Auguste Comte, Spencer had completely different goals in mind for sociology. To help men build a better society, Auguste Comte sought their assistance. Instead, Spencer advocated for avoiding human intervention in natural societal processes via the study of sociology. In addition, Spencer strongly believed in the notion of freedom and considered any interference with it detrimental.

### 1. Similarities between Comte and Spencer

Comte and Herbert Spencer were contemporaries and were active during the Century of Great Hope, and both sought to establish sociology as the study of society. Spencer and Comte are often grouped in terms of their contributions to the development of sociological theory. Spencer was also introduced to Auguste Comte's theories and took the word "Sociology" from Comte. He is also referred to as the "second founding father of sociology. However, Spencer vigorously contested any intellectual debt to Auguste Comte.

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Both Comte and Spencer were both committed to advancing the science of society.

Both stressed the importance of studying society as a whole and concentrated on the interactions among its many components, including social institutions.

Spencer shared Comte's notion of historical development as an evolutionary process. Both had strong confidence in historical development's unity and irreversibility, as well as their belief in progress. Both of their ideologies placed a strong emphasis on evolutionary philosophy..

However there were many differences in their thoughts. Such as:

● Spencer disregarded Comte's Law of Three Stages.

● Spencer, unlike Comte, had little interest in social reforms. He was a believer in the laissez-faire concept. He believed that the government should act passively to protect its citizens and not become involved in their personal matters. He desired an unrestricted evolution of social life.

● Comte, wanted sociology to help men build a better society in which to live. In contrast, Spencer, a social Darwinist, argued that the new science should show the modern state that humans should not interfere with or alter the natural processes in society. Furthermore, sociology demonstrates how and why a pure laissez-faire social policy serves society's interests best.

● Spencer considered himself a positivist, although he disagreed with Comte's definition of positivism, particularly his idea of a positivist religion.

● Spencer dealt with various disciplines, similar to Comte, although he disagreed with Comte's claim of the arrangement of sciences in hierarchical order. According to Spencer, sciences cannot be legitimately arranged in any linear order as he believed that the sciences were linked and connected.

● Comte seeks to provide a definitive explanation of how human concepts have progressed. Spencer wants to assess how the external world is developing comprehensively.

● Spencer emphasized ideas' structural and functional development, while Comte was more concerned with ideas' progression.

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# 1.2 Biographical Sketch

Spencer's upbringing in a family that valued free thinking and his self-education in the natural sciences provided the foundation for his later work. Despite his lack of formal education, he had a strong background in mathematics and natural science. He started working as a civil engineer for the London and Birmingham Railways in 1837. He was appointed sub-editor of "The Economist" in 1848, and his intellectual practice began to take shape here. His first major work, *Social Statics*, was completed by 1850. He published *The Principles of Psychology* in 1854.

Spencer suffered a nervous breakdown shortly after, rendering him unable to concentrate for long periods of time on reading or writing and he became preoccupied with his health. However, Spencer continued to write after this initial breakdown and became a well-known and successful author.

He wrote several books on concepts, theories, and all-encompassing universal laws starting in 1850. *Social Static* (1850), *First Principles* (1862), *The Study of Sociology* (1873), and *Descriptive Sociology* (1890) are some of Spencer's major contributions to sociological discourse. At the age of eighty-three, Herbert Spencer died on December 8, 1903.

**Comte and Spence will go to introduction**

Both stressed the importance of studying society as a whole and concentrated on the interactions among its many components, including social institutions.

Spencer shared Comte's notion of historical development as an evolutionary process. Both had strong confidence in historical development's unity and irreversibility, as well as their belief in progress. Both of their ideologies placed a strong emphasis on evolutionary philosophy.

## 0.3.2 Differences between Comte and Spencer

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# 1.3 Social Darwinism of Herbert Spencer

Social Darwinism, as articulated by Herbert Spencer, is a theory that applies the principles of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and natural selection to human societies. **Herbert Spencer** of Britain and **W.G. Sumner** of America can be considered the two prominent advocates of the theory of "Social Darwinism." There is an attempt in this theory to extend the principles of evolution to explain the developments taking place in the social world. Spencer is often associated with this concept, although he did not coin the term "Social Darwinism" himself.

Herbert Spencer's Social Darwinism is grounded in his interpretation of evolutionary theory. He was influenced by Darwin's ideas of natural selection but extended these concepts to the social and economic realms. He proposed that societies, like biological organisms, evolve through a process of competition and survival of the fittest. This notion was articulated in Spencer's famous phrase, "survival of the fittest," which he applied to both biological evolution and societal development. Spencer's social philosophy posited that individual success in a competitive environment is a reflection of one's superior attributes, and thus, societal progress is achieved through the natural elimination of less fit individuals or groups. He argued that government intervention in the economy or social welfare was counterproductive, as it interfered with the natural process of selection and evolution.

## 1.3.1 Core Principles

- **The Principle of "Survival of the Fittest:** According to Spencer, nature is endowed with a providential tendency to get rid of the unfit and to make room for the better. It is the law of the nature that the weak should be eliminated for the sake of the strong. He believed that the rapid elimination of unfit individuals from society through natural selection would benefit the race biologically. It is for this reason that the state should do nothing to relieve the conditions of poor, whom Spencer assumed to be "less fit". By less fit, Spencer meant less healthy and less intelligent than the social norm. According to Spencer, stupid persons, people with vices and idleness, people who become victims of sickness and deformity, and such other persons belong to the category of less fit. Due to the operation of the laws of evolution, only the "more fit" persons will survive and the "less fit" ones will decline on their own. By this, Spencer did not, however, mean that "widows and orphans should be left to struggle for life or death." He was only opposed to governmental assistance to the "less fit". But he did not oppose individual philanthropy. As a strong supporter of individualism, Spencer mentioned that "the economic system works best if each individual is allowed to seek his own private interests and that consequently, the state should not intervene in the economy."

- **The Principle of Non-Interference:** Spencer who championed the ideology of Social Darwinism also became a very strong advocate of individualism and laissez-faire politics. Spencer opposed almost all forms of state interference with private property. "He insisted that the state had no business in the education, health and sanitation, postal service, money and banking, regulation of housing conditions, or the elimination of poverty. Money used for such activities could better be spent to support labourers employed in new productive works-land drainage, machine building, etc. According to Spencer, state was just like a joint stock company, whose primary business was protection of the rights of individuals and defending the interests of its citizens against external aggression.

- **Social Evolution and Progress:** Spencer envisioned societal evolution as a progressive process where complex societies emerge from simpler forms through competition and adaptation. He saw this evolution as a natural and desirable outcome, leading to greater individual freedom and societal advancement.

## 1.3.2 Impact on Society

Spencer's Social Darwinism had significant implications for social and economic policies in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. His ideas influenced various aspects of society, including:

**Economic Policies:** Spencer's philosophy supported laissez-faire capitalism, advocating for minimal government regulation of businesses and markets. This approach influenced economic policies in many Western countries, contributing to a period of unregulated economic growth and inequality.

**Social Policy:** His ideas also shaped social policies by justifying the lack of social welfare programs. Spencer's views were used to argue against government intervention in issues like poverty, healthcare, and education, reinforcing a belief in self-reliance and individual responsibility.

**Imperialism and Colonialism:** Social Darwinism provided a pseudo-scientific rationale for imperialism and colonialism. The belief that certain races or nations were more "fit" than others was used to justify the expansion of European empires and the subjugation of non-Western peoples.

## 1.3.3 Criticisms and Controversies

Spencer's Social Darwinism has faced substantial criticism from various perspectives. The theory of Social Darwinism got wide publicity during the second half of the 19th century, especially in Europe and America. The theory was being used to justify the imposition of the politico-economic domination of the whites over non-whites. It thus became an ideological theory for justifying the exploitation of exploiters and for protecting the vested interests of the imperialists.

- Critics argue that Spencer's application of natural selection to human societies is ethically problematic. They contend that it promotes a ruthless worldview that disregards human compassion and social responsibility. The idea that inequality is a natural and acceptable outcome of competition is seen as a justification for ignoring the needs of the disadvantaged.

- Scholars have challenged the scientific validity of applying biological concepts to social phenomena. They argue that human societies are not simply biological organisms and that social behaviors and structures are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, historical, and economic factors.

- The legacy of Spencer's Social Darwinism includes its influence on harmful social policies and ideologies. His theories were used to justify

social inequality and colonial exploitation, contributing to various forms of discrimination and oppression.

● This theory does not take into account that people in the category of the poor and labour class are suffering from problems and seem to be "less fit ones", not because they are basically incapable and leff fit, but they have become the victims of socially organised coercions.

# 1.4 Three Basic Laws

"Evolutionary Theory" or "The Laws of Evolution" is often regarded as the greatest contribution of the British sociologist Herbert Spencer to the realm of social thought. Spencer's ideals have left an indelible impression on the succeeding writers.

"Evolution" was one of the most exciting ideas of the 19th century. Its most influential sponsor was the naturalist Charles Darwin. Darwin developed the concept of "Evolution" in his *Origin of Species* (1859). Spencer was fascinated by the ideas of evolution. He applied the principle of evolution to the social world and called it "social evolution" He saw social evolution as "a set of stages through which all the societies moved from simple to the complex and from the homogenous to the heterogeneous."

## 1.4.1 Meaning of the Concept of "Evolution"

The term "evolution" comes from the Latin word "evolve" which means "to develop" or to "unfold". Evolution means gradual "unfolding" or "unrolling". It indicates changes from "within" and not from "without", it is spontaneous, but not automatic.

The concept of Evolution has been borrowed from Biology to Sociology and the concept of "Organic Evolution" has been replaced by "Social Evolution" in Sociology. Social Evolution refers to the evolution of human societies and implies the evolution of man's social relations. It had been hoped that the theory of "Social Evolution" would explain the origin and development of man. Sociologists and Anthropologists wanted to find out explanation of how our society evolved. They wanted an explanation rather than a description.

As L.A. Coser has pointed out the "evolutionary principles" or "the law of evolution" constitutes the very basis of Spencer's Theory of Evolution. Spencerian interpretations relating to "evolution" could be divided into two parts **(A) The General Theory of Evolution** (in the book *First Principle*), **and (B) Theory of Social Evolution** (in the book *Study of Sociology & Principle of Sociology*).

## 1.4.2 General Theory of Evolution

According to Spencer, "Evolution is a change from a state of relatively indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity."

For Spencer, this law of evolution was universal for it was applicable to the physical, organic and the social world. Spencer believed that this universal process of evolution would explain the earliest change that the universe at large is supposed to have undergone.

## 1.4.3 Three Basic Laws as Proposed by Spencer

Within the framework of universal evolution, Spencer developed his "three basic laws" and his "four secondary prepositions"-each building upon each and all upon the doctrine of evolution.

## The Three Basic Laws

- **Law of Persistence of Energy or Force:** There is a persistence of force in the world. There is the persistence of some sustaining energy in which all phenomena are rooted and upon which all phenomena rest. But this force or energy itself lies beyond our knowledge. This is a major, irreducible fact which we cannot explain, but which we are obliged simply to accept.

- **The Law of Indestructibility of Matter:** The basic elements of matter and energy in the world are neither created nor destroyed, but conserved. It means there is a basic "indestructibility" of the elements of matter.

- **The Law of Continuity of Motion:** There is a continuous motion in the world. All things continue in motion. As it is in the case of matter, motion also cannot be stopped or destroyed. When the form of the matter changes, motion also changes. Though energy passes from one form to another, it always persists, and never disappears nor does it get extinguished.

## 1.4.4 Four Secondary Propositions of Laws

In the evolutionary process, Spencer has mentioned four secondary propositions or laws in addition to the three basic laws. They are as follows.

- **Uniformity of Law:** There is a persistence of certain relationships among the forces in the world. The world is an order of elements. Recurring manifestations of events in the natural world, the forces, elements of matter, and relations of motion existing among them have a definite regularity.

- **Law of Transformation and Equivalence of Forces:** The force, the elements of matter, and the motion, are never lost or dissipated entirely in a process of change. They are merely transformed into the manifestation of some other event or some other form of existence.

- **The Law of Least Resistance and Great Attraction:** There is the tendency of everything [all forces and elements] to move along the line of least resistance and of greatest attraction.

- **The Principle of Alternative or Rhythm of Motion:** All phenomena in nature have their own particular rate and rhythm of movement, of duration, and development. Force, matter, and motion, each of these, has its appropriate pattern of transformation.

## 1.5 Types of Society

Spencer thought that the evolutionary principle could be applied to human society for he treated human society as an organism. Both the organism and the society grow from simple to complex and from homogeneous to heterogeneous.

As Abraham and Morgan have pointed out "Spencer's Theory of Evolution" involves two essential but interrelated trends or strains of thought.

(i) Change from simplicity to complexity or movement from simple society to various levels of compound societies, and

(ii) Change from military society to industrial society.

- **Change from Simplicity to Complexity, or Movement from Simple Society to Various Levels of Compound Society**

    As Spencer repeatedly argued all phenomena in all fields proceed from simplicity to complexity. Societies also undergo evolutionary stages of development. Spencer identified four types of societies in terms of stages of their evolutionary development-simple, compound, doubly compound, and trebly compound.

- **Simple Society:** This is the most primitive society without any complexities and consisting of several families.

- **Compound Society:** A large number of the above-mentioned simple societies make a compound society. This is clan society.

- **Doubly Compound Society:** Several clans are compounded into nation tribes or tribal societies.

- **Trebly Compound Society:** Here the tribes are organized into nation-states. states. This is the present form of the worl

**ii) Change from Military [Militant] Society to Industrial Society:** According to Spencer, evolution proceeds from military society to industrial society. The type of social structure depends on the relation of a society to other societies in their significant characteristics.

**Military Society:** The Militant society is a type in which the predominant organization is offensive and defensive military action. Such a society has the following characteristics.

- **Offensive and Defensive Military Action:** In military society offensive and defensive military action is predominant over other actions. Here the entire society is taken as a sleeping military. Entire social organization is military in nature.

- **Centralized Authority:** In military society military head is also a political head and has despotic control over the entire nation. There exists a clear, precise and rigid hierarchy of power throughout the society to suit the absolute power of the ruler. All are slaves to those above in the hierarchy.

- **Rigid Social Classes:** A fixed hierarchy of power structure involves a rigid grading of social statuses in society. It means social classes are rigid on economic terms. Distribution of property and material rewards are according to the order of social ranks.

- **Hierarchy in Belief System:** Authoritarian and rigid hierarchy in society corresponds to the prevailing ideas and beliefs. The existing belief system represents a supernatural authority having control over everything. Gods are also arranged in terms of a hierarchy of power. Religion has also a hierarchy and the religious head is also despotic authority. In such a society at times the despotic head is at the same time a political and military head and a religious head. His powers are justified by religion. Such a society is generally in conflict with other societies.

- **Strict Discipline:** In military society, life is rigorously disciplined. The distinction between public and private life is minimal. State has control over every aspects of life of citizens and can invade privacy of citizens any time. Individual rights virtually do not exist. The loyalty of the individual is demanded by the state unquestionably.

- **Compulsory Cooperation:** Human relations are guided by compulsory cooperation.

    Therefore, it can be said that the Spencerian description of the military type of society not only describes the ancient despotic societies but

also modern totalitarian societies. As a concept, it has a wider use for a comparative study of societies of both past and present.

● **The Industrial Society:** The Industrial society is one in which military activity and organization are peripheral to society. The greater part of society concentrates on human production and welfare. Saint Simon talked of industrial society referring to emerging central role of manufacturing industries in 18th century Europe in comparison to the previous agrarian society. Such a society has the following characteristics.

 ● **Existence of personal rights:** In industrial society personal rights of the individuals are recognized. Citizens also maintain a close watch over its maintenance and hence a strong representative form of government exists. There exists a dispute resolution mechanism accepted by the citizens.

 ● **Existence of 'sustaining system':** In industrial society sustaining system has a greater degree of freedom from the regulatory authorities. The economic system is more in the hands of common man and citizens are encouraged to do take control of major economic activities.

 ● **Growth of Association and Institutions:** Economic enterprises of different types are given protection by the state and a healthy and peaceful atmosphere in the society helps the growth of free association and institutions with autonomy of functionality.

 ● **Relatively Open Class Structure:** Above mentioned factors is corresponded with a less rigid class structure where a human relationship is more of a contractual nature and free.

 ● **Diminishing religious hierarchy:** Religion is of individual nature. It loses its central authority status. Religious practices become more and more secular nature.

 ● **Welfare State:** In industrial society state takes a welfarist attitude towards its citizens. All forms of government is meant for the well being of its members.

 ● **Awareness of Duty:** In industrial society citizens are well aware of rights and duties of the government. They have institutional mechanisms to resist the irresponsible government.

 ● **Contractual Relationship:** Human relationships are sharply different from that of in military society. Free, contractual, and responsible relationship between individuals call for voluntary

cooperation in sharp contrast to compulsory cooperation in military society.

## 1.5.1 The Contrast between Military and Industrial Society

| Characteristics | Military Society | Industrial Society |
|---|---|---|
| Dominant Functions or activity | Corporate defensive and offensive activity for preservation and aggrandizement. | Peaceful, mutual rendering of individual services |
| Principle of Social Coordination | Compulsory cooperation, regimentation by enforcement of orders, both positive and negative regulation of activity. | Voluntary cooperation, regulation by contract, and principles of justice, only negative regulation of activity |
| Relations between state and individual | Individuals exist for the benefit of state; restraints on liberty, property and mobility | The state exists for the benefit of individuals, freedom, few restraints on property, and mobility |
| Relations between state and other organizations | All organizations public, and private organizations excluded | Private organizations encouraged |
| Structure of State | Centralized | Decentralized |
| Structure of social stratification | Fixity of rank, occupation and locality, inheritance of positions | Plasticity and openness of rank, occupation, and locality, movement between positions |
| Type of economic activity | Economic autonomy and self-sufficiency, little external trade, protectionism trade | Loss of economic autonomy, interdependence via peaceful trade, free trade |
| Valued social and personal characteristics | Patriotism, courage, reverence, loyalty, obedience, faith in authority, discipline. | Independence, respect for others, resistance to coercion, individual initiative, truthfulness, kindness. |

This table has been constructed from Herbert Spencer, *The Principles of Sociology*, Vol 1, Chapter 10, and Vol 11, Chapters 17 and 18, by Neil J Smelser in his *Essays in Sociological Explanation* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1968), p 246.

## 1.5.2 Appreciation and Criticisms

Spencer's ideas were among the early attempts to apply evolutionary theory beyond biology, influencing sociology, psychology, and political science. His work helped pave the way for modern social sciences.

- Spencer's emphasis on the survival of the fittest and the idea that societies evolve and improve over time contributed to a belief in progress and the potential for human advancement. As Bogardus has pointed out that Spencer rightly emphasized the laws of evolution and natural causation. He described social evolution as a phase of natural evolution.

- His ideas laid the groundwork for later sociological theories, including functionalism, which explores how social institutions and structures contribute to the stability of society.

- Spencer's advocacy for individual rights and freedoms aligned with classical liberal principles, promoting ideas of personal liberty and minimal government intervention.

**Abraham and Morgan have rightly commented:** "No one after Spencer ever matched either sheer volume of sociological writing nor made more significant contributions to the science of man society."

**Comments Against Spencer's Views**

- No modern sociologist subscribes to the "theory of social evolution" in its original form as put forward by Spencer. His attempt to equalize evolution with progress is totally rejected. But its modified form known as the "Theory of Neo-Evolution" advocated by anthropologists like Leslie White, V. Gordon Childe, and others, is getting some publicity in the anthropological circles.

- **Bogardus is unhappy** with Spencer's theory of social evolution for it underestimates the importance of man. He writes; "The emphasis upon 'man' as a primary unit neglects the importance the 'group' in the social evolutionary process. Moreover, Sweeper underrated the intellectual structure of primitive man; he denied to early man the qualities involving exclusiveness of thought, agination, and original ideas."

- **Spencer** had spoken of uniformity in the process of evolution. He "did not realise that societies the same stage of evolution do not necessarily posts identical politics, ethics, art and religion."

**Criticisms and Limitations:**

- **Scientific Accuracy:** Spencer's social evolution theory has been criticized for lacking empirical support and scientific rigor. Unlike Darwin's

biological evolution, which was based on extensive observation and evidence, Spencer's social theories were often more speculative.

● **Ethical Concerns:** Spencer's ideas have been criticized for their ethical implications. His application of "survival of the fittest" to social policy was used to justify social inequalities and neglect for disadvantaged groups, leading to significant moral and humanitarian concerns.

● **Misinterpretations:** Spencer's work was sometimes misinterpreted or misused to support social and economic policies that many argue were unjust or harmful. His theory has been associated with social Darwinism, which has been criticized for promoting a laissez-faire attitude that disregards social responsibility.

● **Influence on Sociology:** Despite its flaws, Spencer's work was influential in the development of sociology and the study of social evolution. His attempt to apply evolutionary principles to social phenomena laid the groundwork for future sociological theories.

● **Historical Context:** Spencer's ideas reflect the intellectual climate of the 19th century, which was deeply influenced by evolutionary theory and the notion of progress. His work offers insight into how scientific ideas can be applied to social theory, even if the applications are controversial or flawed.

● **In summary,** Herbert Spencer's theory of evolution, particularly his application of evolutionary principles to social and cultural contexts, has been both influential and controversial. While his ideas contributed to the development of social science, they have also been criticized for their scientific limitations and ethical implications.

# 1.6 Organic Analogy

Herbert Spencer, is known for applying the principles of organic analogy to society. This analogy compares society to a living organism. The organic evolution of the body is of interest to biologists, whereas the evolution of social structure, institutions, and organisations is of interest to sociologists. Spencer regarded Sociology as similar to a science like Biology and he tries to explain it better by using an organic analogy. The social process is compared to a biological organism in this biological analogy. In his analogy, he claims that for the benefit of the society as a whole, the parts of the society, like the parts of the human body, work in unison. In the same way that any dysfunction of a body part causes issues with the healthy functioning of the individual body, any societal dysfunction poses a threat

to the entire social structure. By doing so, Spencer emphasised the importance of looking at society as a whole in terms of structure and functional interdependence.

Spencer believed that, even though human 'organisms' (individuals) are members of i 'a society' as an entity is something more than and other than a 'organism.' It is a comprehensive system of social organisation elements and their interdependent functions. It's a super-organic entity, meaning it's an organisational entity that exists above and beyond the level of the organism. Following this, Spencer came to believe that a society was more than just a name for a group of people. That is, it is more than a collection of people; it is a separate entity. The whole is more than its parts.

Here are some key points of Spencer's organic analogy:

**Interdependence:** Just as the organs in a biological organism (like the heart, lungs, and kidneys) rely on one another to sustain the life of the whole, the various institutions and social structures in society (such as family, education, and government) rely on each other to ensure social cohesion and functionality.

**Functionality:** In the same way that each organ in an organism has a specific function that contributes to the overall health of the body, each social institution has roles and functions that contribute to the stability and efficiency of society. For example, the education system is seen as essential for preparing individuals to participate effectively in the economy.

**Evolutionary Perspective:** Spencer also applied the concept of evolution to society, suggesting that just as organisms evolve and adapt to their environments, societies also undergo evolutionary changes. This perspective implies that social structures and institutions develop and refine themselves over time in response to internal and external pressures.

**Social Order and Stability:** The organic analogy emphasizes that, for society to remain stable, its various parts must work together harmoniously. Disruptions or dysfunctions in one part of society can have ripple effects, just as a problem with one organ can impact the health of the entire organism.

Spencer's organic analogy was influential in the development of sociology and social theory, providing a framework for understanding how complex societies function and evolve. The analogy is clearer when some similarities between organisms and societies are highlighted.

## 1.6.1 Similarities Between Biological and Social Organisms

- **Similarity in Visible Growth:** Both society and organism are distinguished from inorganic matter by means of their visible growth. Thus both society and the organism are subject to growth.

- **An Increase in the Complexity of Structure:** As both society and organisms grow in size they also increase in complexity of structure. Primitive organism [like amaeba] are simple whereas the highest organisms [like the mammals] are very complex, Primitive community was very simple whereas the modern industrial society is highly complex.

- **Differentiation of Structure Leading to Differentiation of Functions:** In societies and in organism progressive differentiation of structure is accompanied by progressive differentiation of function. It is quite obvious. The primitive living organism was a unicelluar creature; but with the increase in the cells, differentiation of organs, at the highest levels of evolution the structure of the body is quite complex. Similar is the case with society. In the case of an organism that has very complex organs, each organ performs a specified function. Similarly, in the case of complex society subdivided into many different organisations, each organisation carries on a specified function.

- **Change in Structure Leads to Change in Function:** When change takes place in the structure of organs and communities, there results a change in their functions. The function becomes more and more specialised. This applies to the body of a living creature as well as to the society.

- **Differentiation as well as Harmony of Organs:** Evolution establishes for both societies and organisms, differences in strucutre and function that make each other possible. Evolution leads to development or greater differentiation of the organs of society as also that of an individual. Along with this differentiation there is also the harmony between various organs. Each organ is complementary to the other and not opposed. This holds true both in the body of a living organism and society.

- **Loss of an Organ does not Necessarily Result in the Loss of Organism:** Both society and the individual are organisms. It is common to both that a loss of one organ or the other does not necessarily result in the death of an organism. For example, if an individual loses his leg he does not necessarily meet with his death. Similarly, in society if some association or a political party disintegrates it does not invariably lead to the decay of the society.

- **Similar Process and Methods of Organisations:** In discussing the organic analogy further Spencer compared-(i) The alimentary system of an organism to the productive industries, or the sustaining system in the society. (ii) There is a strong parallelism between the circulation

system of an organism and the distributing system in society with its transportation lines and with its commercial classes and media of exchange. (iii) In both the cases there are developed regulating system. In society, there is the social control mechanism to fulfil the regulative function. In an organism there are dominant centres and subordinate centres, the senses, and a neural apparatus to perform the tasks of the regulating system.

Spencer, however, was an individualist who believed that, unlike biological organisms, where the parts exist for the benefit of the whole, society exists for the benefit of the parts, i.e., the individuals in society (Timasheff 1967). Herbert Spencer noted the differences between the biological organism and society when comparing human society to an organism. There are some distinctions between biological organisms and societies. The distinctions are:

● **Organs are Organised, but parts of Society are Independent:**
   As Spencer has observed various organs of the body are incapable of independent existence, whereas various parts of society can exist independently.

● **Society does not have a Definite Form as does the Organism:**
   Unlike organisms, societies have no specific external form, such as a physical body with limbs or a fae. Organisms have an outward form or shape [for example, dog, donkey, monkey, deer, and so on] whereas societies such as Indian society or American society do not have any definite and externally identifiable form. Society is only a mental construct. It is abstract and exists in our mind only in the form of idea.

● **Manner of Difference in the Dependence of Organ or Parts on the Organism or Society** According to Spencer, parts or organs of the body of the organism are dependent upon the body itself. They exist for the sake of the body. On the other hand, in the case of society, the parts [such as individuals, families, groups, etc.] are more important than the society. In fact, society exists for the benefit of its parts, that is, individuals. Spencer as a champion of the philosophy of individualism very strongly felt that the state and society exist for the good of the individual and not vice versa.

● **Difference Regarding the Centrality of "Consciousness".** In an organism, there exists what is known as "consciouness" and it is concerned in a small part of the aggregate. The parts of the body

do not have this. But in the case of the society consciousness is diffused throughout the individual members.

- **Differences Regarding the Structure and Function** In the case of organism each of its parts performs a definite and fixed functions. The parts perform their functions incessantly. This certainty relating to the functions of the parts, we do not find in society. Functions of the parts of society such as institutions, often get changed. Some of the functions of family, for example, have changed. On the contrary, the eyes, heart, nerves, ears, tongue and other organs of the organism cannot change their functions.

# 1.7 Critical Appraisal

While Herbert Spencer's organic analogy theory contributed to early sociological thought and the understanding of social systems, it faced significant criticism for its deterministic views, lack of empirical support, and implications for social inequality. Major criticisms are:

**Overemphasis on Stability:** Critics argue that Spencer's theory places too much emphasis on social stability and equilibrium, neglecting the role of conflict and social change. His analogy often assumes that all parts of society function harmoniously, which may overlook the tensions and inequalities that exist.

**Deterministic and Reductionist:** The theory has been criticized for being deterministic, implying that social phenomena are predetermined by the needs of the social organism. This can lead to a reductionist view of social issues, ignoring the complexity of human behavior and social interactions.

**Lack of Empirical Evidence:** Spencer's organic analogy was criticized for lacking empirical evidence and rigorous testing. His ideas were more theoretical and philosophical, which made it difficult to apply them in practical sociological research.

**Ethnocentrism and Social Darwinism:** Spencer's application of the organic analogy was often intertwined with Social Darwinism, which applied the concept of "survival of the fittest" to human societies. This led to criticisms of the theory being ethnocentric and justifying social inequalities and imperialistic policies.

**Neglect of Individual Agency:** By focusing on the society as a whole, the theory sometimes neglects the role of individual agency and personal choices in shaping social dynamics. It tends to view individuals as mere components of a larger system rather than active agents in their own right.

However, in spite of above criticisms, Spencer's concept of "organic analogy" has had a significant impact on our understanding of social systems. This analogy has been used to understand complex social systems, such as economies and societies, and has influenced thinkers such as Emile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons.

## 1.7.1 The Significance of Herbert Spencer's Ideas in Contemporary Sociology

Herbert Spencer, a 19th-century philosopher and sociologist, is often remembered for his contributions to the development of sociological theory and his promotion of the concept of social Darwinism. Although his work has been critiqued and evolved over time, Spencer's ideas continue to hold significant relevance in contemporary sociology. This essay explores the impact and significance of Spencer's theories on modern sociological thought, highlighting his influence on the evolution of sociological theory, his contributions to the understanding of social evolution, and the critiques and adaptations of his ideas in current sociological discourse.

### Spencer's Sociological Framework

Spencer's approach to sociology was heavily influenced by his application of evolutionary theory to social systems. He is best known for his concept of "social Darwinism," which applied Charles Darwin's principles of natural selection to societal development. Spencer posited that societies evolve through a process analogous to biological evolution, characterized by a progression from simple to complex forms. His theory was grounded in the belief that social progress results from the survival of the fittest institutions and practices, which naturally adapt and improve over time.

Spencer's emphasis on social evolution introduced a framework that profoundly influenced subsequent sociological thought. His notion that societies develop through a natural, evolutionary process contributed to the foundation of functionalism—a major theoretical perspective in sociology. Functionalists view society as a complex system with interdependent parts that work together to promote stability and social order. While contemporary sociologists have moved beyond Spencer's simplistic application of evolutionary theory, the foundational idea that social structures evolve and adapt remains a significant component of sociological analysis.

### Influence on Sociological Theory

Spencer's work had a considerable impact on the development of early sociological theory. His belief in the evolution of society and the notion that

social institutions evolve to fulfill necessary functions influenced later sociologists like Emile Durkheim. Durkheim, who is often regarded as one of the founders of sociology, adopted and expanded upon some of Spencer's ideas, particularly regarding the function of social institutions and the concept of social cohesion.

Furthermore, Spencer's emphasis on the interplay between individual and societal progress contributed to the development of the structural-functional approach. This perspective, which remains influential today, examines how societal components contribute to overall stability and functioning. Although contemporary sociologists have critiqued and refined this perspective, Spencer's initial ideas provided a foundation upon which subsequent theories were built.

**Critiques and Adaptations**

Despite Spencer's contributions, his ideas have faced significant critiques, particularly regarding the application of evolutionary theory to social phenomena. Critics argue that Spencer's social Darwinism justified social inequality and perpetuated the notion that some individuals or groups are inherently superior to others. This perspective has been criticized for its deterministic and reductionist approach, which overlooks the complexity of social dynamics and the role of social justice in societal development.

In contemporary sociology, Spencer's theories have been adapted and critiqued to address these concerns. Modern sociologists acknowledge the importance of social change and adaptation while also considering the impact of social policies and institutions on equality and justice. The evolutionary perspective has been integrated into more nuanced theories that account for the influence of social, cultural, and economic factors on societal development.

**Legacy and Contemporary Relevance**

Spencer's legacy in contemporary sociology lies in his pioneering efforts to apply scientific principles to the study of society. His focus on social evolution and the adaptation of social institutions laid the groundwork for future sociological inquiry. While his specific theories, such as social Darwinism, are largely discredited, the broader idea that societies evolve and adapt remains relevant. Contemporary sociologists continue to explore how social structures and institutions change over time and how these changes affect social cohesion and stability. **Spencer's** work inspired British social thought to a great extent. L.T Hobhouse, G.C. Wheeler, and in a later generation, Morris Ginsberg continued work in his general evolutionary addition while rejecting his anti-reformist individualism. In America, W.G. Summer may be said to have been a disciple of Spencer. Ward, Cooley, Veblen, Giddings, Ross, and Park, whether agreeing with his ideas or using them as a springboard for dissent, were all in Spencer's debt.

Moreover, Spencer's work has prompted ongoing debates about the relationship between individual agency and structural forces. His ideas have influenced discussions on social inequality, the role of institutions in societal development, and the impact of social change. Contemporary sociology continues to grapple with these issues, incorporating and challenging Spencer's concepts to develop a more comprehensive understanding of social dynamics.

# 1.8 Conclusion

Herbert Spencer's ideas, despite their limitations and criticisms, have had a lasting impact on contemporary sociology. His contributions to the understanding of social evolution and the application of scientific principles to social theory provided a foundation for subsequent sociological development. While modern sociologists have refined and critiqued Spencer's theories, his work remains a significant part of the historical and theoretical framework of sociology. By examining and adapting Spencer's ideas, contemporary sociology continues to build on his legacy while addressing the complexities of social change and development.

# 1.9 Questions

**A.  Short Questions:**                                                 **5 Marks each**
  1.  What is meant by Social Darwinism?
  2.  What are the features of Military Society?
  3.  What are the characteristics of Industrial society according to Spencer?
  4.  hat are the four secondary propositions of law?

**B.  Long Questions:**                                                 **10 Marks each**
  1.  Critically examine Spencer's theory of Social Darwinism.
  2.  Make a critical estimation of Spencer's typology of society.
  3.  Discuss Spencer's place in contemporary sociological theory.
  4.  Write a note on the three basic laws proposed by Spencer.

# 1.10 References

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# DSC-4 (MAJOR): Sociological Thinker-II

## Unit-2 □ Georg Simmel: Formal Sociology, Types of Social Relationship

**Structure**

## 2.0 Learning Objectives

- To get an idea of the sociological scholar that George Simmel was
- To understand his idea of formal sociology
- To explain Simmel's propositions on types of social interactions

## 2.1 Introduction

The impact of the ideas of Georg Simmel (1858-1918) on American sociological theory, as well as sociological theory in general, differs markedly from the other three classical theorists such as, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber. Simmel was much better known to the early American sociologists (Jaworski, 1997). Simmel was eclipsed by Marx, Durkheim, and Weber, although he is far more influential today than classical thinkers such as Comte and Spencer. In recent years we have seen an increase in Simmel's impact on sociological theory because of the growing influence of one of his most important works, The Philosophy of Money, the linking of his ideas to postmodern social theory and the translation into English of Simmel's later works on life philosophy. We shall try taking up these issues in the latter section of the unit.

Except for his contribution to the primarily macroscopic conflict theory, Georg Simmel is best known as a microsociologist who played a significant role in the development of small-group research, symbolic interactionism, and exchange theory. All of Simmel's contributions in these areas reflect his belief that sociologists should study primarily forms and types of social interaction. Robert Nisbet presents this view of Simmel's contribution to sociology: It is the micro-sociological character of Simmel's work that may always give him an edge in timeliness over the other pioneers. He did not disdain the small and the intimate elements of human association, nor did he ever lose sight of the primacy of human beings, of concrete individuals, in his analysis of institutions. David Frisby makes a similar point: "The grounding of sociology in some psychological categories may be one reason why Simmel's sociology has proved attractive not merely to the interactionist but also to social psychology" (1984:57; see also Frisby, 1992:20-41). However, it is often forgotten that Simmel's micro-sociological work on the forms of interaction is embedded in a broader theory of the relations between individuals and the larger society.

## 2.2 Simmel: A Biographical Sketch

Georg Simmel was born in the heart of Berlin on March 1, 1858. He studied a wide range of subjects at the University of Berlin. However, his first effort to produce a dissertation was rejected, and one of his professors remarked, "We would do him a great service if we do not encourage him further in this direction" (Frisby, 1984:23). Despite this, Simmel persevered and received his doctorate in philosophy

in 1881. He remained at the university in a teaching capacity until 1914, although he occupied a relatively unimportant position as Privatdozent from 1885 to 1900. In the latter position, Simmel served as an unpaid lecturer whose livelihood was dependent on student fees. Despite his marginality, Simmel did rather well in this position, largely because he was an excellent lecturer and attracted large numbers of. His style was so popular that even cultured members of Berlin society were drawn to his lectures, which became public events. Simmel's marginality is paralleled by the fact that he was a somewhat contradictory and therefore bewildering person. He is depicted by some as being tall and slender, by others as being short and as bearing a forlorn expression. His appearance is reported to be unattractive, but also intensely intellectual and noble. He is reported to be hard-working, but also humorous and over-articulate as a lecturer. Finally, we hear that he was intellectually brilliant, friendly, well-disposed—but also that inside he was irrational, opaque, and wild.



*Picture: George Simmel*

*Photo credit: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b0/Simmel_02.jpg*

Simmel wrote innumerable articles "The Metropolis and Mental Life" and books "The Philosophy of Money". He was well known and influential in German academic circles. His Berlin home was a center of cultural life where he and his wife Gertrud hosted important figures, including poets Rainer Rilke and Stefan George, philosophers Edmund Husserl and Heinrich Rickert, and sociologists Max and Marianne Weber. Simmel even had an international following, especially in the United States, where his work was of great significance in the birth of sociology. Finally, in 1900, Simmel received official recognition, a purely honorary title at the University of Berlin, which did not give him full academic status.

Simmel tried to obtain many academic positions, but he failed in spite of the support of such scholars as Max Weber. Despite the fact that he was a baptized

Protestant, one of the reasons for Simmel's failure was that he was a Jew in a nineteenth-century Germany rife with anti-Semitism (Birnbaum, 2008; Kasler, 1985). Thus, in a report on Simmel written to a minister of education, Simmel was described as "an Israelite through and through, in his external appearance, in his bearing and in his mode of thought" (Frisby, 1981:25). Another reason was the kind of work that he did. Many of his articles appeared in newspapers and magazines; they were written for an audience more general than simply academic sociologists. In addition, because he did not hold a regular academic appointment, he was forced to earn his living through public lectures. Simmel's audience, both for his writings and for his lectures, was more the intellectual public than professional sociologists, and this tended to lead to derisive judgments from fellow professionals.

Simmel's personal failures can also be linked to the low esteem that German academicians of that day had for sociology. In 1914, Simmel finally obtained a regular academic appointment at a minor university (Strasbourg), but he once again felt estranged. On the one hand, he regretted leaving his audience of Berlin intellectuals. Thus, his wife wrote to Max Weber's wife: "Georg has taken leave of the auditorium very badly…. The students were very affectionate and sympathetic…. It was a departure at the full height of life" (Frisby, 1981:29). On the other hand, Simmel did not feel a part of the life of his new university. Thus, he wrote to Mrs. Weber: "There is hardly anything to report from us. We live … a cloistered, closed-off, indifferent, desolate external existence. Academic activity is = 0, the people … alien and inwardly hostile" (Frisby, 1981:32). World War I started soon after Simmel's appointment at Strasbourg; lecture halls were turned into military hospitals, and students went off to war. Thus, Simmel remained a marginal figure in German academia until his death in 1918. He never did have a normal academic career. Nevertheless, Simmel attracted a large academic following in his day, and his fame as a scholar has, if anything, grown over the years.

## 2.3 Areas of importance

Simmel had a much more complicated and sophisticated theory of social reality than he commonly is given credit for in contemporary American sociology. Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (1978) argued that there are four basic levels of concern in Simmel's work. First are his microscopic assumptions about the psychological components of social life. Second, on a slightly larger scale, is his interest in the sociological components of interpersonal relationships. Third, and most macroscopic, is his work on the structure of, and changes in, the social and cultural "spirit" of his times. Not only did Simmel operate with this image of a

three-tiered social reality, but he adopted the principle of emergence (Sawyer, 2005), the idea that the higher levels emerge out of the lower levels. Further development replaces the immediacy of interacting forces with the creation of higher supra-individual formations, which appear as independent representatives of these forces and absorb and mediate the relations between individuals. He also said, If society is to be an autonomous object of an independent science, then it can only be so through the fact that, out of the sum of the individual elements that constitute it, a new entity emerges; otherwise, all problems of social science would only be those of individual psychology. Overarching these three tiers is a fourth that involves ultimate metaphysical principles of life. These eternal truths affect all of Simmel's work and, as we will see, lead to his image of the future direction of the world. This concern with multiple levels of social reality is reflected in Simmel's definition of three separable problem "areas" in sociology, which he described in "The Problem Areas of Sociology".

The first he described as "pure" sociology. In this area, psychological variables are combined with forms of interactions. Although Simmel clearly assumed that actors have creative mental abilities, he gave little explicit attention to this aspect of social reality. His most microscopic work is with the forms that interaction takes as well as with the types of people who engage in interaction. The forms include subordination, superordination, exchange, conflict, and sociability. In his work on types, he differentiated between positions in the interactional structure, such as "competitor" and "coquette," and orientations to the world, such as "miser," "spendthrift," "stranger," and "adventurer." At the intermediate level is Simmel's "general" sociology, dealing with the social and cultural products of human history. Here Simmel manifested his larger-scale interests in the group, the structure, and history of societies and cultures. Finally, in Simmel's "philosophical" sociology, he dealt with his views on the basic nature, and inevitable fate, of humankind. Throughout this unit, we touch on all these levels and sociologies. We find that although Simmel sometimes separated the different levels and sociologies, he more often integrated them into a broader totality.

## 2.3.1 Dialectical Thinking in Simmel's Work

Simmel's way of dealing with the interrelationships among three basic levels of social reality, leaving out his fourth, metaphysical, level. These layers gave his sociology a dialectical character reminiscent of Marx's sociology. A dialectical approach is multicausal and multidirectional, integrates fact and value, rejects the idea that there are hard-and-fast dividing lines between social phenomena, focuses on social relations, looks not only at the present but also at the past and the

future, and is deeply concerned with both conflicts and contradictions. Despite the similarities between Marx and Simmel in their use of a dialectical approach, there are important differences between them. Of greatest importance is the fact that they focused on very different aspects of the social world and offered very different images of the future of the world. Simmel manifested his commitment to the dialectic in various ways. For one thing, Simmel's sociology was always concerned with relationships, especially interaction (association). More generally, Simmel was a "methodological relationist" (operating with the "principle that everything interacts in some way with everything else".

Overall, he was ever attuned to dualisms, conflicts, and contradictions in whatever realm of the social world he happened to be working on. Donald Levine stated that this perspective reflects Simmel's belief that "the world can best be understood in terms of conflicts and contrasts between opposed categories". Rather than try to deal with this mode of thinking throughout Simmel's work, let us illustrate it from his work on one of his forms of interaction—fashion. Simmel used a similar mode of dialectical thinking in most of his essays on social forms and social types, but this discussion of fashion amply illustrates his method of dealing with these phenomena. We will also deal with the dialectic in Simmel's thoughts on subjective-objective culture and the concepts of "more-life" and "more-than-life" in this unit.

## 2.4 Simmel's Formal Sociology

Simmel's sociology focused primarily on forms of association and interactions between persons. In contrast to Weber he was not a methodological individualist, but rather an interactionist who assumed that humans could only be understood as beings who exist in relationship to one another. This said, the individual was a core theoretical concept for Simmel. Even though relationships are not reducible to individual psychological processes, they are nevertheless dependent upon psychological processes. Most basically, Simmel believed that individuals are the "bearers" of the life process (1918/2011:9). As bearers of the life process, individuals are creative beings always driven to transcend that which is fixed and stable. It is the creativity of individuals working in relationship with each other that makes possible the emergence of social forms (Helle, 2013). As Frisby put it, the bases of social life to Simmel were "conscious individuals or groups of individuals who interact with one another for a variety of motives, purposes, and interests" (1984:61). This interest in creativity is manifest in Simmel's discussion of the diverse forms of interaction, the ability of actors to create social structures, as well as the disastrous

effects those structures have on the creativity of individuals. Moreover, although he did not examine psychological life in detail, Simmel nevertheless assumed a number of additional psychological capacities necessary for the development and continued operation of social life. For example, all of Simmel's discussions of the forms of interaction imply that actors must be consciously oriented to one another. Thus, interaction in a stratified system requires that superordinates and subordinates orient themselves to each other. The interaction would cease and the stratification system would collapse if a process of mutual orientation did not exist. The same is true of all other forms of interaction. Also, even though Simmel believed that social (and cultural) structures come to have a life of their own, he realized that people must conceptualize such structures in order for them to have an effect on the people. Simmel stated that society is not simply "out there" but is also "'my representation'—something dependent on the activity of consciousness" (1908/1959a:339). Simmel also had a sense of individual conscience and of the fact that the norms and values of society become internalized in individual consciousness. The existence of norms and values both internally and externally explains the dual character of the moral command: that on the one hand, it confronts us as an impersonal order to which we simply have to submit, but that, on the other, no external power, but only our most private and internal impulses, imposes it upon us. At any rate, here is one of the cases where the individual, within his own consciousness, repeats the relationships which exist between him, as a total personality, and the group. (Simmel, 1908/1950a:254) This very modern conception of internalization is a relatively undeveloped assumption in Simmel's work.

In addition, Simmel had a conception of people's ability to confront themselves mentally, to set themselves apart from their own actions, a view that is very similar to the views of George Herbert Mead ) and the symbolic interactionists (Simmel, 1907/1978:64). The actor can take in external stimuli, assess them, try out different courses of action, and then decide what to do. Because of these mental capacities, the actor is not simply enslaved by external forces. But there is a paradox in Simmel's conception of the actor's mental capacities. The mind can keep people from being enslaved by external stimuli, but it also has the capacity to reify social reality, to create the very objects that come to enslave it. As Simmel said, "Our mind has a remarkable ability to think of contents as being independent of the act of thinking" (1907/1978:65). Thus, although their intelligence enables people to avoid being enslaved by the same external stimuli that constrain lower animals, it also creates the structures and institutions that constrain their thoughts and actions. Finally, individuality was important to Simmel as an ethical or moral ideal. Horst Helle (2013:36) wrote, "For Simmel autonomy and individuality of the person are values which he does not question or discuss; they are taken for granted as goals

that must be pursued." Precisely because the individual is the source of creativity Simmel defended the modern liberal concept of individuality. As Helle pointed out, Simmel understood individuality as an evolutionary achievement connected to the development of modern, capitalist, urban societies. In particular, capitalism institutionalizes competition as the basis for social life. Competition encourages individual creativity and the development of further social forms. This said, Simmel was careful. He did not embrace a laissez-faire view of capitalism and competition but rather saw competition itself as a social form that must be fostered. For these reasons, Simmel was critical of socialism. Socialism eliminated competition between individuals and thus threatened the creativity that fuels the emergence of novel social forms. In effect, Simmel argued that socialism destroys the creativity of life in the name of society.

## 2.5 Social Interaction or Association

Georg Simmel is best known in contemporary sociology for his contributions to our understanding of the patterns, or forms, of social interaction. He expressed his interest in this level of social reality in this way: We are dealing here with microscopic-molecular processes within human material, so to speak. These processes are the actual occurrences that are concatenated or hypostatized into those macrocosmic, solid units and systems. That people look at one another and are jealous of one another; that they exchange letters or have dinner together; that apart from all tangible interests they strike one another as pleasant or unpleasant; that gratitude for altruistic acts makes for inseparable union; that one asks another to point out a certain street; that people dress and adorn themselves for each other— these are a few casually chosen illustrations from the whole range of relations that play between one person and another. They may be momentary or permanent, conscious or unconscious, ephemeral or of grave consequence, but they incessantly tie men together. At each moment such threads are spun, dropped, taken up again, displaced by others, interwoven with others. These interactions among the atoms of society are accessible only to psychological microscopy.

Simmel made clear here that one of his primary interests was interaction (association) among conscious actors and that his intent was to look at a wide range of interactions that may seem trivial at some times but crucially important at others. His was not a Durkheimian expression of interest in social facts but a declaration of a smaller-scale focus for sociology. Because Simmel sometimes took an exaggerated position on the importance of interaction in his sociology, many have lost sight of his insights into the larger-scale aspects of social reality. At times, for example, he equated society with interaction: "Society … is only

the synthesis or the general term for the totality of these specific interactions…. 'Society' is identical with the sum total of these relations". Such statements may be taken as a reaffirmation of his interest in interaction, but in his general and philosophical sociologies, Simmel held a much larger-scale conception of society as well as culture.

## 2.6 Interaction: Forms and Types

One of Simmel's dominant concerns was the form rather than the content of social interaction. This concern stemmed from Simmel's identification with the Kantian tradition in philosophy, in which much is made of the difference between form and content. Simmel's position here, however, was quite simple. The real world is composed of innumerable and constantly changing events, actions and interactions, and so forth. To cope with this maze of reality, people order it by imposing patterns, or forms, on it. Thus, instead of a bewildering array of specific events, the actor is confronted with a limited number of forms. In Simmel's view, the sociologist's task is to do precisely what the layperson does, that is, impose a limited number of forms on social reality, on interaction in particular, so that it may be better analyzed. This methodology generally involves extracting commonalities that are found in a wide array of specific interactions. For example, the superordination and subordination forms of interaction are found in a wide range of settings, "in the state as well as in a religious community, in a band of conspirators as in an economic association, in art school as in a family" (Simmel, 1908/1959b:317).

Donald Levine, one of Simmel's foremost contemporary analysts, described Simmel's method of doing formal interactional sociology in this way: "His method is to select some bounded, finite phenomenon from the world of flux; to examine the multiplicity of elements which compose it; and to ascertain the cause of their coherence by disclosing its form. Secondarily, he investigates the origins of this form and its structural implications" (1971:xxxi). More specifically, Levine pointed out that "forms are the patterns exhibited by the associations" of people (1981b:65). Simmel's interest in the forms of social interaction has been subjected to various criticisms. For example, he has been accused of imposing order where there is none and of producing a series of unrelated studies that in the end really impose no better order on the complexities of social reality than does the layperson. Some of these criticisms are valid only if we focus on Simmel's concern with forms of interaction, his formal sociology, and ignore the other types of sociology he practiced. However, there are a number of ways to defend Simmel's approach to formal sociology.

First, it is close to reality, as reflected by the innumerable real-life examples employed by Simmel. Second, it does not impose arbitrary and rigid categories on social life but tries instead to allow the forms to emerge from social life. It is important to remember that for Simmel, form always existed in relationship to the creative processes of life. The goal was not to impose order on social life per se, but to show how people always organize and reorganize their lives through the creation of social forms. It is best then to see Simmel's description of forms not as set in stone depictions of life, but rather as a tool to animate the tension between life and form. Third, Simmel's approach does not employ a general theoretical schema into which all aspects of the social world are forced. He thus avoided the reification of a theoretical schema that plagues a theorist like Talcott Parsons. Finally, formal sociology militates against the poorly conceptualized empiricism that is characteristic of much of sociology. Simmel certainly used empirical "data," but they are subordinated to his effort to impose some order on the bewildering world of social reality.

## 2.7 Social Geometry

In Simmel's formal sociology, one sees most clearly his effort to develop a "geometry" of social relations. Two of the geometric coefficients that interested him are numbers and distance (others are position, valence, self-involvement, and symmetry [D. Levine, 1981b]).

## 2.8 Numbers

Simmel's interest in the impact of numbers of people on the quality of interaction can be seen in his discussion of the difference between a dyad and a triad. Dyad and Triad. For Simmel (1950) there was a crucial difference between the dyad (two-person group) and the triad (three-person group). The addition of a third person causes a radical and fundamental change.

Increasing the membership beyond three has nowhere near the same impact as does adding a third member. Unlike all other groups, the dyad does not achieve a meaning beyond the two individuals involved. There is no independent group structure in a dyad; there is nothing more to the group than the two separable individuals. Thus, each member of a dyad retains a high level of individuality. The individual is not lowered to the level of the group. This is not the case in a triad. A triad does have the possibility of obtaining a meaning beyond the individuals involved. There is likely to be more to a triad than the individuals involved. It is

likely to develop an independent group structure. As a result, there is a greater threat to the individuality of the members. A triad can have a general leveling effect on the members. With the addition of a third party to the group, a number of new social roles become possible. For example, the third party can take the role of arbitrator or mediator in disputes within the group. Then the third party can use disputes between the other two for his or her own gain or become an object of competition between the other two parties. The third member also can intentionally foster conflict between the other two parties in order to gain superiority (divide and rule). A stratification system and an authority structure then can emerge. The movement from dyad to triad is essential to the development of social structures that can become separate from, and dominant over, individuals. Such a possibility does not exist in a dyad. The process that is begun in the transition from a dyad to a triad continues as larger and larger groups and, ultimately, societies emerge. In these large social structures, the individual, increasingly separated from the structure of society, grows more and more alone, isolated, and segmented. This results finally in a dialectical relationship between individuals and social structures: "According to Simmel, the socialized individual always remains in a dual relation toward society: he is incorporated within it and yet stands against it. The individual is determined, yet determining; acted upon, yet self-actuating" (Coser, 1965:11). The contradiction here is that "society allows the emergence of individuality and autonomy, but it also impedes it" (Coser, 1965:11).

# 2.9 Group Size

At a more general level, there is Simmel's (1908/1971a) ambivalent attitude toward the impact of group size. On the one hand, he took the position that the increase in the size of a group or society increases individual freedom. A small group or society is likely to control the individual completely. However, in a larger society, the individual is likely to be involved in a number of groups, each of which controls only a small portion of his or her total personality. In other words, "Individuality in being and action generally increases to the degree that the social circle encompassing the individual expands" (Simmel, 1908/1971a:252).

However, Simmel took the view that large societies create a set of problems that ultimately threaten individual freedom. For example, he saw the masses as likely to be dominated by one idea, the simplest idea. The physical proximity of a mass makes people suggestible and more likely to follow simplistic ideas, to engage in mindless, emotional actions. Perhaps most important, in terms of Simmel's interest in forms of interaction, is that increasing size and differentiation

tend to loosen the bonds between individuals and leave in their place much more distant, impersonal, and segmental relationships. Paradoxically, the large group that frees the individual simultaneously threatens that individuality. Also paradoxical is Simmel's belief that one way for individuals to cope with the threat of the mass society is to immerse themselves in small groups such as the family.

## 2.10 Distance

Another of Simmel's concerns in social geometry was distance. Levine offered this summation of Simmel's views on the role of distance in social relationships: "The properties of forms and the meanings of things are a function of the relative distances between individuals and other individuals or things". This concern with distance is manifest in various places in Simmel's work. We discuss it within two different contexts— Simmel's massive The Philosophy of Money and one of his cleverest essays, "The Stranger."

In The Philosophy of Money (1907/1978), Simmel enunciated some general principles about value—and about what makes things valuable—that served as the basis for his analysis of money. Because we deal with this work in detail later in this chapter, we discuss this issue only briefly here. The essential point is that the value of something is determined by its distance from the actor. It is not valuable if it is either too close and too easy to obtain or too distant and too difficult to obtain. Objects that are attainable, but only with great effort, are the most valuable. Distance also plays a central role in Simmel's "The Stranger", an essay on a type of actor who is neither too close nor too far. If he (or she) were too close, he would no longer be a stranger, but if he were too far, he would cease to have any contact with the group. The interaction that the stranger engages in with the group members involves a combination of closeness and distance. The peculiar distance of the stranger from the group allows him to have a series of unusual interaction patterns with the members. For example, the stranger can be more objective in his relationships with the group members. Because he is a stranger, other group members feel more comfortable expressing confidences to him.

In these and other ways, a pattern of coordination and consistent interaction emerges between the stranger and the other group members. The stranger becomes an organic member of the group. But Simmel not only considered the stranger a social type, he considered strangeness a form of social interaction. A degree of strangeness, involving a combination of nearness and remoteness, enters into all social relationships, even the most intimate. Thus, we can examine a wide range of specific interactions in order to discover the degree of strangeness found in each.

Although geometric dimensions enter a number of Simmel's types and forms, there is much more to them than simply geometry. The types and forms are constructs that Simmel used to gain a greater understanding of a wide range of interaction patterns.

## 2.11 Social Types

We have already encountered one of Simmel's types, the stranger; others include the miser, the spendthrift, the adventurer, and the nobleman. To illustrate his mode of thinking in this area, we focus on one of his types, the poor.

## 2.12 The Poor

As is typical of types in Simmel's work, the poor were defined in terms of social relationships, as being aided by other people or at least having the right to that aid. Here Simmel quite clearly did not hold the view that poverty is defined by a quantity, or rather a lack of quantity, of money. Although Simmel focused on the poor in terms of characteristic relationships and interaction patterns, he also used the occasion of his essay "The Poor" (1908/1971c) to develop a wide range of interesting insights into the poor and poverty. It was characteristic of Simmel to offer a profusion of insights in every essay. Indeed, this is one of his great claims to fame. For example, Simmel argued that a reciprocal set of rights and obligations defines the relationship between the needy and the givers. The needy have the right to receive aid, and this right makes receiving aid less painful. Conversely, the giver has the obligation to give to the needy. Simmel also took the functionalist position that aid to the poor by society helps support the system. Society requires aid to the poor "so that the poor will not become active and dangerous enemies of society, so as to make their reduced energies more productive, and so as to prevent the degeneration of their progeny" (Simmel, 1908/1971c:154).

Thus, aid to the poor is for the sake of society, not so much for the poor per se. The state plays a key role here, and, as Simmel saw it, the treatment of the poor grows increasingly impersonal as the mechanism for giving aid becomes more bureaucratized. Simmel also had a relativistic view of poverty; that is, the poor are not simply those who stand at the bottom of society. From his point of view, poverty is found in all social strata. This concept foreshadowed the later sociological concept of relative deprivation. If people who are members of the upper classes have less than their peers do, they are likely to feel poor in comparison to them.

Therefore, government programs aimed at eradicating poverty can never succeed. Even if those at the bottom are elevated, many people throughout the stratification system will still feel poor in comparison to their peers.

## 2.13 Social Forms

As with social types, Simmel looked at a wide range of social forms, including exchange, conflict, prostitution, and sociability. We can illustrate Simmel's (1908/1971d) work on social forms through his discussion of domination, that is, superordination and subordination.

## 2.14 Superordination and Subordination

Superordination and subordination have a reciprocal relationship. The leader does not want to determine completely the thoughts and actions of others. Rather, the leader expects the subordinate to react either positively or negatively. Neither this nor any other form of interaction can exist without mutual relationships. Even in the most oppressive form of domination, subordinates have at least some degree of personal freedom. To most people, superordination involves an effort to eliminate completely the independence of subordinates, but Simmel argued that a social relationship would cease to exist if this were the case. Simmel asserted that one can be subordinated to an individual, a group, or an objective force. Leadership by a single individual generally leads to a tightly knit group either in support of or in opposition to the leader. Even when opposition arises in such a group, discord can be resolved more easily when the parties stand under the same higher power. Subordination under a plurality can have very uneven effects. On the one hand, the objectivity of rule by a plurality may make for greater unity in the group than does the more arbitrary rule of an individual. On the other hand, hostility is likely to be engendered among subordinates if they do not get the personal attention of a leader. Simmel found subordination under an objective principle to be most offensive, perhaps because human relationships and social interactions are eliminated. People feel they are determined by an impersonal law that they have no ability to affect. Simmel saw subordination to an individual as freer and more spontaneous: "Subordination under a person has an element of freedom and dignity in comparison with which all obedience to laws has something mechanical and passive" (1908/1971d:115). Even worse is subordination to objects (e.g., icons), which Simmel found a "humiliatingly harsh and unconditional kind of subordination" (1908/1971d:115). Because the individual is dominated by a

thing, "he himself psychologically sinks to the category of mere thing" (Simmel, 1908/1971d:117).

## 2.15 Conclusion

Georg Simmel's contributions to sociology, particularly his formal sociology, emphasize the complex and multifaceted nature of social relationships. By focusing on forms of social interaction and the dynamic qualities inherent in social groupings, Simmel reshaped the understanding of society as a series of interdependent interactions. His analysis of social forms and types, alongside his insights into social geometry, numbers, and distance, showcased his innovative approach. Ultimately, Simmel's dialectical thinking provided a framework that highlighted the tensions and harmonies in social life, allowing for a nuanced exploration of human association and organization.

## 2.16 Summary

Georg Simmel, one of sociology's foundational thinkers, approached the study of society through a lens that stressed the abstract and structural aspects of social interaction. By emphasizing forms rather than content, Simmel distinguished himself from other theorists, arguing that interactions shape the fabric of society. Key concepts like social geometry, the importance of numbers, group size, distance, and social types such as "the poor," shed light on the structural dynamics at play in any social environment. His analysis highlighted how individuals are simultaneously shaped by and shape their social contexts, with each interaction contributing to the continuous evolution of social structures.

## 2.17 Questions

*Short Questions*

1. What is meant by Simmel's formal sociology?
2. How does Simmel's concept of social geometry contribute to understanding interactions?
3. Briefly explain the importance of numbers in Simmel's theory.
4. What is dialectical thinking according to Simmel?
5. Who are considered social types in Simmel's work?

*Long Questions*

1. Discuss the relevance of Simmel's dialectical thinking in contemporary sociological analysis.

2. Explain the forms and types of social interaction as proposed by Simmel and their significance in modern society.

3. Analyze the relationship between group size and social interactions in Simmel's sociology.

4. Describe how Simmel's biographical background influenced his sociological perspectives.

5. Critically evaluate Simmel's contributions to understanding the role of distance in social relationships.

## 2.18 Reference

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# DSE-04 (Major) Sociological Thinkers-II

## Unit-3 □ Emile Durkheim(1858-1917): Methodology, Social Fact, Division of Labour, Suicide, Religion.

**Structure:**

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3.1 Introduction

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    3.2.1 Characteristics of Social Fact

    3.2.2 Rules For Sociological Research: Durkheim's Book

    3.2.3 Other Aspects of Durkheim's Methodology.

    3.2.4 Causal Analysis

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    3.2.6 Glossary

3.3 Division of Labor

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        3.3.1.1 Mechanical Solidarity

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    3.3.4 Glossary

3.4 Suicide

    3.4.1 Basic Concepts

    3.4.2 Essence of Durkheim's Theory of Suicide

    3.4.3 Types of Suicide

        3.4.3.1 Egoistic Suicide

        3.4.3.2 Altruistic Suicide

        3.4.3.3 Anomic Suicide

        3.4.4.4 Fatalistic Suicide

    3.4.5 Critical Assessment of Durkheim's Theory of Suicide

# 3.0 Learning Objectives

This unit aims to give the learners a comprehensive idea about Emile Durkheim's contributions in sociology. From this learners will come to know about

- Durkheim's contribution in creation of a proper methodology to study sociology
- Durkheim's path-breaking analysis of 'social fact'
- Division of labour and different types of solidarity in primitive and advanced societies
- Durkheim's pioneering work on suicide as a social fact.
- Durkheim's concept of religion with reference to sacred and profane and totem.

# 3.1 Introduction

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was born in a Jewish rabbi family of France. While growing up, he was influenced by the philosophy of empiricism, positivism and scientism of his time; at the same time, coming from a rabbi family, he was

deeply influenced by the social role of religion. All these have, time and again, influenced his sociological vision to analyze various aspects of social life. He was deeply influenced by the thoughts of several German scholars who considered society as the symbol of an integrated unity and ethical entity. Durkheim was also concerned with the science of morals. All these intellectual influences have shaped his sociological thoughts and ideas and have led him to take a pioneering role in the study of sociology. These units intend to examine his views on Methodology, social fact, religion, division of labour and suicide that have immense contributions in the understanding of sociology; his methodology has been recognized as a path-breaking exercise to be followed in sociological research and analysis. In this regard we also need to understand his views on the relevance of Social Fact in any kind of sociological investigation. In this unit we also discuss other aspects of his thoughts like differences in division of labor in different societies and its society-specific significance, the true spirit of religion and the larger role it plays in social life, in general. He is also recognized for understanding suicide from a sociological point of view.

## 3.2 Methodology: Social Fact

Before delving deep into our discussion, we should, first, make a distinction between methodology and method. Methodology is the analysis of how research should proceed and the examination of how theories are generated. It is the sum total of philosophical principles governing one's choice of techniques of research. To put it more simply, it is a system of methods used in a particular area of study; while method implies the techniques of research. Sociological methodology is required to investigate the concept about social reality, about the manner in which sociologists examine the relationship between individuals and society. Methodology also helps us understand how sociologists look at society and their concerns and orientations regarding society and individuals. Durkheim's methodological perspective includes the study of social phenomena as social facts.

Durkheim's famous book 'The Rules of Sociological Method', published in 1895, is an important contribution to sociological methodology; as in this book he has given a step by step account of sociological research. In fact, The Rules of Sociological Method represents Durkheim's desire to develop a systematic study of sociology. From the very beginning, he was indebted to Comte, the first 'father' of sociology and his positivist and empiricist thoughts, while he rejected Herbert Spencer's (another father)Individualistic interpretation of society and opposed the notion of social order based on competition and struggle for existence among free

individuals. Like Comte, Durkheim, too, believed that the conduct of individuals depend on the group. He was fond of a well ordered society based on cohesiveness and mutual dependence. To examine and understand what held society together, he wanted to understand how to study society and what should be the methodology of studying sociology. After much critical analysis he came to the conclusion that sociology's methodology should be scientific and science-based. But he was also aware of the fact that sociology could not use the methodology of any other discipline, because each science must depend on its own principles for explanation of phenomena. He strived hard to establish sociology as science. To distinguish it from other disciplines like philosophy, psychology, etc. he wanted to create a distinct methodology of sociology's own. He has viewed society as a collectivity composed of a number of institutions. All these institutions are, according to Durkheim, Social Facts. To him, Social Facts are immensely valuable, because, in any scientific research we are to deal with empirical and observable facts. So, in sociology too, we should deal with empirical social realities or Social Facts. He was determined to make Social Fact the exclusive subject-matter of sociology because each and every science has its own exclusive subject-matter and a corresponding method of investigation. Therefore, as a scientific discipline sociology should study social reality which has exclusive qualities of its own and the elements of social reality are nothing but Social Facts. On the one hand, the aggregate of social facts is the society itself; on the other, social facts constitute the subject-matter of sociology.

## 3.2.1 Characteristics of Social Fact:

Durkheim has defined Social Fact as any manner of action, fixed or not, susceptible to exert an external constraint on the individual that has its own existence independent of its individual manifestations. From this definition we can clearly identify several characteristics of Social Facts.

Firstly, Social Facts exist independently and objectively. For example, in any given society, individuals have to behave according to the already existing laws, customs rules of conducts, religious beliefs rituals and practices, language and a monetary system. All these exist independent of the individuals who practice them and are objective in nature.

Secondly, social facts are external to individuals; that means, such facts have real existence in the material domain, meaning that these are not mental constructs or figments of imagination of any person. Being external to individuals, these are independent of individuals. People do not choose the types of social fact they get to live under.

Thirdly, social facts exert constraints or pressure on the individuals and compel them to act in a certain way. For this reason, everybody in a society experiences some kind of social compulsion to act in a recommended or socially approved manner.

Fourthly, due to the externality of social facts, these are observable by the members of the society. As Durkheim has mentioned, a social fact can be identified through its power of external coercion that it is exerts or is capable of exerting on individuals.

Fifthly, social facts are general throughout the social unit. These cannot be reduced to individual facts. They are also independent in nature.

Sixthly, social facts differ from physical fact in that, while the former are slow to change, they do change and are not the same across time and space. One or more individuals can bring in change in these facts.

In short, social facts have three main characteristics; these are externality, ability to put constraint and generality and independence. Like the society itself, social fact is also sui generis or it is in a class of its own.

Durkheim has mentioned of two types of social facts. These are: Legal and Moral constraints or constraints coming from social organizations. These types can also be counted as formal and in-formal.

## 3.2.2 Rules For Sociological Research:

Durkheim's book The Rules of Sociological Method (1895) has quite extensively discussed the methodology needed to be followed in sociological research and analyses and with this he has secured his place as one of the leading advocates of positivism. Durkheim, in his methodology has formulated three important rules to know and understand social facts. These are: 1) all preconceptions must be eradicated; 2) sociological investigations must be based on social facts known by their external characteristics; 3) social facts are to be considered as independent and irreducible.

His cherished desire is to build sociology following the footprints of natural sciences, their inductive methods and principles of objective observation. His penchant for natural science methodology has made him an opponent of psychologism and its method of introspection, so popular during his time. In his attempt to build up a proper methodology for sociological research, he has established certain rules; these are,

● Rules for the observation of social facts.
● Rules for distinguishing the normal from the pathological.

- Rules relating to the classification of social types.
- Rules for explanation of social facts.
- Rules relating to the establishment of proofs.

We should now discuss these rules one by one.

(a) **Rules for Observing Social Facts:** For observation of social facts, Durkheim recommends to consider social facts as things. If social phenomena are considered as things, then they are recognized as independent of the subject, and they are to be studied objectively, just as a natural science studies its subject manner. Thus, Durkheim has conceptualized sociology as an objective science like other or natural sciences. In his opinion, then, the subject of sociology needs to be specific like the subjects of other sciences and this subject is nothing but social fact. Secondly, he also assumes that the subject matter of sociology, i.e. social fact needs to be of observable and explainable kind like the facts in other sciences. He also urges that social facts should be regarded as things.

(b) **Rules for Distinguishing the Normal from the Pathological:** Durkheim has distinguished between what is normal and what is not. While 'normal' is "the facts which are as they should be", or the most general forms; the pathological or not-normal includes the "facts which ought to be something other than what they are'. In short, the pathological forms of facts do not follow the characteristics of the 'normal'. According to Durkheim, a social fact becomes normal or not depending upon the precise phase of its development. This shows, he has us a developmental model of normal and pathological social facts.

(c) **Rules Relating to Classification of Social Types:** Durkheim prefers classification of types on the basis of 'simplicity' or 'a complete absence of parts'. claims that facts should be classified independently of the scholar and his He further moods and should be based on the nature of the things'. (Kohn: 219)

(d) **Rules for Explanation of Social Facts:** Durkheim has not only classified social facts, he has also established rules for explaining them. To do this he has noted the distinction between the cause behind any social phenomena and its functions.

Durkheim has made a distinction between causal and functional analysis; yet he believes that both methods of analysis should act in tandem. But he has expressed strong opposition against the use of psychological explanation of social facts.

(e) **Rules for the Establishment of Proofs:** Scientific disciplines establish relationships between variables that prove these relationships. If sociology intends to be a science, then it should also establish relations between its variables and prove these relationships. Durkheim, even more than Comte, considers comparative method as a very important method to study one and the same phenomenon in different societies to discover their general and specific features, their similarities and differences of the social phenomena etc. Comparative method should include causal analysis for a clear examination and understanding of social phenomena.

## 3.2.3 Other Aspects of Durkheim's Methodology:

Durkheim has avoided descriptive analysis and has adopted structural-functional analysis based on the analogy between society and an organism as a highly developed system of organs and functions. From this analogy he has formed an idea about a normal type of society, along with the concepts of normal type of societies, concepts of a norm and of pathology etc. With the concept of pathology he has later explored the phenomena of crime, crisis or social ailments and various other forms of social disorganization. According to him the social functions that emerge from the conditions of a social organism's existence are all normal. But he has seen crime and other forms of social disorganizations as normal too, because these are also rooted in one or the other type of social conditions; moreover, these also support a number of useful social relations. Though both of them may be considered normal, there are certain external signs for distinguishing the pathological phenomena from the normal one. As per Durkheim's opinion if a phenomenon is commonly or regularly found in a given society at a particular phase of its evolution, then it is normal in that society. The external signs of distinction include the degree of the phenomena's universality or commonness. For him, generality is an indicator of social health. But this kind of conclusion (that what is general or common is normal) has led him to certain problematic situation and confusion. For example, he accepts crime as normal phenomenon because it has certain social roles to play; at the same time, he considers the increasing rate of suicide during the late-nineteenth century as pathological.

## 3.2.4 Causal Analysis:

Durkheim's methodology also involves causal and functional analysis of social phenomena. Durkheim has established that for explaining any social phenomenon one should look for its cause/s. It is also important to look for the phenomenon's preceding elements that have led to its occurrence. Causal explanations are integral

parts of scientific explanations. As Durkheim wants to see sociology as science, he thinks causal explanation should be included in sociological research. Durkheim does not consider historical method a truly scientific method of analysis. Yet, he has given due consideration to historical understanding of a phenomenon to understand the causality behind its presence. He also believes that through the study of causality of social milieu we can reach scientific sociology. Society as a reality is different from the individual reality; it is Sui Generis or a kind of its own; and secondly, that social facts originate from other social facts, and these are never the products of human minds or individual consciousness.

**Functional Analysis:** In Durkheim's sociological research method functionalism or functional analysis has considerable importance. Durkheim, following Spencer, has applied this concept to understand how societies work, maintain and change themselves. According to Durkheim society is a complex system of many interrelated and interconnected parts that work together to maintain the order and stability of the system as a whole. To study society sociologists need not to confine themselves to individuals only but to observe social facts like laws, values, morality, religious beliefs, fashion, customs, rituals etc. because the society sustains on them. Individuals are, no doubt, important parts of society, but all these social facts perform one or more functions in a society. But he has also mentioned that a social fact can exist even if does not perform any function at all; because a social fact may continue to exist even though it has no apparent significance or even after its purpose has been done away with.

He has established it clearly that the study of social phenomena requires a clear understanding of the causes behind its emergence and the functions it fulfills. Sociological investigations should combine historical analysis and comparative method with functional analysis.

## 3.2.5 Appraisal of Durkheim's Contribution in Methodology:

Emile Durkheim is the product of the political climate of his time. During the second half of the nineteenth century, France was in the midst of grave political crisis concerning political activist Dreyfus that affected France's national unity. To recover and restore the unity, France depended, firstly, on the study of science and scientific researches and secondly, on the idea of social progress. During this period Durkheim has felt the need for a scientific study of sociology after Comte's positivism. But Comte is not the only influence in his life as he has also adopted the realist perspective to study the social realities of objective relations. Another important aspect of his thought is his belief in the power of the collectivity by going against the intellectual tide in France. Since the establishment of French Republic

and the Declaration of the Rights of Man, individual was considered to be the center of social universe. He has also opposed the utilitarian doctrine of society made of spontaneous acts of individuals. During the second half of the nineteenth century utilitarian philosophy had a powerful presence in Europe's intellectual history. Thus, Durkheim not only has opened up many new areas of sociological thought, he has done all these by opposing many of the then existing currents of thought. His contribution in establishing the rules to be followed in sociological research is most praiseworthy; because by doing this he has not only distinguished it from other branches of knowledge like psychology and philosophy but has also outlined the scope of sociology's subject matter and steps of its investigation.

### 3.2.6 Glossary

**Constraints:** Constraints are elements that restrict someone or something by imposing limitations on one's behavior.

**Functional Analysis:** Functional analysis is used to explain the workings of a complex system. In this analysis the system is explained with reference to the functions it does and the purpose of the system is also explained with reference to its functions.

## 3.3 Division of Labor

### 3.3.1 Basic Concept:

The terms 'society' and 'social' are integral parts of Durkheim's study of social facts. He believes that society is a unique entity which is structurally greater than the sum-total of its parts or members. It is sui generis in character and is quite distinct from the individuals who form it. For this reason, there is a common belief that Durkheim has given more importance to the society than individuals. But in many of his well-known. So he believes, when the rights of the individual are defended, vital interests of the society also remain protected.

Durkheim's ideas about the relations between individual and society first appeared in his doctoral thesis-The Division of Labour (De la division du travail social) in 1893. The book is an exploration of the relationship between society or collectivity and its constituent parts or individuals. Here Durkheim has been driven by an urge to understand how individuals arrive at a consensus, which is the basic condition of collective social existence and has examined two completely different types of society, namely, simple and advanced, and their corresponding forms of solidarity, i.e., mechanical and organic.

### 3.3.1.1 Mechanical Solidarity:

He finds simple societies homogenous in character with individuals resembling each other in their values, beliefs, emotions and ideas so much that there hardly exists any difference between them. The society is formed and acquires meaning because of this unwavering sameness of the members. As time passes, the society gets transformed with regular increase in population, advancement in technology, industry, mobility and communication, a different kind of solidarity comes into existence to replace the older one. The new type of solidarity or the organic solidarity is composed of coherent unity and consensus based on the differences of heterogeneous members of the group.

As per his observation, in archaic or primitive societies, each individual is so similar to every other that they become interchangeable; their consciousness, common or collective feelings, intensity of feelings, everything is similar. In such societies primitive people live as tight social groups where members remain cocooned within their own self-sufficient group, separated from all other groups, with almost no communication with the outside world. However, segmental structure is, sometimes, found in some very advanced societies like England as well. The primitive societies enjoy greater authority and freedom at the cost of individual's freedom of decision and action. Social imperatives, especially the religious ones are maintained with precision with the help of violent intolerance towards deviation-major or minor whatever be the case. Thus, in archaic societies individuals always remain at the receiving end surrendering meekly to the will of the society.

### 3.3.1.2 Organic Solidarity:

In contrast, advanced and more complex industrial societies characterized by heterogeneity and division of labor offer individuals far more scope for personal freedom and deviation from the accepted norms does not elicit that much violent reaction from the society. In the post-industrial society people enjoy more freedom in every sphere of their life and they learn to use that liberty rationally, judiciously. They come to understand that to enjoy freedom and to guarantee rights, they need to love and respect each other; they must also depend on each other voluntarily. Therefore, in modern society a new kind of solidarity emerges which binds people together yet lets them enjoy their own freedom of thought, expression and work. Durkheim has always believed in the primacy of society over individuals. This belief of his can be examined from two angles-firstly, by analyzing how in the primitive societies individuals resemble each other so much that their independent voice and identity get lost; and secondly by examining how in modern societies the control over individuals is less rigid to allow people acquire their own individual identity and enjoy the freedom and ability to express it.

### 3.3.2 Division of Labour and Social Solidarity:

Durkheim's understanding of division of labor differs from the way the economists explain it. Economists view it purely from the angle of production and connect all other social activities as parts of economic activities. Durkheim explains It as a structure for the whole of the society; technical and economic division of labor being mere parts of that larger structure. For him, division of labor acts as a developer of social harmony and voluntary cooperation of all individuals. Though it is one of the most significant ideas in the sociology of Durkheim, he is not the first author to write on it. Adam Smith was the first thinker to shed light on the issue of division of labor in a well-governed, wealthy society. But the difference between the two thinkers is that while Smith has taken up the issue from the angle of economy and production, Durkheim accepts it as a moral fact and has utilized this concept to understand the moral consequences of the growing complexities within modern societies and its impact over human societies.

For Durkheim, society is a living phenomenon, a whole that is not formed by the mere amalgamation of individuals; but something more than that. By using the concept of division of labor as a key to understand its true nature he has explained how it generates specific bond among members and the necessities it fulfills. This bond of solidarity is not simple empathy, but a creative bond between highly specialized parts of a modern advanced society. Though the book Division of Labor was published in 1893 the ideas of the thesis remained with Durkheim for many years. He has always believed that individuals draw all their values and morals from the society itself. He has also categorically mentioned that individualism is a social product. The modern society, with values based on principles of division of labor, encourage autonomy and fraternity among the members. Therefore, people in such a society remain bonded together, voluntarily and spontaneously, in the interests of the common good, and not because of any kind of force used by the social body.

### 3.3.2.2 Abnormal forms of Division of Labour:

However, Durkheim is not unaware of the possibilities of problems in modern society because, as he sees it, the division of labour may not always function properly and has spoken of its two abnormal forms. These two abnormal forms are (a) anomic division of labor and (b) forced division of labor. We need to discuss these two forms in detail.

    (a) **Anomic division of labor:** From Durkheim's detailed examination of advanced industrial societies we come to know that in such societies division of labor provides the 'glue' to keep the members integrated

and dependent on each other. Yet, if there appear any commercial and industrial crises in the society, the organic solidarity may get disturbed. For example, there may arise any conflict between the capital and labor if the employer and the employee drift away from each other and a lack of solidarity. This is an anomic division of labor creating a sense of confusion and rootlessness, lack of social regulation due to disruption or quick change in division of labor.

Though normally crime is associated with anomie, Durkheim has not included it as part of breakdown and considers it as differentiation and distances it from division of labor. If the division of labor fails to produce solidarity then it reveals the state of anomy and mal-functioning of the organs. Durkheim, almost like Marx, has discussed the conditions of the workers in a capitalist society, the degrading nature of the division of labor and its impact on the workers, the monotony of their job, and the machine like actions of the workers-everything has been described by him as products of abnormal and exceptional circumstances.

(b) **Forced Division of Labour:** Another abnormal form is forced division of labor. It may take place when spontaneous division of labor is not allowed to grow and when some factors attach less importance to the common good and more to the personal or sectional interests. Castes, classes or traditional forms or any other factors that prevent individuals to achieve positions commensurate with their natural skill and ability are indicative of a forced division of labor. Whenever the most able person is denied of certain position best suited to him it indicates the presence of forced division of labor.

## 3.3.4 Glossary

**Archaic Society:** 'Archaic' means extremely old or of a very ancient period of art, culture or civilization. Archaic societies with their very old culture existed during approximately 8,000-2,000 BC. People in those societies were primarily hunter-gatherer, lived in large groups and had very rudimentary form of agriculture.

**Advanced Industrial Society:** Advanced or industrial society is a society driven by the use of modern technology and external sources of energy like fossil fuel, electricity etc. for mass production, for a large population with a high capacity for division of labour.

**Division of Labour:** The separation of tasks in any work process into a number of tasks with each task performed by a separate person or group of persons for better and more systematic production of goods. It also helps the workers to be more skillful and acquire specialization in their tasks.

**Individualism:** It is a moral stance, social theory, political philosophy to favour the freedom of action over collective or state control.

# 3.4 Suicide

## 3.4.1 Basic concepts:

Suicide A Study in Sociology (1897) is a very valuable and important work by Durkheim; his observations on suicide as a 'social fact' in this book has turned the tide of suicide-analysis from a philosophical or psychological standpoint to a sociological one. Durkheim was one of the many researchers of that time who were increasingly becoming interested in studying the problem of suicide in different parts of Europe. We can name Guerry, Lisle, Legoyt, Quetelet, Wagner, Masaryk, Morselli and Ferri amongst his predecessors and contemporaries whose observations and explanations encouraged him to present his own theory of suicide as a social fact. He could well assert that the causes of suicide will always remain hidden within the very structure of the society. If members lack a sense of integration with the society there are more chances that they will commit suicide in a greater number.

Durkheim first explored the facts of suicide in 1888 as a part of his study on the subject and then he delivered a number of lectures on the topic on the basis of his findings in the next two years. Then in 1897 the first methodological study of suicide as a social fact titled as Suicide A Study in Sociology and written by Durkheim saw the light of the day. In his analysis he has negated the other existing theories of his time that explained suicide as an extra-social factor resulting from causes like mental alienation, geographical and climatic conditions, heredity, race and such other biological factors. He also negated Gabriel Tarde's popular doctrine of imitation; and rejected many of the ideas of the renowned thinkers of his time and carefully prepared a theory based on the social causes only. For this reason, he has not considered suicide as an isolated act of an individual but has considered it with reference to its social concomitants. He has studied a number of issues in a given social situation like religious faith, marital status, family structure, character of political and national communities, etc. to come to a definite conclusion about the causation of suicide. In the process, he has classified all incidents of suicide into three categories of egoistic, altruistic and anomic types of suicide.

To understand Durkheim's view on suicide it is essential to examine its social context first. Suicide, by the late nineteenth century, was increasing in Europe under the impact of rapid industrialization, decline of social cohesion, dominance

of economic institutions over other social institutions and increasing primacy of individual's interests over collective interests. With rising individual freedom and liberty, individual occupied the center-stage in social life and the level of society's control over men reduced gradually. Supported by the principles of individualism and liberty, people also started to challenge the ideas of collective social purposes in life. Amidst this fast changing social backdrop Durkheim examined thousands of suicide case records and classified the victims on the basis of age, sex, religion, occupation, military service and marital status for understanding the role of the social factors behind such deaths. Altogether he studied the records of 26,000 deaths by suicide to find that more than suicide being itself a problem, it acted as a reflector of several deep rooted crises in the modern society. Therefore, he wanted to examine it as a social fact in relation to all other social facts. It was not that he was the first thinker to produce a well-conceived theory of suicide; much before him in France, Germany and Italy doctrines explaining suicide were aplenty and Durkheim was energized by their doctrines to prepare a theory of his own.

## 3.4.2 Essence of Durkheim's Theory of Suicide:

As a sociologist Durkheim could never accept that suicides were caused by factors like mental disorder or depression or by accidents like sudden tragedy like personal setbacks alone. Therefore, he eliminated all these factors as probable causes of suicide to locate the causes hidden within the social context and strived to find a connection between the individuals and his social world. Durkheim believed that through various social activities people remained attached to their immediate social groups and also to their wider social environment comprised of family group, religious group and the national political group like state. People kill themselves not due to any psychological reason but due to the pressures generated by various social forces making them detached, isolated and alienated from all the others. The erosion of social connections in a modern, industrial society often leads to the promotion of private ego to the extent of pre-occupation with self only and that may lead to suicide. Therefore, he focused on the role of the social forces like religion, family-life patterns, type of military obligation, etc. and thus on the social suicide rates to understand and compare the differences between suicide rates in different societies. He also wanted to understand the bonds that tie individuals and the society at various points of their existence; weakening of these bonds would lead to an increase in the autonomy of the individuals and an erosion of integrative ties between them. Integration of individuals with the collective social body acts as a check on the growth of individual egoism and acts of suicide, and we come to understand how society's integrative role keeps individuals under control. As a clue to the social forces behind man's self-destruction Durkheim has shown how under

the pressure of different social circumstances different types of suicides, namely, egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic, may occur. His study also reveals why one social group is more suicide prone than the others when biological, psychological and social-psychological factors remain more or less constant over a period of time. Before coming to his final conclusion he has rejected factors like individual psychology, alcoholism, race, heredity and climate after thorough empirical testing. He also rejected a very popular theory proposed by French social psychologist Gabriel Tarde that suggests that people commit suicide by seeing or imitating others who commit suicide even though he admits that imitation may have a very small role and insignificant impact on the overall data on suicide. On the basis of his studies based on case-records, Durkheim has classified suicides into four types, eg., egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic by linking each one of these types with certain degree of social integration. He has also introduced the concept of regulation to indicate the degree of external control over individuals and its impact on suicide; for example, high social regulation often leads to fatalistic suicide while inadequate social regulation may lead to anomic suicide.

An important characteristic of Durkheim's theory of suicide is the analysis of 'social suicide rate'; for this he collected mortality data for the period between 1841 to 1872 from a number of countries like France, Germany, Denmark, Italy, Austria and England. The data records contained all the detailed information regarding the deceased persons and their deaths like the number of deaths by suicide in a country, causes of suicide, age, marital status, religion, occupation, military service details, etc. Thus, from the 'social suicide rate' one can get not only the number of suicide but also its pattern or trend in a given society; he pointed towards the active presence of certain underlying social conditions for which the cases of suicide are unlikely to be caused by psychological factors. Durkheim was quite confident that on the basis of the data he collected a social theory of suicide could easily be prepared. He rejected the psychological explanation of suicide on the ground that motives cannot explain why people commit suicide in a particular society at a particular point of time.

In Durkheim's opinion, the three most important groups to which the individuals belong and that generate social integration are the family group, the religious group and the national political group or the state.

With the help of an enormous amount of data on suicide Durkheim could separate social suicide rates or suicide due to social causes and individual suicides and could explain why suicide rates vary from society to society. He reasoned that from the quality of social integration of individuals it could be ascertained that the causes of suicide actually lay within distinct social environments like religious faith,

family structure and bonding, military obligations and duties and such other things. He also came to realize that if integrative social mechanisms produce greater bond between the society and its members, then there will be less suicide. However, the weakening of integrative functions, especially in an industrial society where there is an excess of sense of autonomy and egoism, there will be higher number of egoistic suicide. On the other hand, it is also true that if there is an excessive amount of integration with the society that too will cause problems leading to increasing number of suicide.

## 3.4.3 Types of Suicide:

Depending on the nature and degree of people's integration to society or the lack of it, Durkheim has classified the acts of suicide into four types, namely, the egoistic type, the altruistic type, the anomic type and the fatalistic type. Whitney Pope, following Durkheim, has shown how suicides are related to degrees of social integration and regulation in the following way-

Low Level of Integration → Egoistic Suicide

High Level of Integration → Altruistic Suicide

Low Level of Integration → Anomic Suicide

High Level of Integration → Fatalistic Suicide (Ritzer. 2011.86)

These types require more detailed discussion.

### 3.4.3.1 Egoistic Suicide:

Egoistic suicide occurs in societies or groups when people are not sufficiently integrated into the larger social group. This can happen when collective conscience is weak and individuals feel lesser urge to respect the social order and are more eager to act on their own; weakened collective conscience and unrestrained egoism often lead first to heightened dissatisfaction and then to suicide. On the other hand, when there prevails a strong sense of social integration within the primary and secondary groups like the family, the religious group and the polity, society will definitely be discouraged. Egoistic suicide occurs when a person becomes socially isolated or detached from his social groups and feels that he has no place in the society, so he kills himself. Egoistic suicide takes place when a person's ego is flared up enough to make him self-centered and he perceives himself as lonely and isolated in the world with very low social interaction with others.

From the extensive data he collected, Durkheim could establish certain links between religious faith, marital status and suicide. His conclusion was based on a comparison of suicide rates of several Catholic and Protestant countries and he found there were more suicides in Protestant countries compared to the Catholic

countries. Amongst the Jews the rate of suicide was very less. This happens because Protestantism encourages autonomy, freedom of thought and individualist spirit among men while Catholicism and Judaism encourage solidarity among the believers and surrender of people to the authority and control of the community. From this, it can be guessed that the powerful presence of common beliefs and practices to which almost all the members of the group surrender, makes the sense of integration strong; and the stronger the integration, the greater is its preservative value. All these act as a preventive measure against suicide.

Durkheim's second observation regarding egoistic suicide is that married persons, especially those with children commit less suicide than unmarried persons because marriage gives some kind of immunity of its own against suicide. As the density of the family increases, the immunity against suicide also increases because spouses and children act as barriers. In large families with several members common sentiments and memories remain very intense and powerfully integrated. Thus, strong social integration provides individuals with greater meaning of life and well balanced sustenance for limiting the number of suicide successfully. On the contrary, if social integration remains low and weak, individuals ignore the dictates of the collective conscience and act according to their own free will in whatever manner they wish. The sense of social isolation arouses in individuals the pain of rejection from the society and it may ultimately lead to suicide.

The third point of integration is the political integration or integration under national identity. Common citizenship of a nation binds people together and invokes a sense of duty and obligation towards the polity. Disintegration from the national identity may also fill oneself with extreme gloom and despair. Durkheim has shown, taking examples from different periods of history that whenever there is any political turmoil or decline, the number of suicide increases. But even during the period of political uncertainty strong nationalist sentiment may be evoked to inspire people to think more about the common national causes than about their narrow selfish interests.

Thus, through a detailed analysis of social integration Durkheim has shown how it plays an important role in the incidents of suicide. Social integration creates social duties to connect individuals closely with other fellow beings, institutions and social groups, with the ties of common beliefs and collective purposes and to bring them out of their own private shells. Secondly, social integration also creates ties of interdependency and social obligation. Thirdly, it prevents excessive individualism and social isolation. All these act together as a barrier against suicide.

### 3.4.3.2 Altruistic Suicide:

Altruistic suicide is caused by over-integration with the society when people believe that it is their duty to sacrifice their life for the greater good of the society. Juxtaposed with the egoistic suicide type, altruistic suicide is caused by rudimentary development of individualism; people willfully end their lives as they come to believe it as their sacred duty.

Suicide is not a modern phenomenon; among the primitive people also it was quite common. In many societies old people who were sick, widowed women and servants or followers of the chief of a group had to commit suicide would commit suicide out of the belief that it was their obligation and failure to do that would bring dishonor and punishment by religious sanctions. Durkheim finds the practice of 'sati' once practiced by Hindu widows an example of altruistic suicide. Altruistic suicide is the result of very strict tutelage of the society over individuals. Being caused by intense altruism it is called altruistic suicide and is performed as a duty towards the social whole. Durkheim calls it obligatory altruistic suicide.

Altruistic suicide is also common among Japanese Samurai soldiers who prefer death by harakiri over defeat and associated dishonor by. In this type of suicide individuals kill themselves primarily for the joy and glory of sacrifice and also for the consideration of renunciation as praiseworthy. Ancient India, under the influence of Brahminic values, emerged as the perfect soil for this kind of suicide. The ancient value system demanded that a person should willfully end his mortal life at a matured age, once all the duties towards his family are completed, leaving his progenies behind. Among many Hindu sects there is a belief in sacrificing life for higher bliss and emancipation. In Jainism suicide has been elevated to a solemn religious practice.

Altruistic suicide takes several different forms and Durkheim distinguishes three distinct types based on certain type of duty as a reason for taking one's own life with or without coercive pressure from the community. One form is obligatory altruistic suicide or suicide imposed by the society on its members as a duty. Social prestige may also be attached to the act. This may occur when an individual is sick or ageing and his life has little value to the group. Durkheim reasons that, under the pressure of social expectation people often readily give up their life. As it has been mentioned earlier, the Hindu 'sati' ritual is one example of this type of suicide because society here expects that upon widowhood, it is the sacred duty of the widow to voluntarily self-immolate herself on her husband's pyre. Other examples of obligatory altruistic suicide include throwing oneself under the chariot during the rathayatra festival or attaining 'jal samadhi', i.e. drowning oneself in the holy tanks of the temples. In all these and similar other cases suicide or self-killing is

neither a personal choice nor a private will but an obligation imposed externally by religious society.

Durkheim describes the second type as optional altruistic suicide. It may appear similar to the first type though there are certain subtle differences between the two. This type also involves expectations of the society and suicide become an honorable act as it means (for a particular group) giving up of one's life for the causes of the group.

The third type of altruistic suicide is known as acute altruistic suicide and this is the most extreme form of altruistic self-annihilation. In this case, individual becomes so attached to the group that renunciation of life gives him the 'joy of sacrifice' (Morrison: 2006.221). Integration to the group becomes so overpowering and group is given so much importance that individualism does not get a good chance to develop. In such cases the society is induced and imposed on the individual. People commit suicide on the belief that their life is being sacrificed for the causes of the country or for the benefit of the group. Therefore, death is chosen as a matter of glorious sacrifice over life; military suicides are examples of this kind of altruistic suicide.

### 3.4.3.3 Anomic Suicide:

Durkheim used the concept of anomie for the first time in 1893 in his famous work The Division of Labour. Four years later, he used the concept again, in 1897, to describe the moral decline, disruption of values and deterioration in the standard of social regulations in the industrial society. He has observed that in industrial society material desires of people grow limitlessly while the society fails to put a cap on that. In such circumstances people violate norms and thus a state of anomie or normlessness sets in. Suicides committed under the impact of this situation have been named as anomic suicide.

Anomic suicide takes place when society goes through any kind of disruption, be it positive or negative in nature. Disruptive changes put people in situations where old, established norms no longer apply and new norms are yet to appear; it aggravates the disruptions in order and a normless or anomic state appears to impact the life of the people. The suicides that take place under such disruptive conditions are known as anomic suicides. To substantiate his concept of anomic suicide Durkheim has referred to the industrial society of Europe that was under bouts of economic recession in the mid-19th century (1845-1869) and that witnessed a manifold increase in the rate of suicide. Though he has clarified that this rate rises or declines according to the waxing or waning of economic prosperity he has not blindly linked it with the rate of growth or downfall of economy because there were several other important factors like disruption in norms or absence of

effective regulatory mechanism associated with the rise in the rate of suicide. To put it simply, as per Durkheim's observation, anomic suicide takes place when society fails to impose sufficient restraint on individual's material desires. In the animal world needs and demands remain limited to physical wants that can be satisfied naturally. This is also true for human society in many cases though in the industrial society human desires find the scope to soar unbounded; yet many of these desires may remain unattainable causing a sense of despair and alienation among many people. This becomes the actual reason behind suicide.

### 3.4.4.4 Fatalistic Suicide:

Compared to the other three types of suicide discussed by Durkheim, this fourth type is comparatively lesser known and is discussed less than the others. Durkheim himself discussed it in a footnote of his book Suicide. This is caused by the excessive control of the society over its members who resent it but find no way to come out of that. People may have to surrender to that control and follow every dictate of the persons in control of them; externally they may have to show signs of surrender and submission to the authority in all their activities but internally they may resent the control. Under such circumstances fatalistic suicides may take place. Slaves, who face extreme oppression and find all their escape routes to freedom and opportunities are blocked, may kill themselves out of despair. Too much restraint and complete absence of freedom may create a state of melancholy in the minds of the long suffering people that may ultimately lead to suicide.

## 3.4.5 Critical Assessment of Durkheim's Theory of Suicide:

In his study on suicide Durkheim's goal was to understand what drives men towards suicide and what factors might compel them to bring their life to an end. After considering the probable effects of economic hardships, religion, marriage and military activities on suicide he came to realize that there must have been some other more impactful factors like absence of social integration and that could explain suicide more rationally. His approach was so far ahead of his time that it did not receive support from other sociologists of the west. In 1897, when his study on suicide saw the light of the day, many eminent scholars in Europe and America could not agree with him as they were convinced that suicide was an outcome of certain psychiatric disorder. They felt that Durkheim had ignored the more relevant psychological factors located deep within the psyche of the individual in favour of the external factors. By the late 19th century, when Durkheim's study was published, researchers in Europe and America were examining the psychological factors to find out the causes of suicide. Therefore, they summarily dismissed Durkheim's observations on suicide and its relations with social circumstances. American

scholars, in particular, attached so much importance to the individual factors that social factors appeared insignificant for them. By 1890s the Chicago University scholars had already started to study suicide by focusing on individuals; therefore, linking suicide to social factors was not acceptable to them. Their dislike for the social explanation of suicide was so strong that even though Chicago University was known as the primary center for the social sciences then they did not consider it as worth mentioning in their review.

Much later, however, Durkheim's analysis of suicide and its causes has earned its due recognition from all corners of the globe. It is known as the first theory to suggest how social factors can influence human perspectives towards life and how both over-integration and under-integration with society can impact life and death.

## 3.4.6 Summary:

Durkheim's Suicide is a very important text for the discipline of sociology. Though it was initially ignored by many of his contemporaries, it has remained not only influential in the study of suicide but also has altered the course of discussion on the subject to a great extent. In his multivariate statistical analysis, he has considered factors like country, marital status, education level and religion to explain variations in suicide rates. His study reveals that Protestants with higher educational qualifications and highly aroused individualism are more prone to suicide than Catholics who are generally less educated but more integrated to society than them. The Jewish people, being better integrated to the society, have far less number of suicides though they are highly educated. With the help of his intensive study he has arrived at a typology of suicide based on different degrees of integration and levels of regulation with egoistic, altruistic, anomic and fatalistic suicides.

## 3.4.7 Glossary:

**Gabriel Tarde:** Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904) was a French sociologist of the nineteenth century period. He was also a criminologist and social psychologist who perceived sociology as a study of small psychological interactions among individuals. He was one of the most versatile social scientists of his time and many of his views contradicted Durkheim's ideas.

**Harakiri:** Harakiri, a Japanese term, connotes ceremonial suicide committed by the members of highly respected warrior class by disembowelment with a sword or dagger. It was an ancient Samurai tradition practiced in Japan as an honourable alternative to disgrace, execution or any kind of inglorious death.

**Samurai:** The word Samurai denotes the ancient warrior class in Japan. In fact, they belonged to the hereditary military nobility and officer community of the

medieval and early-modern Japan. They enjoyed high prestige and special privileges for their capacities as fearless warriors and feudal landholders for about seven centuries starting from the late 12th century till 1876, when the special status and privileges were abolished.

**Sati:** Sati or Suttee was a traditional Hindu practice in which a widow sacrificed herself on the burning funeral pyre of her deceased husband. Orthodox beliefs and superstitions let the practice continue for ages until Raja Rammohan Roy advocated against it and the East India Company Governor General, Lord Bentinck, prohibited it in 1829 by passing the Bengal Sati Regulation Act.

# 3.5 Relegion

## 3.5.1 Introduction:

Durkheim's interest in religion was aroused quiet late in his life as in the cultural and intellectual environment of post-revolution France reasoning and rational thinking had been appreciated much more than spirituality and belief in the super-naturals. He himself admitted that prior to 1895 he never had a clear view of the essential role of religion in social life, and only since that year he became interested in understanding religion as a social fact. By that time he had come into contact with a number of eminent English and American anthropologists like E.B. Taylor, Frazer and Robertson Smith whose observations on religion had invoked an interest regarding the same in his mind. Out of that interest he wanted to unearth the true essence of religion and the ways and means of reaching that. In his last great work, the Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912) he set out to uncover the universal properties of religion. Though he was well acquainted with the theories of religion propounded by all noted anthropologists of his time, he never accepted the existing theories based on the concept of magic, anima, animism, etc., as, he felt, none of these could truly offer an explanation of relations between society and its members. For him, religion always played a role in keeping people integrated and controlled within the social limits; and his belief in the regulatory role of religion had led him to examine its various aspects like sacred and profane. Durkheim was convinced that religion was social and not personal. To prove his point he examined the importance of two opposite elements of life like the sacred religious symbols and profane rituals of everyday life-the first integrated people and the second remained concerned with the narrow private space.

In his quest for the truth behind religion Durkheim assumed that it would be most evident in the simpler religions of the simplest of societies. For that reason

he studied the religious practices of the Arunta tribe of Central Australia without ever going to Australia or by doing any field-research. In Durkheim's theory of religion certain concepts occupy the central position, these are his ideas about the sacred, the profane and totem; therefore this section will take note of all of them.

## 3.5.2 Sacred and Profane: Meaning and Nature:

Durkheim did not accept any of the existing theories of religion, and concluded that religion, in general, was composed of two essential elements: Sacred and Profane. His conclusion was based on the belief that neither the idea of the supernatural nor the concept of God formed the necessary attributes of religion. He argued, the idea of the God and of the supernatural were not necessarily the concerns of religion; on the contrary, it was more concerned with two distinctly opposite categories-the Profane or the earthly elements and the Sacred or the element that transcended the profane. This dichotomy of the sacred and the profane, according to Durkheim, was nothing but the dichotomy of the social and the individual. In short, the sacred and its celebration could help men integrate with the society as a whole and would give them a sense of belonging and would widen their horizon by locating them within the larger society. On the other hand, the profane remained connected to man's narrow personal sphere.

The sacred had certain unique features like firstly, a taboo character, a separateness from earthly phenomena; and secondly, an object of aspiration, love and respect. It was both a source of constraint (taboo) and respect (authority). In Durkheim's view sacred was represented by 'Church', even the primitive tribes had their own church or Places of worship. His example for the 'profane' or 'vulgar' activity was labour that generated grief and sorrow. The significance of the sacred is revealed through its distinction from the profane; the profane, can by no means touch the sacred.

The sacred items are kept in a place, safe and secured from an intruder and in the process the sacredness of that element is passed on to the place where they are kept. To protect the sacred quality of the designated element, the Aruntas of Australia women and the uninitiated are prohibited from coming near the sacred place.

Durkheim, in his The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912) observes that the sacred in a society is not merely useful to the people, it also binds the collective fate of the entire clan with it. Therefore, losing it will be ominous for the clan. The totems are sacred because they represent the whole clan. Apart from the images of the totem, the sacredness remains ingrained in other beings like the object of rites.

### 3.5.3 Summary:

Durkheim was the pioneer of sociology of religion to discuss the significance religion in society in terms of sacred and profane aspects of life. He has explained the sacred as representative of the group's or clan's interests and unity. The totem or the clan's symbol represents the unity of interests of the clan-members. The profane, in contrast, represents the mundane, everyday existence of the group-members. Though these two aspects of life express two opposite sides of clan's life, in no way they may be compared to the binary of good and evil. Profane, though not as pure as the sacred, is not evil either; nor it is secular in nature and it represents only the mundane elements and activities of life. The most sacred of all the elements is the totem, the center of the clan's existence and identity; therefore, it also becomes the center of all sacred rituals. As Durkheim has noticed, women are not considered fit enough either to participate in or to witness many of the sacred rituals.

In spite of their differences in status and spirit, Durkheim's sacred is only conceivable in terms of the profane. Anything can be sacred; the only thing that matters is how society separates it from the profane. The profane and the sacred are so heterogeneous that they cannot come close to each other by maintaining their own qualities. Rites and other rules of conduct prescribe how man should behave in the presence of the sacred things. In conclusion, it can be said that while the profane refers to mundane, ordinary life and everyday activities of man, the sacred refers to anything and everything that transcends that ordinary daily existence. Religion emerges as the collective practice of marking off and maintaining distance between the sacred and the profane through rituals and prayers.

By studying the religious life and practices of primitive men he actually wanted to have a deep insight into the world of modern men and their religion. To Durkheim, all religions were 'true' and thus equal. He wanted to understand modern religion by analyzing the path of their historical progression from the primitive stage. Secondly, he also believed that there were certain common elements at the root of all systems of belief and cults. Primitive societies offered privileged cases of the study of religion because these societies were far more simple and homogeneous with uniformity of thought and conduct. The primitive religions, in spite of their differences from modern religious, offered a key to understand them. Though many of the anthropologists of his time had claimed animism or naturism to be the earliest of all religions, he came to accept totemism or worship of totems as the most ancient form of religion. He found traces of totemism among certain North American tribes and also among the tribes of Central and Northern Australia. The clans belonging to these tribes worshipped and protected their totems-be it

animals or plants or any other elements of nature-because they considered them extremely sacred. In this way, totemic principles and practices acted quite effectively in protecting the environment. Though Durkheim himself did not make any field surveys, he meticulously collected data from a number of ethnographic studies made by renowned anthropologists like Morgan, Spencer and Gillen, Strehlow and von Leonhardi, Frazer and many others and built up his own theory of religion and its role in man's social life in his iconic book The Elementary Forms of Religious Life (1912).

## 3.5.4 Totem and Totemism:

Totems are, to put it simply, the collective symbols that represent both god and society; and society is the soul of religion. This representation makes god and society one and the same. Totems are extremely sacred hence fiercely protected objects in a clan's life. Any natural element like animals, plants or any other objects can be accepted by the group as their totems. Members of the clans in a pre-literate society pay respect to their totems and maintain certain distance from the totem out of reverence. The belief in the sacredness of the totems and the practice of worshipping them is known as totemism. It is prevalent more among the pre-literate communities of North America, New Guinea, Malayasia and Central Australia.

The word 'totem' is derived from the Ojibwa word 'ototeman' meaning 'one's brother-sister kin.' 'Ote' indicates a blood-relationship between brothers and sisters who have the same mother and who are not allowed to marry each other. In English, the word totem was introduced in 1791 by a British merchant and translator who gave it a false meaning in the belief that it designated the guardian spirit of an individual, who appeared in the form of an animal-idea that the Ojibwa clans had portrayed by wearing animal skins; by the late eighteenth century it was reported that the Ojibwa people named their clans after the animals that could be found in their locality and that appeared to be either friendly or fearful.

### 3.5.4.1 Significance of Totem in Primitive Life:

Durkheim has defined religion as a unified system of beliefs and practices related to sacred things that brings people under one single moral community like Church. To Durkheim, totem worshipping is one of the earliest and the simplest form of religion. Under this belief system humans sense a mystical relationship or kinship with a spirit-being in the form of an animal or a plant. This entity or totem supposedly interacts with a given kin group or an individual to serve as their emblem or symbol. The term 'totemism' refers to certain traits in the region and social organization of many peoples. It is manifested in various forms and types in different contexts, and is most often found among population whose traditional

economies relied on hunting and gathering, mixed farming with gathering or cattle breeding. Totemism played an active role in the development of the late 19th and early-20th century theories of religion.

Totemism, in the opinion of Durkheim, refers to one of the most fundamental and primitive cults; more primitive and fundamental than animism and naturism. In spite of its very ancient existence, the term 'totem' came to appear in 1791 only in the ethnographical writings of John Long. Then for the next fifty years it was known as an American institution and only in 1841 its existence among the aborigines of Australia was brought to light through the articles of George Grey. But it was James McLennan,who for the first time, argued in 1870 that totemism was not only a religion that embraced a multiplicity of beliefs and practices but was also the source of all the ancient animal and plant worshipping cults. Durkheim, however, has not accepted McLennan's observations on totemism; by his own admission, since the late nineteenth century anthropologists like Lewis M. Morgan (Ancient Society,1877) and James Frazer(Golden Bough, 1890) had made extensive studies to observe and document the social organization of the pre-literate people of America and Australia. Such studies of totemic cult were, then, primarily concentrated on several tribes in and around Central and Northwestern parts of America. Durkheim has felt that despite compilation of enormous data, the documents were fragmentary in character because documentation on Australia's tribes remained concentrated on the beliefs, rites and prohibitions relative to the totem only. He has found Australia as the most favourable area for the study of totemism though he has never visited Australia and has depended on the available documents only. He has tried to know the beliefs on which the totemic religion and its practices rest.

Durkheim has discussed his theory on totemic cults in two parts-the first part contains the intellectual conceptions or beliefs and the second part contains analysis of rites or religious practices of Australia's aborigines. Though he has mentioned the beliefs and practices of many a tribes, he has primarily focused in the practices of the Arunta tribe of Australia. Amongst the tribal groups he has noticed the existence of multiple clans or kinship groups with members bearing the same name and respecting obligations of help and prohibitions on marriage. Such clans or clan-like groups were always present in every other society. Both the clans and the clan-members worship a totem that not only give them their distinct identity, but also represent the clan as a whole even hen members disperse over different places. No two clans can share the same totem unless and until they are the dispersed units of the same clan. Totems can be selected from both animal and plant species; similarly other natural elements can also be accredited as totems. Alfred William Howitt, in his famous ethnographic book-The Native Tribes of

South-East Australia (1904)-has listed over 500 totemic names popular among the tribes living in the Southwest part of Australia at that time. Of all these, only about forty belong to other natural elements like clouds, rain, hail, frost, noon, sun, wind, autumn summer, winter etc. Of all these names, rain was the most popular natural phenomenon as totem. Usually normal natural elements are worshipped as totems, but there can be certain abnormalities in some of them if clans are subdivided into many parts. For example, amongst the Arunta and the Loritja, even body parts of sacred animals can be hailed as totems. More commonly, totem is actually a whole species of either an animal or a plant; but occasionally totems are named after certain mythical beings, instead of after a real thing. As an explanation to this, Durkheim has observed that due to various causes the collective and impersonal totem may gradually allow certain mythical elements to turn into totems themselves.

As a sociologist Durkheim has felt that the relationship between a totemic name and the organization of the clan should come under the purview of sociology of family rather than under the sociology of religion. He has pointed out that a clan can get its totem in three different ways. Firstly, in a majority of cases, people inherit the totem of their mothers by birth as the mothers continue to use their pre-marriage totems and their maiden totemic names after their marriage, even when they continue to reside at their husbands' homes. Secondly, in other cases, totemic identity of a group is decided and transmitted through paternal line. This happens in a group where excepting the married women (wives) all other members stay in the same locality and share the same totem. The third method is more common among tribes like the Arunta and the Loritja. Here the totem is believed to be one mythical ancestor from whom the members of the clan originated in the ancient past mystically.

As the whole of the aborigine society is divided into a number of divisions and sub-divisions like phratries, clans and marriage-classes, Durkheim has also mentioned of the existence of the totem of the phratries. A phratry is a conglomeration of clans tied together by the bonds of fraternity. As Durkheim has noted, there has not been any tribe in Australia with more than two phratries and all the phratries are named after some animals. It can easily be assumed that these animals are nothing but totems of these groups. With time, phratries have faced gradual decline leading to the appearance of the clans in the forefront; but in principle each clan belongs to one particular phratry only. Phratries are further subdivided into marriage-classes and each of the subdivisions including clans and the phratry at the top, share the same totem.

Now, what exactly is totem? According to Durkheim, the totem is not simply a name, it is something more than that; it is practically an emblem, a badge of the

group. The term 'dodaim', from which the English word 'totem' has been derived, means "village or residence of a family group"(Durkheim, p.112, 1995) That means, clans and clan members are to be known in the name and identity of their totems. These totemic identities have multiple uses ; for example, finalization of contracts between clans or between clans and outsiders is done with their respective totemic seals; totems are often painted and displayed on the coats of arms, on walls of their (clan members') houses and on all kinds of things they own. In these and many other ways the tribes of North America and Australia traditionally used the images of their totems for safety, security and decorative purposes both during peace-time and war-time. The practice is in vogue till date. Totemic marks were, and still are, often imprinted on the bodies of the clan members in the less advanced societies. Durkheim has mentioned that among the Arunta body paintings and distortions like knife-gashes or extraction of teeth used to be done to resemble their totems. Among some of the North American tribes totemic marks are painted not only on the bodies of the living members but also on the body of the dead before burial.

Durkheim believes that totemism is a far more complex religion than it apparently appears to be. Under normal circumstances all the clans worship their own totems, but in some cases the clans become divided into subgroups with the same totems. In some other cases, tribes use to follow allies or auxiliary totems. These allies then act as sub-totems. The cult of each totem is celebrated and worshipped by its corresponding clan; the clan members bear responsibility for it, and through the process of socialization transmit the values and beliefs associated with it to younger generations. Being part of the same religious fold,all the clans remain aware of the existence of the others and their totemic practices. The clans also remain devoted to their totems because they accept the totemic animals or plants as their ancestors and as the source of all their special qualities and capabilities.

### 3.5.4.2 Totem in Relation to Man:

Totems and totemic images stir religious feelings and a sense of sacredness among the clan members. The things that are represented as totems are mainly animals and plants. Very interestingly, these sacred elements have some profane aspects too because these may be served as food; but being totem and thus sacred, a number of prohibitions are usually issued against their consumption. These can only be eaten on special occasions as mystical meals. There exist prohibitions against killing the totem animal or picking the sacred totemic plant, there are also prohibitions against even touching the whole or a part of the totemic elements because they live on the profane ground.

Due to such and many other complexity of totemic beliefs and practices, Durkheim has felt the need to understand all the relevant issues only with reference

to the concerning tribe as a whole. He describes it as a public institution shared by a clan, a phratry and the whole of the tribe in general; at the same time, it has a private aspect as individuals maintain a personal relationship with a particular object-be it inanimate, man-made being or a whole animal or any part of its body. The individual's name remains linked with the name of the collective totem (totem of the clan or tribe) and thus gives both the totemic element and the individual the same kind of identity. The bond between the two appears so close that the totem's qualities, both the good and the bad, rub on the person too. The animal becomes his alter ego; the connection between them is so intimate that when needed, especially in times of any crisis, the person supposedly can take up the animal's form. The two always remain interdependent; the animal becomes a patron of the worshipper by protecting him from all kinds of danger, and in return, the man must also protect and respect the totem by not killing or by not consuming its flesh. Thus, through the principle of respect and protection the whole species of the animal or plant becomes extremely sacred to the members of the collectivity.

**As we see it, there can be two kinds of totem:** the collective totem and the individual totem. The first type is hereditary in nature, man acquires it as a member of the clan through either his paternal or maternal line. The second type is acquired personally by a deliberate act. Durkheim has compared the systems of selection of personal totem among the Native Americans and Australian aborigines. Among the aborigines of America when a boy undergoes the process of clan initiation during puberty, he may dream or hallucinate or actually see his patron-animal and thus may accept it as his totem. But in Australia the personal totem of an individual is selected and imposed by a third party, either at birth or during initiation. However, the acquisition of individual totem is not always obligatory; because many Australian tribes do not even recognize any such custom. Among some of the Australian tribes only the magicians possess individual totems but common people may not have any such thing.

Durkheim has also examined an intermediate form between the collective and individual totemism, namely, sexual totemism, a term he has borrowed from Frazer to mean the practice of possessing different totems by male and female members of the group. However, this is found only among a very small number of Australian tribes in which men and women form two distinct and antagonistic gender-based groups, each having a totem specific to its sex. Each sex believes that it is a kin to a particular species of bird or animal that protects it from all sorts of danger and, in turn, that species should also be protected and respected. Killing or eating of that protected species is, therefore, forbidden. The sexual totem is to the gender-group what the totem is to the clan. It belongs to all the members of the

gender-group and the group believes in its descent from the sex-totem; and sharing of common blood between the two. Men and women of a clan not only respect the distinct totems of their own sex-group but also force the other sex-group to do the same. Any violation of this norm may lead to violence and bloody battles between males and females. The practice of maintaining and respecting different totems for different sexes emerges when the concerned tribe is considered the offspring of a mythical couple and also when the men and women members live apart from each other.

Bearing the name and identity of the totem bestows each member of the clan with certain sacredness that is generally found in their totem. This personal sacredness of the members is rooted in the belief that they are both human yet possess the qualities of their animal or plant totem.

## 3.5.5 Totemism vs. Other Simple Forms of Religion:

In his search for the most basic and most elementary form of religion, Durkheim has examined two other forms like animism and naturism. He is not the only thinker to do so because Tylor, Morgan, Spencer and Max Mueller had done meticulous studies on religious beliefs and practices of early societies and Durkheim has depended much on these studies. He has dwelt on great length on two elementary forms of religion like animism and naturism, which might have been the earliest forms of beliefs but are also known for their complexity, seemingly unsuitable to the primitive mentality of the earliest civilizations. Naturism is the religion under which the elements of nature like the cosmic forces of the winds, the sea, the sky, the stars, the sun, the moon, the earth and the rivers are worshipped. The objects that are found on the earth's surface like the plants, rocks and the mountains, the species of birds and animals are also worshipped by the followers of naturism. The other belief is more concerned with the spiritual or the supernatural beings like spirits, souls, genies, demons and deities-all the animate and conscious beings, similar in many ways to man, yet different from him because of their special characteristics and superior power. The characteristics of these spiritual beings are not always visible to the human eyes, nor do they affect the human senses in a regular manner. This belief in the power of the spirits is known as animism. Both naturism and animism help us understand the origin of religion from a rational point of view.

### 3.5.5.1 Animism:

Durkheim has based his views on animism on the analysis presented by Tyler and Spencer. It is believed to be one of the most ancient forms of religion to dwell on the idea of soul. The idea of soul comes to man as an answer to his quest for

an explanation of his dual existence-one while he is awake and the other when he is asleep. The primitive mind cannot make any distinction between the awakened state and the state of dreaming, therefore, whatever the man experiences in his dream he accepts them as real. With similar repeated experiences, he comes to believe in the existence of a double self within himself, the self that can leave the body as and when it wishes to travel distant places. This 'double' or dual self of the individual is, in many ways, similar to the beings men experience; yet it is different from those being in many ways. It can leave man's body supposedly through the openings like nose and mouth. Durkheim explains this 'double self' as the soul-'the built-in duality of man' (Durkheim.p.48). The soul is not spirit, but it can transform itself into spirit by means of sleep and death. For primitive men death and sleep are alike, both can separate the soul and the body. During sleep the body-soul separation is temporary and once the sleep is over, the body becomes fresh and rejuvenated; but in case of death the separation is permanent. As the body is destroyed at funeral the soul remains detached permanently from the body with liberty to roam freely and to impact people's lives in both positive and negative ways. The soul can act as allies or foes of the people; by entering their bodies they can either revitalize its potentials or can damage all its possibilities. Keeping in mind the extreme power of these souls people seek their benevolence and appease them with various religious rites like offerings, sacrifices, prayers, etc. Tyler has named this worship of souls or spirits of human origin as animism. He also believes that all religions, from the simplest to the most complex involve some kind of animism.

Though Durkheim has discussed the principles and practices of animism, he has not agreed with the arguments of this theory. He does not believe that an illusion or dream can explain religion extensively, but admits that it offers an explanation for soul.

### 3.5.5.2 Naturism:

The theory of naturism has been developed by noted Indologist and Sanskrit scholar Max Muller and Andrew Lang. It believes in the mystic power of the natural forces. Max Muller accepts naturism as the most ancient form of religion and suggests that men used to worship nature as transcendental or super natural. In sharp contrast to animism, naturism insists that religion rests upon the principal phenomena of nature. When the phenomena of time, space, force etc. cease to be in abstract form and get transformed into personal, conscious spirits or gods, the cult of nature then appears. Naturism has been boosted by the advent of language when men learnt to name and classify objects by their names. Durkheim believes, naturism is founded on our sensory experiences and language gives life to those

experiences. He also believes that naturism has originated because man has felt the need to understand his surroundings.

Durkheim has rejected both animism and naturism as he believes, firstly, none of the two can offer the key to explain the distinction between the sacred and the profane. Secondly, religion has been explained as an illusion by both. By suggesting love for unreal spirits or love for natural forces based on men's fear, these theories actually turn religious experiences into a kind of hallucination. He rather tries to offer a more authentic explanation of the most elementary form of religion with the help of totemism.

### 3.5.6 Summary:

Durkheim is of the opinion that religion is universal, it is found in all societies-modern and pre-modern, though its forms may vary from society to society and the simplest form is found in the pre-literate, primitive society. Refuting the claims of many renowned thinkers, he finds totemism as the earliest and the simplest form of religion. From the existing literature of his time he finds its existence among the Native American Indians of North America and the aborigines of Australia-all having clan-based societies. The tribes are divided into a number of clans, each with a totem of its own; the totems are typically either a species of animal or plant or their images carved on wood or stone. The totems explain the origin of the clans and each totem gives its follower clan an identity of its own. Both the clan as a whole and its members individually hold the totem in supreme respect and meticulously maintain all the regulations and prohibitions associated with it. To them the totem is a sacred object, just as much as the god; the totemic representation too has sacred appeal for them. By worshipping their respective totems the clans and their members actually worship the society, which is more important than the individual. The idea of worshipping the clan or the society is,in fact, quite complex for the people to conceptualise, hence the practice of worshipping the totem has been adopted to make the celebration of society acceptable to all. It also enhances the bond of solidarity among the members and strengthens the collective consciousness of the group.

## 3.6 Conclusion

Durkheim is considered as one of the fathers of sociology because he was the first thinker to point towards the importance of social reality by clearly distinguishing it from psychological reality. He established sociology as an academic discipline and insisted on studying particular aspects of collectivity or group life and by identifying

'social fact' as an important subject matter of sociology. Sociology, according to him, must study social facts as social solidarity, religion, suicide, and many other such things that have a collective existence and cannot be reduced to the level of atoms or individuals who make up the collectivity. As a structuralist, he is of the opinion that social structure exerts strong influences on its parts; individuals are active, they act in various social settings, but their actions are products of society's influences. Man's religious beliefs, rituals and practices, even suicide, are all products of the pushes and pulls of social life. For this role of society he describes it as sui generis or a thing in itself.

Through his life he strived to understand society and its various facets as an expression of the collectivity.

## 3.7 Glossary:

Arunta-A tribe of aborigine people from Central Australia. The group is also known as the Arrenrente, Aranda or Arrarnta.

Initiation-Initiation or clan initiation involves certain rituals and rites for accepting a person within the fold of the group. It may also be the celebration of formal admission to adulthood.

Frazer-Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941) was a Scottish social anthropologist and folklorist who influenced the study of comparative sociology. His most famous work,The Golden Bough, has documented in detail the similarities among different religious beliefs around the world,

Morgan-Lewis Henry Morgan (1818-1881) was a renowned American cultural anthropologist and social theorist. He is best known for his contributions in the study of kinship and social evolution.

Taylor-Sir Edward Burnett Taylor 91832-19170 was an English anthropologist who founded cultural anthropology and pioneered the ideas of cultural evolutionism of the 19th century.

**Glossary:**

**Arunta:** The Arunta are a group of Australian aboriginal people who live in the Central Australia region of the Northern Territory. They are also known as the Aranda, Arunta, Arrenrnte or Arranta. Durkheim studied the religious practices of this tribe, among others, for building his theory of religion based on the concepts of totem and sacred and profane.

**E.B. Taylor:** Sir Edward Butler Taylor (1832-1917) was the founder of cultural anthropology. He believed that all societies passed through three basic

stages of development like savagery, barbarism and civilization. He was the first scholar to attempt an anthropological analysis of religion.

**Frazer:** Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941) was a Scottish social anthropologist and folklorist who influenced the modern studies of mythology and comparative religion. He was of the opinion that human belief progressed through stages like primitive magic, religion and science; each being replaced by the next stage. His most noted work, The Golden Bough, documents and discusses the similarities between magic and religious beliefs around the world.

**Fustel de Coulanges:** Numa Denis Fustel de Coulanges (1830-1889) was a French historian who had great knowledge of the important Greek and Latin texts. He is also recognized as the pioneer of the scientific approach to the study of history in France.

**William Robertson Smith:** W. Robertson Smith (1846-1894) was a Scottish orientalist, Semitic scholar, encyclopaedist who studied comparative religion and social anthropology. His most original work is Lectures on the Religion of Semites(1889).

# 3.8 Model Questions

**1. Answer in Detail**                                    **10**

    (a) Examine the salient features of Durkheim's methodology.

    (b) What is Social Fact?

    (c) What is methodology? Discuss the relevance of Durkheim's suggested methodology in sociological analysis.

    (d) Make an estimation of rules for sociological research advocated by Durkheim.

**2. Answer in brief**                                    **5**

    (e) Mention the characteristics of Social Fact.

    (f) What is meant by causal relations?

    (g) What is functional analysis?

**A. Answer in short:**                                    **5 Marks each**

    1. What is division of labour?

    2. What is individual's position in primitive societies?

    3. What are the differences between the internal and external realms of society? How does individuals in a modern state arrive at a consensus?

    4. Write a short note on feminist critiques of Durkheim's individualism.

**B) Answer in Detail:**                                          **10 marks each.**

1. Examine, in detail, Durkheim's views on the position of individual in different types of society.
2. Make a critical assessment of Durkheim's ideas presented in his famous thesis.
3. Examine the feminist criticisms against Durkheim's ideas on society and individual.

**A. Answer in brief:**                                          **5 Marks**

1. What is sacred?
2. What are the characteristics of sacred?
3. What is profane? What is the relationship between sacred and profane?
4. Is Totem sacred? Give reasons in favour of your argument.
5. How man is placed in the system of sacred and profane?

**B. Answer in detail:**                                          **10 Marks**

1. Examine, in detail, Durkheim's observations on the role of sacred and profane in society.
2. Discuss the nature and meaning of sacred and profane after Durkheim.

**A. Answer in brief:**                                          **5 Marks**

1. What is totem?
2. What is animism?
3. What is naturism?
4. Why do people worship totem?
5. What is phratry?

**B. Answer in detail:**                                          **10 Marks**

Examine Durkheim's concept of religion with reference to totem and totemism.

Make a comparison of totemism with other primitive forms of religion.

What is the purpose of totem worship? How does it help a clan?

**A. Answer in brief**

1. What is egoistic suicide?
2. What is altruistic suicide?
3. What is anomic suicide?
4. What is meant by fatalistic suicide?
5. How does Durkheim's theory of suicide differ from other theories of his time?

**B. Answer in detail**

   1. Discuss, after Durkheim, the different types of suicide and the factors that cause them.

   2. Critically examine Durkheim's theory of suicide and compare it with the other existing theories of that time.

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# Unit-4 □ Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)

**Structure**

# 4.0 Learning Objectives

The main thrust of this unit is:

- To understand the concept and classification of logical and non-logical social action.

- To develop an idea of residues and derivations.

- To know about the components and characteristics of residues and derivations.

- To learn about the concept of the elite and its typology.

- To develop an understanding of the nature of the circulation of the elite.

- To evaluate Pareto's contribution to sociology.

## 4.1 Introduction

Pareto posits that the concept of God is not logico-experimental, as no one has had the chance to view it. Therefore, if a person wants to be a scientist, he must reject such concepts, which inherently elude the methods employed by science: observation, experimentation, and logical reasoning. Society is a confusing and ambiguous concept. Pareto's sociology developed from the reflections and disappointments of an engineer and economist. The engineer acts logically unless he is making a mistake. The economist, so long as he is under no illusions as to his knowledge, is capable of understanding certain aspects of human behaviour (Aron, 2017). Pareto asserts that, beyond these two particular areas, sociology is predominantly influenced by those who do not act as either engineers or speculators. Pareto sets forth the notion of the social system as a framework for analysing mutually dependent variations among several variables influencing human action. This unit is concerned with the famous Italian sociologist Vilfredo Pareto.

## 4.2 Biographical Sketch

Vilfredo Pareto was an influential and prolific engineer, economist, and sociologist of the nineteenth century, whose contributions to mathematical economics, particularly in The Manual of Political Economy, continue to influence the field. Pareto is less recognised for his contributions to sociology through his book, The Mind and Society: A Treatise on General Sociology, in which he sought to formalise the science similarly to his work in economics. Pareto was born on July 15, 1848, in Paris to an Italian father, Marquis Rafaele Pareto, and a French mother, Marie Mettenier. Pareto's father relocated to France in voluntary political exile due to his unwavering support for Giuseppe Mazzini's republican ideology. Pareto only spent the first ten years of his life in France before returning to Italy in 1858, as his father was offered an engineering position on the Italian railways.

On his return, Pareto completed his education and obtained a PhD in engineering in 1870 from the Polytechnic Institute of Turin, where his dissertation focused on mechanical equilibrium. This study probably influenced his later mathematical economic research. Pareto served as an engineer for two decades, ending his career as the general manager of the Italian Society of Iron Works. Pareto's interests expanded beyond engineering. During his formal education, he pursued studies in Greek, Latin and other humanities. His diverse interests led him to frequent

places of elite societies, particularly the salon of Signora Emilia Peruzzi. Through his interactions with renowned intellectuals such as Domenico Comparetti, Arturo Linacher, Sydney Sonino, Giustino Fortunato, Maffeo Pantaleoni, Ernet Naville, and others, along with his extensive study of the writings of prominent scholars of his era (Comte, Spencer, Taine, Darwin, Walras, etc.), Pareto developed a deep interest in politics and economics. Pareto's involvement with economics began after he read Maffeo Pantaleoni's Elementi di Economia Pura (Amoroso, 1938).

Most of Pareto's studies on economics were based on his career as an engineer, which led to important contributions to mathematical economics and econometrics. This work put him in the same intellectual circles as Cournot, Jevons, and Walras. In 1893, Walras asked Pareto to succeed him at the University of Lausanne due to his work in mathematical economics. From 1893 to 1906, Pareto taught at the University of Lausanne. During that time, he taught economics, published his Cours d'Economie Politique Professé à l'Universite de Lausanne, and lectured on sociology, some of which would help him write his later book The Mind. After retiring from the university, Pareto completed The Manual of Political Economy. Pareto's academic interest in sociology came from a political agenda.

Later years, Pareto were marked by a growing disenchantment with the political environment of Italy, particularly after World War I. He expressed sympathy for the early efforts of the fascist movement but became increasingly critical of Mussolini's regime as it solidified its power. Pareto's passion for politics ultimately motivated him to contest for parliament in 1882 for the Pistoia-Prato region. Pareto campaigned for free trade, but his opponent easily defeated him. Pareto felt confused and angered by his defeat because he believed that people were voting against their best interests. It led him to thoroughly investigate why people, he thought, were rational economic actors could behave in a "nonlogical" manner in the social realm. His inquiry into this fundamental question would motivate his sociological study. Pareto shifted his focus to sociology after finishing his work on The Manual. In 1906, he began his work by utilising his older lecture notes and meticulously studying ancient Greek and Roman writings. Pareto sought to establish a "scientific" framework for understanding all areas of sociology (Coser, 2007). In 1916, Pareto published his work 'Trattato di Sociologia Generale', which English readers recognised upon its translation and reissue in 1935. We eagerly anticipated his work, as it held the promise of revolutionising our understanding of politics, society, and psychology. He died on August 19, 1923, at the age of seventy-five, after a short illness. He is buried in the cemetery of Celigny, where his grave carries the simple inscription, 'Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)'.

## 4.3 Intellectual Roots

The best way to understand Pareto's theoretical ambition is to relate traditional Italian "Machiavellian" social theory with nineteenth-century positivist ideas in their Comtean, Saint-Simonian, or Social Darwinist editions. Classical and contemporary mathematics are two major intellectual traditions that significantly influenced Pareto's ideas since his early years. Throughout his life, Pareto remained fascinated by the classics; most historical examples and many aspects of the Treatise originate from the histories of Greece and Rome. Pareto borrowed the concepts of "equilibrium" and "system" from the natural sciences. Pareto's deep involvement in Italian intellectual traditions, despite his cosmopolitan education and partly French background, explains some of his approaches to sociology. In the eighteenth century, the idea of 'society as a social order subject to specific laws of its own' had already found many exponents in Italy, France and Britain. Machiavelli and his contemporaries claim that rational knowledge does not pursue the discovery of social laws governing stability or change; rather, it aims to examine the nature of each element constituting the social structure. Since Machiavelli to Pareto, Italian social thought has focused on the power of some men over others or the ability of the few to impose their will on the many. Pareto is the true successor of Machiavelli but also supplements the Machiavellian tradition with ideas derived from British and French positivism. Like Machiavelli, he sought to develop a science that would explain the motivations of human behaviour grounded in our intrinsic nature—a science of power that would clarify how the few dominate the many (Coser, 2007).

Although Pareto had no faith in socialism, he admired Marx in some respects. He liked Marx's analysis of class conflict and his conception of history as a continuous struggle for domination among competing groups. Overall, Pareto viewed Marxism as a religion for the masses, not as a science.

Among his contemporaries, Pareto acknowledged the influence of George Sorel and Gaetano Mosca. Pareto made a close study of Sorel's 'Reflection on Violence'. Pareto and Sorel held the belief that non-rational instincts govern human behaviour. Mosca's influence on Pareto is difficult to assess. It is known that Pareto read Mosca's Theory of Government and Parliamentary Government, in which Mosca suggested that an organised ruling class will always be able to dominate a subordinate majority. Mosca and Pareto agree that rulers impose their will on the governed through manipulation. Mosca was the first of the two to discuss the ' circulation of governing elite', a concept that was to become central in Pareto's work (Ashley & Orenstein, 2005).

## 4.4 Logical and Non-logical Action

Vilfredo Pareto expressed his objective in composing his principal sociological work, "The Treatise on General Sociology." He aimed to develop a sociological framework similar in its fundamental characteristics to the generalised physicochemical system. The treatise aims to examine solely the non-rational facets of activity.

He proposed that economics has confined itself to a particular aspect of human behaviour: logical actions focused on finite resources. Pareto shifted his focus to sociology upon realising that human behaviour was predominantly influenced by non-logical and non-rational actions, which economics overlooked.

Pareto sought to establish an analytical distinction between rational and non-rational action, rather than classifying specific behaviours. Pareto said, "It is not actions, as we find them in the concrete that we are called upon to classify, but the elements constituting them." All actions are classified into two primary categories: personal and social and every action of individuals, whether personal or social, consists of two components i.e. ends and means. Similarly, every action or social phenomenon possesses two dimensions:(i) form and (ii) reality. The form is how the experience manifests to the mind. It is a subjective matter. Reality encompasses the material existence. It is something objective.

All actions are based on either logical or non-logical action. Pareto defines logical action as action in which means and ends are conjoined logically (that is, rationally), both in the mind of the actor and the scientific observer. Pareto argued that human behaviour is logical both subjectively and objectively. According to Pareto, logical actions are those in which the ends are objectively achievable and the means used have an objective connection to them. For an action to be logical, a logical connection between means and ends must be present in both the actor's knowledge and objective reality. Here the calculation of means-end relationships was based on objectively true knowledge (Bongiorno, 1930).

Non-logical actions refer to all human actions that do not conform to the criteria of logical actions. These actions are not logical which does not suggest that they are illogical. Non-logical action is behaviour influenced by sentiments and other non-logical considerations. Not all non-logical actions are similar. Pareto categorises this class of actions into four types. The first genus comprises behaviours lacking a logical conclusion, both subjectively and objectively. Many actions governed by custom or manners may be classified within this category. The third genus represents the fundamental form of non-logical actions. It comprises behaviours that

do not have a logical conclusion subjectively, although they have one objectively. This genus encompasses all entirely instinctual actions. The development of human language is an action of the same kind. The non-logical actions of the first and third categories have little significance in human societies. Neither of these two categories of actions possesses a subjectively rational end. But men are not known to act without believing that they understand why. They may operate entirely based on instinct, prejudice, or custom; nonetheless, they usually produce some logical or pseudo-logical rationale for their actions. Most human actions have subjectively rational purposes, and they are classified within the second or fourth genus. Actions of the second genus possess a subjectively logical purpose, but not objectively. The actions of the fourth genus possess a logical conclusion both subjectively and objectively. This defines logical actions, but non-logical actions of this category differ significantly in one respect, namely, that while in logical actions the end corresponds with the purpose, in non-logical actions of this genus this correspondence does not exist (Aron, 2017).

# 4.5 Residues and Derivations

Vilfredo Pareto's attempt to expose non-scientific theories and belief systems led him to differentiate between the changing components responsible for these theories, which he termed derivations, and the residual, comparatively stable components, which he called residues (Coser, 2007).

## 4.5.1. Residues

Residues are the fundamental social forces. Pareto refers to them as residues. Pareto states, "The Residues are the manifestations of instincts and sentiments as the elevation of mercury in a thermometer is the manifestation of a rise in the temperature."

Pareto asserts residues are undoubtedly representations of sentiments and instincts but these manifestations are not constant. Residues serve as intermediaries between sentiments and associated behaviours. These are associated with human instincts but are not similar to them. Pareto says, "Residues are intermediary between the sentiments, we cannot know directly and the belief systems and acts that can be known and analysed". These are related to human instincts; however, they do not include all instincts, because our methodology allows us to identify only those that lead to rationalisations (Abraham & Morgan, 1989).

Pareto posited that society operates as a system of equilibrium. He regarded individuals as components of this system and claimed that these individuals are

influenced by specific forces, the most significant of which he called "sentiments." Sentiments cannot be directly examined. They evolve gradually over time. Pareto argued that it is possible to observe the effects of sentiments. These effects are psychological, characterised as unchangeable "residues". Residues represent the fundamental psychological foundation of social action. In his work "Treatise on General Sociology," Pareto explained that residues are manifestations of sentiments or at least correspond to them, rather than being equivalent to sentiments. Residues, according to Pareto, are motivational forces derived directly from sentiments. He regarded residues as a key analytical principle of sociology (Ashley & Orenstein, 2005).

Pareto classifies residues into six categories. These are as follows:

**Class I: Instinct for Combination:** Class I residue is an inclination to a combination of various similar and opposite things. They are based on the principles of psychological and physical components. All of these elements exist without a logical base. This principle suggests that similar things produce the same results. It explains human intellectual curiosity and the capacity to synthesise information. This residue constructs myths and legends. These residues are present among speculators, inventors and politicians.

**Class II: Group Persistence (Persistence of Aggregates):** These residues stabilise the social relationships among individual members within a specific social context. These residues arise from certain circumstances but persist even after those conditions have ceased to exist. This constitutes class II residues. This residue explains the inertia linked to group affiliation. It elucidates the persistence of kin groups, ethnic communities, and socio-economic classes. These residues are present among churchmen, family men, and subordinates.

**Class III: Need to Express Sentiments by External Acts:** Residues of this category are associated with external activities. These activities address the unexpressed desires of the individual. These feelings manifest among themselves as religious sentiments and acts of worship. Class III residues are found in ceremonies, religious ecstasies, and festivals.

**Class IV: Residues Connected with Sociality:** This residue compels humans to become social beings and modify their behaviour according to norms and values. These residues are connected with social life. These residues illustrate the persistent nature of fashion, sentiments, cruelty, and acts of self-sacrifice. Cooperation, sympathy, fear, and kindness arise from these residues. This type of residue is crucial for social organisation.

**Class V: Integrity of Individuals and Their Appurtenances:** Class V residues are 'the complement' of class IV residues. These residues are related

to the "maintenance of integrity and the development of personality." This class is expressed in sentiments of resistance to alterations in the social order. They indicate any actions are motivated by self-interest. These residues are essential for maintaining integrity and personality and developing high moral standards.

**Class VI: The Sex Residue:** The sex residues are responsible for the "mental states" associated with sexual behaviours. All those residues that are responsible for the development, maintenance, and strengthening of sexual relations fall under this category. These residues are also related to sexual urges. These residues affect our outlook, attitude, and thinking. Sex residues are complex and complicated.

## 4.5.2 Derivations

Derivations are "non-logico experimental theories" that people use to clarify their actions when participating in non-logical behavioural uniformities that are explicable in terms of residues. Derivations are appeals and assertions that allow persons to move towards the desired goal due to residues. Derivations make actions appear to be rational, but they prevent individuals from understanding the real purpose behind their actions. Consequently, Derivatives have significant similarities with Marx's concept of "ideology" and Freud's notion of 'rationalisation'. Derivations emerge only in the presence of reasoning, argumentation, and ideological justification. Pareto defines derivations as factors that facilitate logical explanations of activities based on needs, nature, circumstances, and norms. Everyone attempts to explain the logic behind the action. These actions may not be appropriate. P.A. Sorokin referred to these derivations as 'speech reactions' (Aron, 2017).

Pareto lists four classes of derivations. These are the following:

**Class I: Derivation of Assertion:** This is class I derivation that includes affirmations of facts and sentiments. These sentiments are not subject to experiment. These are generally regarded as being true and it is impossible to oppose them. This category of derivation is used with class I residues. For example, a scientist could see herself as working long hours due to his "thirst for knowledge." She may portray herself as a completely rational being committed to "truth." Pareto would assert that such a person possesses the non-logical "instincts for combinations." He said affirmations that are partially factual and partially based on sentiments are termed "Mixed Affirmations." When these affirmations are repeated, they are generally accepted.

**Class II: Derivation of Authority:** Authoritative relations in this class correspond with sentiments. This category of derivation is used with class II residues. Residents of ethnic ghettos may prefer to stay in their neighbourhoods to associate with their community and engage in their religious institutions. They

may argue that this is "logical" because, by living in the same neighbourhood they do not have to cross town to get what they want. Pareto would have contended that their desire to place themselves under the authority of their communal norms derived from the residues of group persistence.

**Class III: Derivations accord with Sentiments:** This category of derivations relies on emotional agreements and the invocation of metaphysical entities such as solidarity, progress, and humanity. These include sentiments, collective interests, legal entities (law and justice) and metaphysical entities. Such derivations occur when we link our emotions to the national interest, spiritual well-being, etc.

**Class IV: Derivations of Verbal Proof:** This derivation is effective because of the absolute power of speech. Verbal proofs are not grounded in reality. These are used only to give justification. Most of the political speeches belong to the category of verbal proof.

Pareto's classification of residues is an attempt to classify the psychological substratum of human nature. Class I and II residues are the most important. They play a pivotal role in explaining the circulation of elites in society. Unfortunately, Pareto treats his list of residues and derivations as definite. Each residue is subdivided into subcategories so that every social role can be explained as an expression of some combination of these subcategories. Many categories are arbitrary and not readily understandable. Pareto's examples of derivations are not always clear (Ashley and Orenstein, 2005).

## 4.6. The Circulation of Elite

Pareto's fundamental premise is that people are unequal in physical, intellectual, and moral capabilities. In society, some people possess more abilities than others. Pareto believes that people are predominantly controlled by the most capable people with only rare exceptions. He rejects the linear model of history and social change. He argues that throughout history, different elites rise and fall. Pareto argues that elites are those, who stand out because of their intelligence, character, and abilities, no matter what those abilities are. In this social structure, those at the upper strata are known as the "elite." Pareto categorises social classes by using elites as a benchmark. Elites signify the upper strata, while non-elites are perceived as the bottom stratum. He further underscores and categorises it into subgroups, as he believes, there is no single elite stratum. It comprises multiple strata, all of which form the elite stratum. The elite stratum is primarily categorised into two categories: (a) the governing elite, consisting of individuals who significantly influence government, and (b) the non-governing elite, which includes the rest of the elite stratum. The elite, upper

stratum, or aristocracy (terms used interchangeably by Pareto) comprises a finite number of individuals; however, it cannot be precisely delineated, as social classes, akin to societies, are not homogeneous and are not entirely discrete, even within a caste system, especially in modern societies characterised by rapid class mobility (Coser, 2007).

Pareto emphasises the structure and transformation of elites rather than non-elites. This is primarily due to the availability of historical data, as he argued. Elites and non-elites are not stable; they are subject to transformation. New elites emerge and replace the old ones. This phenomenon is often regarded as Pareto's law of circulation of elites. He asserts that "elites" or aristocrats are not permanent. They take positions for a certain period. He argues, "History is a graveyard of aristocracies." Over time, elites undergo a change when the structure of the elite group changes or the inability of their descendants to possess elite qualities; this may result from the infiltration of external elements from lower classes, or from changes in legal rights, such as the extension of citizenship rights that enable non-elites to move up socially. The rise and fall of elites occur at the same time. The rise and fall of elites happen together. Two signs that indicate an elite is declining are: (1) they become softer and less willing to defend their power; (2) they lose their greed and instead focus on taking from others. Conversely, the emerging elite expresses strength, resilience, and dedication in their character (Adams & Sydie, 2001).

The circulation of elites within the ruling class is more apparent than the overall circulation of elites. The ruling elite is perpetually undergoing gradual and ongoing transformation. The transformation depends on changes in the residues of the ruling elite. A change in the proportion of class I (combinations) and class II (persistence of aggression) residues leads to the replacement of the ruling elite. The relative proportions of class I and class II residues determine the social equilibrium and these residues enable the elite to maintain their dominance. Over time, the ruling class became weaker in class II residues and lost its strength. In this case, people who are strong in class II residues rise upwards into the governing class either by gradual infiltrations (class circulation) or in a sudden spurt through revolution. The ruling class follows various ways to protect itself from the threats of non-elites such as using force, death, capital punishment, financial destruction, exclusion from public offices etc. On the other hand, the ruling class recruit individuals from lower sections to fill the gap in both Class I and Class II residues and eliminate the individuals who are a potential threat to the ruling class. Recruitment must be controlled otherwise it can lead to corruption of the ruling class because when one moves up, he also brings his feelings, sentiments and attitudes. Another way to

control ruled class is a device. Considering means to control the subject classes; Pareto categorises political elites into two groups: (1) "foxes," who are good at strategy (Residues I), and (2) "lions," who are strong and aggressive (Residues II). While foxes prefer to rule through cooperation, diplomatic intrigue, and deviousness, lions desire to rule through force. Foxes and lions live under any political structure, their attitudes are not affected or shaped by the form of government (Ashley and Orenstein, 2005).

He asserts regardless of the governmental structure, individuals in positions of authority typically tend to exercise the power to maintain their dominance and exploit it for personal benefit and advantage. All governments utilise coercion; however, no government can only rely on force for rule. The ruling classes developed theories to convince subordinates to conform to governmental regulations, rationalise their policies, and implement overt forces, such as the military, and covert forces, such as political mechanisms. Furthermore, sentiments of superiority and inferiority are employed to keep dominance over the subjugated class. The overall condition of society is crucial for the position of the ruling class. The governing elite exercises control over subordinate classes through force and the distribution of considerable wealth. When governing or non-governing elites try to prevent the influx of newer and more competent individuals from the underlying population, the circulation of elites is impeded, social equilibrium is disrupted, and the social order deteriorates. Pareto claimed that if the ruling elite fails to integrate the exceptional individuals emerging from subordinate classes, an imbalance arises within the political and social structures until this situation is remedied, either by establishing new openings for mobility or through the violent overthrow of the ineffective ruling elite by a more competent one (Bottomore, 2017).

Intelligence and aptitudes as well as residues are not uniformly distributed among the members of society. In this situation, the "conservative" residues of class II dominate the masses and make them compliant. The governing elite must comprise individuals with a strong combination of class I and class II qualities. The ideal ruling class comprises a judicious combination of lions and foxes, who are competent at decisive and assertive action alongside those who are imaginative, innovative, and dishonest. When inadequacies in the circulation of governing elites obstruct the development of alliances among the rulers, the regimes fall into rigid and stagnant bureaucracies unable to adapt. When this happens, the people who govern will eventually succeed in overthrowing their rulers, and new elites will establish a more efficient system (Ashley & Orenstein, 2005).

The ruling class may persist without relying on power, but it also sustains by providing financial resources, dignity, and respect to its rivals. Economic prosperity

not only maintains the ruling class in power and makes it easy to govern society, but also influences the existing political structure. The rivalry between the ruling and the subordinate class is perpetually liable to manipulation. Both the old and the emerging elites assert that they are not fighting for their interests, but rather for the welfare of the society. Once victory is achieved, one party wins while the other faces a loss. After this political confrontation, the winner will obtain the most significant portion of wealth, power, and prestige. The ruling elites are well aware of the heterogeneity of individuals, the unequal distribution of both material and non-material resources in society, and their respective interests. Moreover, in contrast to the masses, the ruling elite engages in more logical actions than illogical ones, which makes them more flexible and cautious about their interests (Aron, 2017).

Pareto's principles on political regimes are equally relevant to the economic sphere. In this sphere, "speculators" are akin to the foxes, while "renters" are to the lions. Speculators and rentiers possess different goals, as well as, they reflect different residues. Generally, both fall into the same dichotomous categories. In the governing elite, the best performance is achieved in the presence of representatives of class I and class II; similarly, in the economic sphere, maximum efficacy is realised when rentiers and speculators coexist. Pareto suggests that the combination of elites from class I and class II residues results in the most stable economic and enduring political structures (Coser, 2007).

## 4.7 Contribution to Sociology

As an eminent sociologist and economist, Vilfredo Pareto is known by many for his work on social action, and process. To recognise his work, it is essential to understand the precise objectives and constraints of his sociological investigations. Pareto did not set out to compile a grand quantitative analysis of society, nor did he develop an overarching historical theory. He was most interested in the non-logical behaviour of individuals. He highlights its importance in influencing social processes. Pareto identified the irrational components (superstitions, emotions and whims) rather than pure logic and observation. These are very commonly guiding human behaviour. Although economic theories assume rational behaviour in pursuit of economic goals, Pareto acknowledges that this assumption is unsatisfactory when it comes to many other areas of human activity. This insight led him to investigate the irrational factors that underlie social actions.

Pareto compiled a large amount of data on social behaviour. He examined these to identify patterns and similarities. His goal was to categorise these similarities into a broader scope using what is known as the scientific method. His decision

to construct his analysis on the verbal expressions of reasoning seen in historical texts. This dependence on historical texts enabled him to identify those specific elements (residues) that persist throughout diverse human explanations. The core of Pareto's theory is the idea of residues. He classified the residues into multiple categories, and each category represents a distinct facet of human behaviour. It is important to understand that residues are the external manifestations of underlying psychological tendencies in social behaviour rather than instincts. Instead of going in-depth into the psychology of the individual, Pareto's analysis concentrates on how these residues affect the collective thinking and behaviour of social groups. Pareto also introduced the idea of 'derivations,' which stands for the various parts of human reasoning in addition to residues. Pareto argues that these derivations are the secondary factors that do not fundamentally change beliefs unless they alter the underlying residues. This idea challenges the notion that logical inconsistencies alone can change beliefs. Pareto concludes with a broader discussion of social equilibrium, incorporating concepts from economics and the natural sciences. He looked into how changes in the residues could affect the social order and how societies change over time. However, his discussions on social order are ambiguous and have analytical rigour compared to other aspects of his work (Adams & Sydie, 2001).

Pareto's emphasis on irrational aspects of human behaviour and their consequences for social dynamics acknowledges his contributions to sociology. His classification of derivations and residues provides a framework for comprehending the complexities of social behaviour. Even though his work is not comprehensive sociological knowledge, it does provide important insights into the relationship between individual motivations and group behaviour, opening up new pathways for sociological research (Abraham & Morgan, 1989).

# 4.8 Critical Appraisal

It would be not easy to agree with Pareto's evaluation, even though he appears to have felt that his theory of residues and derivations was his most significant contribution to sociological thought. Contemporary researchers, influenced by Freud's legacy, generally perceive the notion of residues and derivations as lacking psychological depth. Upon examination, the alleged explanations reveal themselves to be tautological or simply pseudo-clarifications; at best, they may facilitate the categorisation of character types, as Erich Fromm or David Riesman proposed.

T.B. Bottomore identifies two significant challenges with Pareto's work on elites. As a result, Bottomore poses two key questions: (1) does the term "circulations

of elites" refer to a process in which individuals circulate between the elites and non-elites, or (2) is it a process where one elite replaces another? Pareto's work contains both ideas, but the former is more common (Bottomore, 2017). Raymond Aron has made some critical observations regarding the significance of the Treatise on General Sociology. He stated that this treatise holds a unique position in the field of sociological literature. According to him, it is a kind of 'enormous bloc' outside the mainstream of sociology that remains the object of the most contradictory judgements. Some people consider this book one of the masterpieces of the human mind, whereas others, with equal passion, consider it a monument of human stupidity. Furthermore, he asserts that the Treatise on General Sociology cannot be compared to general opinion, as it does not exist. This fact suggests that the nature of the treatise is ambiguous (Aron, 2017).

## 4.9 Conclusion

Pareto's legacy is not without controversy. Towards the end of his life, he decided to associate himself with Mussolini's fascist regime, which ruined his public image. He also offered a harsh critique of Mussolini, reflecting his nuanced viewpoint. Pareto's literary contributions include "Cours d'économie politique," "Les systèmes socialistes," and "Trattato di sociologia generale," later translated into English as "The Mind and Society." These writings provide deep insights into various aspects of society and human action. Despite criticism for being tautological, Pareto's theories on non-logical actions, residues, and derivatives generated discussions and debates that still affect sociological theory today. His focus on social equilibrium and classification of human motivations opened the way for the development of system theory in sociology.

## 4.10 Summary

Vilfredo Pareto, a prominent Italian engineer, economist, and sociologist of the nineteenth century, is best known for his contributions to mathematical economics and sociology. His experiences as an engineer and economist led Pareto to develop his sociological framework. He explores the non-logical aspects of human actions that traditional economic theories often overlook. His diverse interests in humanities and politics shaped his later work in sociology, particularly his book "The Mind and Society," which aimed to formalise sociology. The concepts of 'residues' and 'derivations' are central to Pareto. Residues represent stable social forces derived from human instincts and sentiments, whereas derivations are the non-logical people use to rationalise their actions. Pareto classified residues into six categories, including

the instinct for combination and group persistence, which explains various social behaviours. He also introduced the concept of the 'circulation of elites.' He suggests that a dynamic elite class governs society and their rise and fall over time depends on their capabilities and social changes. His emphasis on non-logical behaviour and the complexities of social dynamics opened new avenues for sociological research.

## 4.11 Model Questions

1. Distinguish between logical and non-logical actions given by Pareto. (10)
2. Who are the elite? What are the different types of elites as mentioned by Pareto? (05)
3. What is residue? What are the different types of residues as mentioned by Pareto? (05)
4. What is derivation? What are the different types of derivations as mentioned by Pareto? (05)
5. Critically evaluate the relevance of Pareto to sociology. (10)
6. What are residues and derivations as discussed by Pareto? (10)
7. Why did Pareto prefer to term non-logical actions instead of illogical actions? (05)
8. Elucidate the theory of the circulation of elites after Vilfredo Pareto. (10)

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# NEP Course: DSC-4 (Major)-Sociological Thinkers II
## Module 3: Influence of Anthropologists

## Unit-5 □ Radcliffe-Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski

**Structure**

## 5.0 Learning Objectives

The field of Anthropology has a long history of evolving and developing new concepts, wherein the discipline has primarily focused on understanding the

origins of human societies, their cultural development, and the consequences of these processes. Enquiries into concepts of evolutionism, diffusionism, historical particularism, functionalism, structuralism, and so on have been the premise of various theoretical orientations; both enhancing as well as reviewing these conceptual arguments. Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown were both influential figures in the field of anthropology, particularly in the early 20th century. While they had different approaches and emphases, they shared a common goal: to understand and explain the functioning of societies (Broce, 1973). Malinowski's field studies is focussed in cultural functionalism while Radcliffe-Brown's work deals with structural functionalist approach. With Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski pushed for a paradigm shift in British Anthropology that brought a change from the historical to the present study of social institutions. This theoretical shift gave rise to functionalism and established fieldwork as the constitutive experience of social anthropology. Their work laid the foundation for much of the subsequent research in modern anthropology, and their ideas continue to be influential today. Let us delve deeper into their works.

In this unit, the salient learning objectives are as follows:

● To understand the concept of Functionalism and Structural functionalism as proposed by Malinowski and Radcliffe Brown through their field studies.

● To describe the kinship theories as proposed by them.

● To define the concept and the application of 'economic life' and 'system of exchange' as derived from their ethnographic works.

● To chart out and discuss a comparative analysis of Malinowski's 'functional' and Brown's 'structural-functional' theory.

## 5.1 Introduction

The methods used by anthropologists to study societies and cultures in the late 19th century were influenced by the concept of evolution, which was a popular idea at the time. The broader scientific context, particularly Charles Darwin's theory of evolution by natural selection prompted key thinkers such as Lewis Henry Morgan, Herbert Spencer, and Edward Tylor to develop a unilineal progression theory on the development of societies through various stages across the graph of timeline. This concept suggested that societies and cultures developed and changed over time, similar to the way biological organisms evolve. This theory received criticism for oversimplifying complex societies and cultures and assuming Western

societies to be the most advanced. As these theories were often based on limited empirical data and speculation they were challenged by later thinkers (Kuklick, 2008). The Evolutionary schools of thought gave way to 'diffusion' or 'culture-historic' schools of thought during the early 20th century that uphold the view that culture is a product of historical process. Diffusionism proposed that cultural traits originated in a few centers of civilization and then spread to other societies through various means, such as migration, trade, or conquest. Through the works of Franz Boas, Grafton Elliot Smith, and W.J. Perry the idea that cultures do not develop independently but rather borrow traits from other societies, promoted the belief that certain civilizations acted as centers of cultural innovation and diffusion. This theory too was challenged, as critics objected to the overemphasis on borrowing, that downplayed the possibility of independent invention. These theories too were based on circumstantial evidence and speculation that mirrored certain cultures as superior and more advanced than others. It lacked rigorous empirical research to prove its logic (Kuklick, 2008).

Around this time i.e. early 20th century, 'Functionalism' emerged as a dominant theoretical perspective in anthropology, primarily in response to the limitations of earlier approaches of evolutionism and diffusionism. However, it may be noted that the notion of function was not new as social philosophers right from ancient Greek scholars like Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle and later Augustine, Hobbes and Locke and even Henri de Saint Simon and Auguste Comte, wrote about function as a major methodological tool in their writings. The dialogue did not stretch further as they subtly mentioned the term and left function largely unexplained, as their intent in developing a positivist theory was greater (Lesser, 1985). Herbert Spencer in his book, Principles of Sociology (1885, vol.1), has dealt with fundamental similarities between 'organism' and 'society'. He has treated society as an integrated order of parts like an organism. As an organism is a composition of different parts, society also is a composition of different parts that are interrelated and integrated to provide the 'structure' of that society. As different parts of the organism perform different functions to make the existence of a body of the organism possible, in the same way, different parts of a society contribute indispensable functions for the existence of the society as an integrated whole. Emile Durkheim, a well-known French sociologist, also used the concepts of structure and function in his books, Division of Labour (1893) and The Rules of Sociological Method (1895); however, he preferred the terms 'monopoly' and 'physiology' respectively. It was only in his writings the concept of function got a greater methodological significance. He too likened the society to an organism. He held the view that just as an organism, in order to make the body alive, fulfils certain essential needs, society also has to fulfil certain needs for its existence and survival. The 'activities' by which the essential

needs are fulfilled, he calls them as 'function'. Durkheim defined function as the combination that a part makes to the whole, which is for its maintenance and well being (Srivastava, 2017). This is how the arguments surrounding the development of cultural practices and its subsequent progress enabled two British scholars to take charge and pioneer what has came to be known as 'Functional and Structural' approach to the analysis of culture.

Malinowski is associated with the functional approach, and Radcliffe-Brown is the pioneer of structural-functional approach. Both of them were critical of evolutionary and diffusionists views on culture. These scholars argued that the evolutionary and diffusionist interpretations of cultures were lacking written records and were not genuinely historical in their context, but were instead pseudo-historical (Adams, 1975). They argued that the goal of comparative social anthropology is to examine contemporary socio-cultural institutions in terms of their structural and functional relationships. Comparative studies could be conducted both synchronically (without considering historical context) and diachronically (by considering historical change). Synchronic studies focus on describing social life at a specific point in time without reference to its overall development, while diachronic studies compare social life at different points in time to analyze changes. By rejecting the earlier evolutionary and diffusionist approaches, these scholars proposed the concept of synchronic functional analysis, which emphasizes the study of the present or, in Radcliffe-Brown's words, the "here-and-now." (Channa, 2021).

# 5.2 Bronislaw Malinowski

## 5.2.1 Brief Life History:

Bronisław Kasper Malinowski was born on April 7, 1884 in Krakow, Poland. He is widely recognized as one of the founders of modern social anthropology. In 1908, Malinowski was awarded his Ph.D. in Physics and Mathematics from the University at Cracow in 1908. However, after reading James Frazer's The Golden Bough, he was inspired to take up the career of an anthropologist. In 1910, he moved to the United Kingdom to take postgraduate studies in social anthropology at the London School of Economics (LSE). In 1913, Malinowski published a book The Family among the Australian Aborigines, which is an example of his early non-field work. In 1914, Malinowski received a scholarship to study in New Guinea. In 1914-1915, he worked on the island of Toulon among a Papuan/ Melanesian people and in 1915-1918 on the Trobriand Islands. After returning from these studies, Malinowski spent some time in Australia where he married Elsie Masson in

1919. Their letters represent the background of Malinowski's field research (Wayne 1995). In 1922, his book Argonauts of the Western Pacific was published, which provided him with international recognition among anthropologists, ethnologists, and sociologists. Malinowski lectured at many prestigious European universities. At the London School of Economics in the Department of Sociology, he taught on Primitive Religion, Social Differentiation and Social Psychology. In 1924 he was appointed Reader in Anthropology at the University of London, and in 1927 he occupied the first Chair in Anthropology in the University of London. He received an honorary D.Sc. from Harvard University in 1936. From September 1940 he was Bishop Museum Visiting Professor of Yale till his death in 1942 (Andrzej, 2017).

Through all his works Malinowski recommended that researchers should live among communities for the entire time of observations because it allows empathic entry into their social world. It is essential to learn the language of indigenous people to avoid distorted observations that can occur when relying on interpreters. Additionally, research methods should be adapted to the specific context of the community being studied. Researchers have a responsibility to respect the laws, rules, and customs of the indigenous people in a way that does not disrupt their daily life. Simultaneously, it is important to document findings and insights throughout the research process (Andrzej, 2017).

## 5.2.2 Malinowski's Functionalism:

In his works "A Scientific Theory of Culture and Other Essays" and "Dynamics of Culture Change," a comprehensive "functional approach" to studying culture has been put forth by Malinowski. This approach focuses on understanding how different aspects of a culture work together as a system, with each part contributing to the overall functioning of the whole. Malinowski defines functional method as follows: "The functional view of culture lays down the principle that in every type of civilization, every custom, material object, idea and belief, fulfils some vital function, has some task to accomplish, represents an indispensable part within a working whole" (Channa, 2021).

Malinowski's functionalism primarily focused on how cultural institutions fulfill the needs of both individuals and the entire society. Like Spencer and Durkheim, he too believed that every part of the society has certain functions to perform. He explains, every part of a culture serves a specific purpose and that all these parts are interrelated and interdependent, forming a unified system. He argues that human beings have different kinds of needs such as social, economic, biological, religious, etc., and in order to get these needs satisfied they have developed material and non-material aspects of culture. In response to these needs; the social, economic,

political, and religious institutions have originated. Malinowski claimed that human creations like language, literature, art, and technology exist to fulfill human needs. These needs are interconnected because they relate to the whole person. While cultural elements may seem different on the surface, they are deeply connected and unified because they all contribute to satisfying human needs. Through his seminal work, Magic, Science and Religion (1929), he studied the practices of the Trobriand islanders and inferred cultural function as largely fulfilling the psychological need among primitives. Magic served as a way to maintain optimism and confidence, which were essential for humans to accomplish tasks, stay calm, and maintain mental well-being during difficult times. Religion also helped people cope with emotional stress, uphold moral laws, and create a sense of unity within their community. Malinowski connected these psychological and social functions to biological needs. By fostering optimism and confidence, magic contributed to the Trobrianders' the ability to find food and ultimately survive physically. The idea that cultural elements serve biological needs became the central focus of Malinowski's functional theory.

He emphasizes that the functional approach is the most effective way to accurately understand and describe cultural realities and that change in one aspect of culture results in change of culture and its customs as a whole. He prescribes in A Scientific Theory of Culture that every aspect of culture has a function, i.e. the satisfaction of a need. In this context, he distinguishes three levels of needs: (i) basic, (ii) derived, and (iii) integrative. By basic needs, he means biological needs such as nutrition, reproduction, growth, health, etc. The primary function of culture is to fulfil these requirements for survival and wellbeing. The basic needs themselves are essentially constant across all populations, but the cultural mechanisms people develop to fulfil them vary from place to place and time to time. Humans rely on cooperation with others to fulfil their needs. They form groups and create institutions to organize their activities and ensure that their needs are met consistently. To maintain these groups and institutions, people must regulate their behaviour, assign roles, and manage access to resources. Malinowski referred to these managing tasks as "derived needs," which are the essential needs of groups and institutions to continue existing over time. Malinowski used "derived needs" to describe activities like producing and distributing goods, regulating behaviour, and establishing authority to enforce rules. These needs are supported by institutions such as economic, educational, and legal systems, which help fulfil primary needs. Malinowski argued that people will follow group rules and norms only if they are emotionally connected to their way of life. These emotional attachments, known as "integrative needs," help society maintain cohesion and include aspects like religion, magic, and play (Channa, 2021).

Thus, Malinowski's functional analysis of culture shows that culture is something humans create and use as a tool to achieve their goals. Culture provides a way for humans to live, feel safe and comfortable, and prosper. It also gives them the power to create things and values that go beyond what they are naturally capable of as animals. Therefore, culture should be understood as a means to an end, serving a specific purpose or function (Srivastava, 2017).

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**Do you Know?**

Malinowski introduced the concept of participant observation, which involves active participation in the cultural activities of the people being studied. This method allowed him to gain firsthand experience of the culture and to understand it from the perspective of its members. He conducted his most famous participant observation fieldwork among the Trobriand Islanders in the Western Pacific Ocean. He lived among them for several years, immersing himself in their culture and studying their customs, beliefs, and social structures. His experiences and observations in the Trobriands formed the basis of his groundbreaking anthropological work, "Argonauts of the Western Pacific."

*Source:http://egyankosh.ac.in//handle/123456789/41253*

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### 5.2.3 Malinowski's Kinship Theory:

In the 1920s, Malinowski's functionalist approach offered a new perspective on kinship as a fundamental social institution by studying the ways that kinship intersected with other institutions in society, such as inheritance, education, politics, and subsistence to provide for basic social needs of the individual. Grounded in his fieldwork of the Trobriand Islanders of Papua New Guinea, a matrilineal society where descent and inheritance were traced solely through mothers and grandmothers, Malinowski in his book The Sexual Life of Savages in North-Western Melanesia (1929), offered a detailed look at the complex kinship systems and social organization that extended beyond biological ties; by examining the functional role of kinship in Trobriand society (Firth, 2022). He elaborates that the Trobriand Islanders had distinct concepts of the family and the clan. The family was a smaller unit based on biological relationships, while the clan was a larger group defined by shared ancestry.

***The following are the key aspects of Malinowski's Kinship Theory among the Trobriand Islanders*** (Rinker & McKinlay, 2023):

- ● **Matrilineal Descent-**Amongst the Trobrianders' descent are traced through the mother's line rather than the father's, emphasizing the importance of the mother's line in determining kinship status and

inheritance rights. A child belongs to the mother's clan, and property, status, and titles are passed down through the maternal lineage.

● **Social Structure-**The matrilineal system organizes the entire society; determining social identity, land ownership, and participation in rituals. In terms of inheritance and social standing, men are considered more closely related to their sister's children than to their own biological offspring.

● **Mother's Role-**The mother plays a central role in raising children and as primary nurturers, and their brothers i.e. the maternal uncles; are seen as essential mentors and guardians, supporting the children, especially in matters of inheritance and family traditions.

● **Non-biological Paternity-**One of Malinowski's most famous discoveries among the Islanders' was the belief that biological paternity is not a necessary component of fatherhood. The Islanders believed that conception did not occur through sexual intercourse but through the spiritual intervention of ancestral spirits from the mother's clan. However, the father still plays an important social and emotional role, he provides for his children and participates in their upbringing, but his involvement does not carry the same formal, legal, or inheritable significance as that of the maternal uncle, hence though affectionate the ties between father and child are not legally binding in terms of kinship.

● **Avuncular Relationship and Inheritance-**Since the maternal uncle (mother's brother) holds a position of authority over his sister's children, he is responsible for passing down wealth, titles, and property. Thus, a man's property and status are inherited by his sister's children, not his own biological offspring. This creates a strong bond between the maternal uncle and his nieces and nephews.

● **Political Organization-**Kinship plays a vital role in Trobriand political structure. Chiefs and leaders are often chosen based on their matrilineal lineage, which grants them power and authority within their communities.

Thus, in summary Malinowski's study of the Trobrianders overturned the Western assumption that biological fatherhood is the basis of kinship, inheritance, and family organization. The Trobrianders' belief in ancestral spirits and their matrilineal system demonstrated that kinship structures can vary widely across cultures. Another aspect underscored the fact that kinship systems are used as a tool for maintaining social order and cohesion; highlighting that kinship was more than just blood ties; it was a network of social roles and relationships that ensured the community's survival and stability and provided a framework for the care and

protection of offspring, ensuring the survival of the next generation. It facilitated cooperation, exchange, and the distribution of resources within a community and offered emotional support, companionship, and a sense of belonging (Rinker & McKinlay, 2023).

## 5.2.4 Malinowski's Theory of Economic Life and System of Exchange

**Economic Life**

Bronisław Malinowski's work on economic life, particularly in non-Western societies, is most famously detailed in his classic ethnographic study "*Argonauts of the Western Pacific*" (1922). His observations challenged traditional Western economic theories and argued that these societies didn't fit the Western model of market exchange, profit, and rational economic behaviour. Instead, economic activities were driven by factors beyond material needs, including social prestige. Additionally, Malinowski highlighted the interconnectedness of economic activities with religion and other aspects of life. His work here is often associated with the substantivist approach to economics in anthropology. This approach argues that economic activities in different societies cannot be understood through a single, universal framework based on Western market economies, instead in non-capitalist societies, economic behaviour is embedded in social, political, and cultural institutions, rather than being an autonomous, separate sphere of life as it often is in Western capitalist societies. Here are some key functions from his observations (Sarma, 2017):

- **Socially Embedded Economic Systems-**Malinowski argued that in the Trobriand Islands, economic activities weren't just about making money. They were closely connected to family ties, ceremonies, and political power. He saw economic exchanges as deeply intertwined with social obligations and cultural practices, where the value of objects was often symbolic rather than based on their material utility or market value.

- **Production and Distribution-**Malinowski implied that the Islanders' system of production and distribution of goods was also embedded in their social structure. Although they produced goods like yams, fish, and crafts, the rules for giving and receiving these things was governed by social rules and hierarchies. For instance, giving and receiving yams was a way to show respect, power, and obligation within the community. Men often grew yams, but these yams were used in exchanges that helped people understand who was important and who had influence. Chiefs and important social figures were central in distributing goods within and between communities.

- **Household and Collective Economy-**The household was the primary unit of economic life in Trobriand society, where the extended family played a key role in production, distribution, and consumption. Rather than individualistic labour, production was often a collective endeavour involving kinship networks. This system contrasts with Western economies, where individuals act primarily in their own self-interest in competitive markets.

- **Critique of Homo Economicus-**Malinowski critiqued the notion of homo economicus (the idea that humans are inherently rational actors who seek to maximize utility or profit in economic transactions), which was central to Western economic theory. He showed that in the Trobriand Islands, people's economic choices were mostly influenced by their social duties, cultural beliefs, and the need to maintain good relationships. Economic activities weren't just about making money; they were about fulfilling social roles and meeting the needs of the community.

- **THE KULA RING: A Case Study on the System of Exchange among the Trobriand Islanders:** The Kula Ring is one of the most famous anthropological case studies, extensively documented by Bronisław Malinowski during his fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands of Papua New Guinea in the early 20th century. The Kula Ring is a ceremonial exchange system that involves the circulation of valuable red shell necklaces and white shell armbands. These items were not traded for their material value, but rather for their symbolic significance and to maintain social relationships among the island communities, and it became a key illustration of Malinowski's functionalism and his emphasis on understanding indigenous societies through their own systems of meaning. Through this case study, Malinowski emphasized the importance of gift exchange in Trobriand society (Malinowski: 1922 in Sarma, 2017).

**Key Features of the Kula Ring**

- **Circulation-**The necklaces and armbands circulated among a network of islands in a specific pattern, with Red shell necklaces (Soulava) traded to the north circulating in a clockwise direction and white shell armbands (Mwali) traded to the south circulating in a counterclockwise direction. These items are not intended for permanent possession. They are exchanged as part of a continuous cycle of giving and receiving. If the opening gift was an armshell, then the closing gift must be a necklace and vice versa.

- **Participants-**The exchange involves a network of islands across the Massim archipelago, with men from different island communities acting as key participants. The exchange is conducted between partners who maintain lifelong relationships.

- **Ceremonial and Social Importance-**The exchange of Kula items is accompanied by elaborate rituals, feasts, and ceremonies, and the objects are imbued with symbolic value. The Kula Ring helps build prestige and status for the participants, as well as solidify important social and political connections via alliances that enables to establish and maintain peaceful relationships between different islands.

- **Reciprocity-**The Kula operates on a system of reciprocity. Participants give and receive the items at regular intervals. Failure to reciprocate within a reasonable time frame can damage social relationships. The system demonstrates Malinowski's concept of the gift exchange and challenges the Western notion of "rational" economic exchange based purely on material gain.

Thus, Malinowski (1922: 177) concluded that exchange among Trobrianders was better seen as a social act than a transmission of useable objects. Exchange, in his view, did not result in economic gain; quite the contrary, it represented a superiority of the giver over the receiver and placed a burden upon the receiver. He used the Kula Ring to illustrate his theory of functionalism, which posits that cultural practices and institutions serve specific roles or functions in fulfilling the needs of individuals and maintaining the stability of society. The Kula exchange, while seemingly non-economic, fulfills crucial social, political, and psychological needs in the Trobriand society. He was able to demonstrate how a seemingly irrational or exotic practice made sense within the cultural and social context of the Trobriand Islanders. It was central to his argument that anthropologists must understand indigenous practices from the perspective of the people who participate in them, and not impose Western interpretations.

## 5.3 Radcliffe-Brown

### 5.3.1 Brief Life History:

Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown was born on January 17, 1881, Birmingham, England. He was an English social anthropologist of the 20th century who developed a systematic framework of concepts and generalizations relating to the social structures of preindustrial societies and their functions. He is widely

known for his theory of structural-functionalism and his role in the founding of British social anthropology. On an expedition to Western Australia (1910-12), he concentrated on kinship and family organization. He was a student of W.H.R. Rivers, a British diffusionist, who was strongly interested in history. Rivers sent Radcliffe-Brown to Andaman Islands (of India) in 1906 with the task of reconstructing the cultural history of these non-literate Andaman Islanders. His study The Andaman Islanders (1922) contained the essential formulation of his ideas and methods. Averse to making conjectural and hypothetical reconstructions, he dutifully recorded Andamanese myths, ceremonies, and customs. Much delayed his book on the Andaman Islanders appeared in 1922.

Amongst his academic accounts, He became director of education for the kingdom of Tonga (1916) and served as professor of social anthropology at the University of Cape Town (1920-25), where he founded the School of African Life and Languages. At the University of Sydney (1925-31) he developed a vigorous teaching program involving research in theoretical and applied anthropology. His theory had its classic formulation and application in The Social Organisation of Australian Tribes (1931). Treating all Aboriginal Australia known at the time, the work catalogued, classified, analyzed, and synthesized a vast amount of data on kinship, marriage, language, custom, occupancy and possession of land, sexual patterns, and cosmology. He attempted to explain social phenomena as enduring systems of adaptation, fusion, and integration of elements. He held that social structures are arrangements of persons and that organizations are the arrangements of activities; thus, the life of a society may be viewed as an active system of functionally consistent, interdependent elements. At the University of Chicago (1931-37) Radcliffe-Brown was instrumental in introducing social anthropology to American scholars. Returning to England in 1937, he joined the faculty of the University of Oxford (1937-46). His later works include Structure and Function in Primitive Society (1952), Method in Social Anthropology (1958), and an edited collection of essays entitled African Systems of Kinship and Marriage (1950), which remains a landmark in African studies. He died in 1955, London leaving behind an influential legacy on the structural-functionalist lines (IGNOU, 2017).

## 5.3.2 Radcliffe-Brown's Structural-Functionalism:

Like Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown too focusses on functionalism however, through a structural lens rather than considering induvial needs as the basic premise of his arguments. In his 1952 work, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, he outlines his theories of social structure and function. He defines social structure as the interconnected web of relationships between individuals within a society.

These relationships are shaped by institutions and rules, wherein function refers to the way an activity contributes to the overall well-being of society. Radcliffe-Brown distinguished 'social structure' (the actual social structure) from 'structural type' (general social structure). According to him in actual structure the relations of persons and groups of persons change from time to time. New members come in by birth and immigrations while others go out by death and migration. Besides this, there are marriages and divorces, whereby members change several times. Thus while the actual social structure changes many times, the general social structure may remain relatively constant for a long time. He held the view that the structural form changes gradually but abrupt changes could be witnessed during the times of revolution or military conquests. But, even in sudden changes the continuity of structure is maintained to a considerable extent (Channa, 2017).

Radcliffe-Brown used biology to explain the relationship between social structure and function. Just as an organism has parts that work together, a society has people and groups that interact in a structured way. He argued that social structure is the arrangement of these people and groups, and social function is how they work together to maintain society. The function of any social activity, especially a harsh, punitive, and emotionally distressing activity like punishment of a crime or a funeral ceremony is the part it plays towards the contribution it makes to the maintenance of the structural continuity. He opines that by understanding the difference between '*structure*' and '*function*', we can study how societies stay the same and how they change over time. Social institutions, he explains are standard ways of doing things. They are the tools that a society uses to maintain its structure and continuity. A social structure is made up of different parts arranged in a specific order. Therefore, the function of these parts is to interact with each other and keep the structure whole. Social function, hence, is the relationship between the structure and the everyday life of people.

### 5.3.3 Radcliffe-Brown's Kinship Studies:

Radcliffe-Brown conducted his kinship studies primarily in various regions among the Aboriginal Australian groups, the Andamanese people, and the Bantu-speaking people in South-Africa. His methodological approach to studying kinship was primarily ethnographic. He emphasized the importance of fieldwork and participant observation in order to understand the specific social context in which kinship systems operate. His analysis focused on identifying the underlying structures and patterns that govern kinship relationships, rather than on individual variations or historical development. His 1922 study, *The Andaman Islanders*, centered on kinship as a social structure; as he deviated from the typical approach

of examining the role or purpose of kinship. In his later works, too, i.e. *Structure and Function in Primitive Society* (1952) he designated the study of kinship system as a field of rights and obligations and viewed it as a part of the social structure.

As a structural-functionalist, he considers 'Kinship' as one of the crucial parts, serving as a fundamental building block of social structure that contributes to the overall stability and equilibrium of the society as a whole. The following are the key aspects of his Kinship Theory that he conducted during his field works (Robin, 1977):

**Kinship as a Social Structure:**

- **Kinship as a system of Social Roles-**Radcliffe-Brown emphasized that kinship is not merely a biological relationship but a social one. Kinship ties are created and maintained through social norms, customs, and rituals. These ties define individuals' roles, rights, and obligations within a society.

- **The Elementary & Compound Family-**He defined kinship systems as the relationships that arise from marriage and related connections. He distinguished between the elementary family and the compound family and emphasized that there is no universal family structure, as it varies across different societies. The elementary family, consisting of a husband, wife, and their children, is the basic unit of kinship. It is seen as the primary source of social reproduction and socialization. He recognized the existence of the compound family, which can be formed through polygamy, remarriage, or adoption. These more complex family structures can have significant implications for social organization and inheritance patterns.

- **Kinship and Social Order-**In traditional societies, kinship often dictates patterns of residence, property rights, and authority that are integral to the maintenance of social order. He explained that within a particular society, certain kinship relationships are recognized as having social significance, with associated rights, duties, and specific behaviours. These recognized relationships collectively form the kinship system. By organizing interpersonal relations, kinship systems help regulate social behaviour, resolve conflicts, and ensure the continuity of social groups over time.

- **Kinship and Social Solidarity-**Kinship contributes to the solidarity of the group, particularly in small-scale, non-state societies where kinship plays a primary role in organizing social life. He was influenced by Émile Durkheim's concept of mechanical solidarity, which suggests that

societies are bound together by shared values and collective practices. Kinship ties, for Radcliffe-Brown, created bonds between individuals that were necessary for the cohesion and survival of the group.

● **Kinship Groups-**A kinship system is a network of social relationships that are expressed through family, clan, lineage groups, or moieties. Radcliffe-Brown differentiated between clans and lineages. A clan is typically a group of people who believe they are related through a common ancestor, whether real or mythical. This is similar to the gotra system in India. In contrast, a lineage consists of people who can trace their ancestry back to a known common ancestor.

● **Kinship Terminology-**Radcliffe-Brown argues that kinship nomenclature is a fundamental component of both kinship systems and language. It serves to indicate relationships and generational differences. He notes that there is often a sense of respect toward older generations (typically the first ascending generation) and a sense of subordination. Additionally, he points out that kinship nomenclature often categorizes various relatives under a single term, as exemplified by the category of "uncle." in British English, the term "uncle" is used for both maternal and paternal uncles. In contrast, Indian societies often differentiate between maternal and paternal uncles using specific terms like "mama" and "*tauji*" or "bade papa" and "chacha." Radcliffe-Brown suggests that the English usage of "uncle" reflects a lack of significant distinction in the relationship between a nephew and his maternal or paternal uncles and aunts. In Indian society, however, the father's elder brother is often considered a father figure, while the mother's sister is seen as a mother figure, referred to as "*Maus*i." Radcliffe-Brown terms this type of terminology, which distinguishes relatives based on age, gender, and seniority, as classificatory terminology.

● **Fraternal & Sororal bond-**In his kinship studies he connects sibling solidarity to practices such as levirate (marrying a deceased brother's widow), sororate (marrying a deceased wife's sister), sororal polygyny (marrying multiple sisters), and adelphic polyandry (marrying multiple brothers). He reflects that, "*Kinship terms are like signposts to interpersonal conducts or etiquette, with the implication of appropriate reciprocal right, duties, privileges and obligations.*" (1950). Fraternal and Sororal bonds highlight such obligatory bonds among kin practices.

● **Avuncular Relationship-**Radcliffe-Brown's analysis of the "avunculate" relationship (between a mother's brother and her son) in certain South

African tribes is unique. He uses a structural-functional approach to explain how this relationship is balanced by other kinship ties. In patrilineal societies, a man's authority comes from his father's side, but in matrilineal societies he seeks support from the men of his mother's lineage. This balancing act ensures social harmony. Radcliffe-Brown uses the concept of "functional extension of sentiments" (where feelings towards one person are extended to others) and "structural equivalence of siblings" to explain the avunculate relationship. Structural equivalence of siblings: refers to the idea that siblings, regardless of their gender, occupy similar positions within the kinship system. This means that they have similar rights, obligations, and roles, often based on their generation and relationship to other family members.

## 5.3.4 Radcliffe-Brown's Theory of Economic Life and System of Exchange:

Brown opines that the economists focus on the specific aspects of the production, distribution, and consumption of goods. They analyze the types and amounts of goods produced, how these goods move between individuals and regions, and how they are ultimately used. Economists often study economic institutions in isolation from other social factors. While this approach can be helpful for understanding complex modern societies, it becomes less effective when analyzing simpler, "primitive" societies. When viewed within the context of a society's overall structure, economic exchanges appear differently. He argues, the exchange of goods and services is intertwined with social relationships and helps maintain a particular social order. For example, the *potlatch*, a ceremonial gift-giving practice among Northwest American Indians, was seen as wasteful by economists and politicians but was understood by anthropologists as a crucial tool for maintaining social hierarchy and relationships (Channa, 2017).

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**Do you Know?**

The largest unilineal social group is the moiety, which results from the division of a society into two halves based on descent. The word moiety is derived from a French word that means "half." The society is divided into two large unilineal descent groups that have reciprocal responsibilities.

*Source: https://egyankosh.ac.in/bitstream/123456789/87345/1/Unit-3.pdf*

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**Key observations from Radcliffe's field studies indicate the following:**

● **Functional relationship-**To fully understand economic institutions among the primitives, we need to examine them from two perspectives.

First, we can view the economic system as a machine that produces, transports, transfers, and uses goods. Second, we can see it as a set of relationships between people and groups that both maintain and are maintained by the exchange of goods and services. This second perspective places the study of economics within the broader study of social structure, wherein economic activities are not isolated but are interconnected with other aspects of social life, such as kinship, religion, and politics. These relationships contribute to the overall functioning of the social system.

● **Normative Order-**Economic behaviour is governed by a set of social norms and rules. These norms regulate exchange relationships, ensuring fairness, reciprocity, and the preservation of social order. Social relationships are observed through the interactions between individuals. The structure of a society is defined by the patterns of behaviour that people and groups follow in their dealings with each other. These patterns are partially expressed in rules, such as etiquette, morals, and laws. Rules only exist when they are recognized by society members, either verbally or through their actions. However, verbal recognition and actual behaviour may not always align, as has been observed in the field.

● **Social Solidarity-**The act of giving and receiving goods and services fosters social bonds and reinforces group identity. The most basic form of social unity occurs when two people work together to achieve a shared goal. When multiple people have a common interest in something, that thing holds social significance for them. In similar standing, when a man hunts for an animal and gets the meat home, he shares his meat not only with his wife and children but also with relatives he feels obligated to help. In any indigenous community, there's a division of labour and a system for distributing the rewards of that labour. This system, though sometimes simple, can also be quite complicated, ensuring a fair distribution of resources. These aspects govern the economic principality of the clan.

● **Exchange Systems-**Radcliffe-Brown identified different types of exchange systems, including barter, gift exchange, and market exchange. Each system has its own rules and functions within the broader social context. However, an interest to exchange will only arise out of social value associated to exchange. When individuals adjust their interests to converge or minimize conflicts, social bonds are formed. Social relationships don't arise from similar interests but depend on mutual

interest, common interests, or a combination. Thus, gift exchange serves to reinforce social relationships, establish alliances, and maintain social order, however, it also involves the exchange of goods and services without the explicit expectation of immediate or equivalent returns but to share resources equally to sustain the group needs.

We, see a lot of similarity in the studies of Malinowski's and Brown's Economic Life and System of Exchange.

| **Do you Know?** |
| :--- |
| A gotra is the lineage or clan assigned to a Hindu at birth. In most cases, the system is patrilineal and the gotra assigned is that of the person's father. Other terms for it are vansh, vanshaj, bedagu, purvik, purvajan, and pitru. An individual may decide to identify his lineage by a different gotra, or combination of gotras. According to strict Hindu tradition, the term gotra is used only for the lineages of Brahmin, Kshatriya and Vaishya varnas. Brahminical gotra relates directly to the original seven or eight rishis of the Vedas. Later, the term gotra was expanded beyond Brahmin.A gotra must be distinguished from a kula. A kula is a set of people following similar cultural rituals, often worshiping the same divinity. Kula does not relate to lineage or caste. In fact, it is possible to change one's kula, based on one's faith. |
| *Source:https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Gotra.html* |

## 5.4    Comparative Analysis of Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown

● **Methodological Approaches-**Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown both emphasized the importance of fieldwork as the cornerstone of anthropological research. However, their approaches to fieldwork differed. Malinowski was a proponent of participant observation, immersing himself in the lives of the people he studied. He aimed to understand their culture from the inside out, adopting their language, customs, and worldview. Radcliffe-Brown, on the other hand, favoured a more detached observer stance. He focused on the structure of social systems, analysing the relationships between different institutions and individuals.

● **Theoretical Frameworks-**Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown developed distinct theoretical frameworks to explain and analyse social phenomena. Malinowski's functionalism emphasized the role of culture in satisfying

the basic needs of individuals and maintaining the stability of society. He argued that cultural institutions, such as kinship, religion, and economics, existed to fulfil specific functions. Radcliffe-Brown's structural functionalism focused on the structure of social systems, emphasizing the relationships between different institutions and their contributions to the overall functioning of society. He argued that social phenomena could be explained by understanding their place within a larger system of interrelated parts.

● **Contributions to the Field-**Both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown made significant contributions to the field of anthropology. Malinowski is credited with revolutionizing ethnographic research through his emphasis on participant observation and his detailed descriptions of cultural practices. His work on kinship, religion, and economics has had a lasting impact on the discipline. Radcliffe-Brown's structural functionalism provided a framework for analyzing social systems and understanding the relationships between different institutions. His work on social structure and kinship has been influential in the development of anthropological theory.

● **Comparison and Contrast-**While Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown shared a commitment to empirical research and the importance of fieldwork, their approaches to studying societies differed significantly. Malinowski's functionalism focused on the individual and the satisfaction of needs, while Radcliffe-Brown's structural functionalism emphasized the structure of social systems. Malinowski's emphasis on participant observation and his detailed ethnographic descriptions set a new standard for anthropological fieldwork. Radcliffe-Brown's focus on social structure and his theoretical framework provided a valuable tool for analyzing social phenomena.

● **Scope-**Malinowski's functionalism was more micro-level, examining the functions of specific customs and rituals, while Radcliffe-Brown's approach was macro-level, analyzing the functioning of entire social systems.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Radcliffe-Brown were two of the most influential figures in the development of British social anthropology. Their work has had a lasting impact on the discipline, shaping the way we understand and study

human societies. Their practice of fieldwork in anthropology have been monumental. They moved the discipline from speculative theorizing to a more scientific and humane study of cultures. The most significant difference between the approach of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski is that the latter grounds his functionalism in the individual and not in the abstracted category of society, although his individual is firmly entrenched within society. He believes that things are 'functional' not for society as a whole, but for individuals within society, disregarding the broader social context. Despite their differences, both approaches enriched the study of anthropology and functionalism, offering complementary perspectives on the intricate interplay between culture, society, and human behaviour.

# 5.6 Let's sum it up

In this unit, we understood the aspects of Culture, Kinship, Economic life and system of exchange through Malinowski's Functionalist and Radcliffe-Brown's Structural Functionalist approach. We began by theorizing and understanding the significance of culture and function in relation to the holistic subsistence of society. Then, we delved into the biographical accounts of these anthropologists; classifying their key concepts from their field notes. We ended this unit by examining some of the methodological, theoretical, and contrasting scopes of these two anthropologists.

# 5.7 Glossary

- **Avuncular-**the term "avuncular" is derived from the Latin word "avunculus," which means "maternal uncle."
- **Ethnography-**It refers to a descriptive account of the way of life of a particular society
- **Evolution-**This concept refers to change and progress. When it is applied to organisms, it implies the changes in genes of given populations by processes like mutation and natural selection. Applied to the development of human society, the concept refers to successive stages of development through which societies are supposed to pass.
- **Ethnology-**is a branch of cultural anthropology that seeks to understand the similarities and differences between different human cultures.
- **Kinship-**It refers to a relationship that is based on marriage (affinal) or blood ties(consanguineal). Apart from establishing relationship between people, the kinship system also assigns roles and status which regulates

behaviour of people. The role and status are often related to gender and age.

● **The Massim Archipelago-**is a group of islands located off the southeastern coast of Papua New Guinea in the western Pacific Ocean. It's a region renowned for its rich cultural heritage, particularly the Kula Ring, a system of ceremonial exchanges that has been extensively studied by anthropologists.

● **Fieldwork-**The anthropological practice of carrying out research by going to the area of the people one wants to study and collecting facts which are guided by systematic theory of society

● **Aborigines-**The original inhabitants of a place. The tribal people in Australia are generally known as aborigines

# 5.8 Suggested Readings

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## 5.10 Exercises

- Explain Malinowski's Functionalism.
- What is the structural-functional approach?
- Explain the system of circulation and reciprocity as practiced in the Kula Ring.
- Define kinship.
- Explain Elementary and Compound Family, as explained by Radcliffe-Brown.
- Explain Avuncular relationship in Radcliffe-Brown's Kinship studies.
- State the difference between Bronislaw Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown's methodological approaches.

# DSC-4 (Major) Sociological Thinkers-II
# Module-IV, American Sociologists
# Unit-6: Thorstein Veblen

## Unit-6 □ Thorsten Veblen-General Contributions

**Structure**

## 6.0. Learning Objectives

To learn about Thorstein Veblen as a scholar in sociology.

● To know about the life, time and social context of Veblen.

● To learn about major works published by Veblen.

● To be acquainted with the contributions of Veblen in sociology.

●     To critically examine Veblenian theory.

## 6.1 Introduction

In this unit, we will study about Thorstein Veblen-a nineteenth/early-twentieth century sociologist and economist who found eminence for his critical works on American high finance and business enterprises; and also, for his analysis of modern economic life of people. Veblen is probably a little less known than several of his contemporaries who attained fame to peak; but his ideas have produced some timeless thoughts that are still relevant in today's social life. For example, his book "The Theory of the Leisure Class" (1899) gave us the concepts: 'Conspicuous Consumption' and 'Conspicuous Leisure'. These concepts highlighted the modern individualistic tenacity to live over the neighbours (others) which can be very easily found in today's social life. So, Veblen overlives his lifetime.

Even though his intellectual legacy seems glorious, his career was just the opposite. In fact, Veblen was a man of his own colour. For his rebellious mentality and lifestyle, he had been rebuked, left alone and even, punished for several times. But he never conformed to the ongoing standards of the society, neither he affirmed the academic culture of then America. So, Veblen, who had little genuine friends in his entire lifetime, was mostly unhappy and disgusted by the 'too-much-believer' sentiments of the people around and dared to express his discontent. As a result, he was not very much liked by most people. His writings, although he claimed to be 'objective', included value-laden expressions which again was disliked by several peoples and academicians. So, Veblen, a complex character as he was, is not easy to explain through some simple lines of categorical thoughts.

In this section, we shall focus upon his life and the social context within which he had lived, his general contributions to sociology and some criticisms that he had faced.

## 6.2 Life and Time

Thorstein Veblen was born in a Norwegian peasant family, who became immigrants in the United States ten years before he was born. Due to a long tradition of facing betrayal from family, Veblen's parents found it hard to go on in the Norwegian continent and moved to the state of Wisconsin, United States of America. There, on July 30th, 1857, Thorstein was born. He was the sixth of twelve children of Thomas Veblen and Kari Veblen.

In Wisconsin, Veblens faced similar issues that they had seen before in Norway. So, when Thorstein was eight years old, they again moved to the township of Minnesota. There the Veblens acted quite securely, protective of themselves, not getting into any sectarian quarrels which pieced the communities. Thomas Veblen was known for his sense of judgement and discernment, and was respected in the community for that. But, the tradition of dealing with charlatans, speculators and con men did affect their family achingly, which can be traced in the later writings of Thorstein Veblen. Thorstein, on the other hand, was a precocious child who caused trouble due to his premature intellect. By the time of his confirmation ceremony, as he took the rite without a bite, but made it apparent that his scepticism has already out-did his faith.
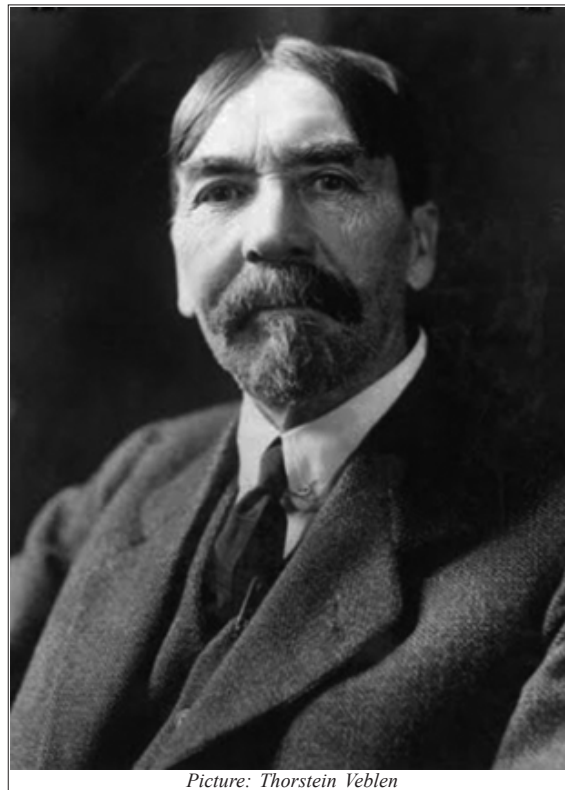

*Picture: Thorstein Veblen*

In 1874, Thorstein was admitted to Congregationalist's Carleton college where most of the syllabus taught was full of moral philosophy and religious scriptural teachings. Thorstein, as expected, did badly in college and showed a direct disinterest for the teaching process there. But, two people he met in that college who proved to become important in his later life: one is Jhon Bates Clark, his teacher at the college who later became an important economist of America; and the other is Ellen Rolfe, Thorstein's would-be first wife.

Thorstein's academic career has also been full of failures and obstacles. After Carleton, he taught mathematics at an academy at Madison, Wisconsin; but the environment there were also as much oppressive for him as Carleton. The school closed due to several disputes one year after Thorstein had joined. Then, he accompanied one of his brothers to Jhon Hopkins University with the aim of studying philosophy. But again, he faced despair by the style of studying philosophy at Jhon Hopkins. Two things, again, are important in Thorstein's visit to Baltimore: one is a temporary teacher of logic whom he met left some impact over him, Charles sanders Pierce; and the other is a library he got access to where he could study Kant, Hume, Mill, Spencer, Rousseau, Huxley for the first time. Distasteful and resenting for his failure to secure a scholarship at Jhon Hopkins, Thorstein moved to Yale University where he completed his PhD. At Yale, Thorstein met one of his major influences in his life: William Graham Sumner. Then, Sumner was advocating Spencerian Evolutionism at Yale and was contesting against the theological atmosphere present there. Thorstein saw him win this combat. His strong backbone and will to individualism that set him on a path of himself had inspired Thorstein very much.

After spending two and a half years at Yale, Veblen returned to his parental farm. He had no job and his reputation was aversive for any job opportunity. He was very much sick, or played to be sick. At 1888, Thorstein married Ellen Rolfe, whose father was very much astonished by his daughter's choice and decision. Nevertheless, he arranged a settlement for the new couple at one of his Iowa farms. There, despite Thorstein's several aloof attempts, no job was obtained by him. At Iowa, Thorstein and Ellen read Edward Bellamy's socialist utopia '*Looking Backwards*' which, according to Ellen, "was a turning point" in their lives. At last, after ten years of idling, frustrated, Thorstein enrolled himself at Cornell University where he received a second PhD in Economics under the supervision of J. L. Laughlin. Laughlin was encouraging towards Thorstein. He managed Thorstein a tutorship at university of Chicago where Thorstein would spend a good fraction of his life. At Chicago, there were some distinguished faculties back then, like, Jhon dewey in Philosophy, W. I. Thomas in sociology, J. Loeb in physiology etc who, along with Thorstein, created a congenial academic environment for each other. In spite of this, Thorstein, only a lecturer at Chicago, were unconventional in his teaching methods that very few students actually liked. These few became followers of Thorstein Veblen. One of his first and most famous books "*The Theory of the Leisure Class*" was published in 1899.

What came to be a final blow over his career is his association with women, especially his students. Rumours of affairs spread very fast, and the windy weather

of Chicago did the rest. Thorstein found his marital bond at the edge. It peaked at the extreme when on 1904 Thorstein returned from a tour with a woman who clearly was not his wife. After this, he was terminated from university of Chicago. At 1906, he got an offer from University of Stanford for a post of Associate Professor. There, too, his affairs shined up and the university authority forced him to resign in 1909. Thorstein was divorced by Ellen in 1909.

At 1911, with the help of one of his followers whom he secured at Chicago, Thorstein managed to get a relatively low position at the University of Missouri. In 1914, his second work "*The Instinct of Workmanship*" was published. Also in the same year, Thorstein was married second time with Anne Fassenden Bradley. At Missouri, he did not get the same intellectual companionship as Chicago. But some of his works got published in the due time.

In 1917, Thorstein left University of Missouri and started working in the food administration bureau under Woodrow Wilson's administration. In 1918, he moved to New York as an editor of *The Dial*. Here, for the first time, Thorstein understood what it meant to be an intellectual celebrity. His editorials and writings at this point was far more aggressive and bitter than in the past. Within one year his work in *the dial* came to an end. He started teaching in the newly organised New School for Social Research which he again left in 1922. By this time, his second wife had already died. In 1926, he moved back to California in a solitude cabin near the mountain Palo Alto. He died there on 3rd Aug, 1929.

## 6.3 Major Works

Some of the major works by Thorstein Veblen are as follows:

● *The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899)*

● *The Theory of Business Enterprise (1904)*

● *The Place of Science in Modern Civilisation and other Essays (1906)*

● *On the Nature of Capital (1908)*

● *The blond race and the Aryan culture (1913)*

● *The instinct of workmanship and the state of Industrial Arts (1914)*

● *Imperial Germany and the industrial revolution (1915)*

● *An Inquiry Into The Nature Of Peace And The Terms Of Its Perpetuation (1917)*

● *The higher learning in America (1918)*

● *The nature of peace (1919)*

● *On the Nature and Uses of Sabotage (1920)*

● *The Engineers and the Price System (1921)*

● *Absentee Ownership (1923)*

Apart from these, Thorstein has written several texts, including short to full length articles, papers, essays and reviews. Some of the notable ones are:

● *Kant's Critique of Judgment (1884),*

● *Some neglected points in the theory of socialism (1891),*

● *The economic theory of woman's dress (1894), Why is economics not an evolutionary science? (1898),*

● *The instinct of workmanship and the irksomeness of labor (1898),*

● *The beginnings of ownership (1898),*

● *The barbarian status of women (1899),*

● *Review of Social Laws: An Outline of Sociology by Gabriel Tarde (1900),*

● *Industrial and pecuniary employments (1901),*

● *Review of Psychologie économique by Gabriel Tarde (1902),*

● *Review of Pure Sociology: A Treatise Concerning the Origin and Spontaneous Development of Society by Lester Ward (1903),*

● *The place of science in modern civilization (1906),*

● *The socialist economics of Karl Marx and his followers, Parts I and II (1906-07).*

However, Thorstein's intellect and authorship goes way beyond this list. There are more works of him to be found.

# 6.4 General Contributions to Sociology

Till now, we have gone through a brief account of the timeline of Thorstein's life and have followed a sequential order of some his notable published works. In this section we shall discuss his general contributions for the discipline of sociology. According to Lewis Coser, there are 'three Thorstein Veblens': *First*, is the top-tier iconoclastic social critic whose aggressive remarks shredded America's pietist culture; *Second*, a shrewd institutional economist whose analyses of American high finance and business models have earned him a multi-generational fame; and, *Third*, the sociologist who gave us theories on the modern industrial world and the social

life there, social change and increasing competitiveness in societies, latent functions and sociology of knowledge.

Let us gradually unfold his discussions on sociology in the following part.

## 6.5 Evolution of Society

As Thorstein Veblen had been considerably influenced by W. G. Sumner, who was a prime advocate of spencer's evolutionary model; Veblen's thoughts and texts carry strong imprints of such notions. During Veblen's academic career, the discipline of economics in America was flooded by formalist school economists, who gave rise to neo-classical era of economics. These economists believed, unlike the classicists, that economy is the most superior institution in society and hence, it has to be studied separately from all the other social institutions. All the social institutions are dependent upon economy, but economy, in turn, is not dependent upon any. So, if the problems of economy can be dealt mathematically, no other aspects of society need to be examined to solve them.

Veblen criticised this approach to study economy. For him, economy, like other social institutions have mutually evolved from time to time. So, it is wrong to study economy in a context-less setting. One must not make generalisations ahistorically that man is utilitarian and hedonistic by nature. Man, and her/his actions must be understood within proper contexts, if need be, historical contexts.

Veblen's search for historical contexts led him to draw up a theory of human evolution, just like Marx. According to him, the evolution of human societies is a "process of natural selection of institutions". He divided man's social evolution into four main stages. These are

- **SAVAGE ECONOMY OF NEOLITHIC TIMES:** Peaceful stage of human society characterised by sedentary groups. Individual property is non-existent. War-politics is yet to emerge. No trace of any 'leisure class'.

- **PREDATORY BARBARIAN ECONOMY:** Rise of war-politics. Idea of 'property' emerged. Advent of masculine prowess and 'leisure class'.

- **THE PRE-MODERN HANDICRAFT ECONOMY:** Long period of dull and menial work. Leisure class is present.

- **THE MODERN INDUSTRIAL ECONOMY:** Characterised by machine. Profit-oriented business enterprise. Heightened importance of pecuniary transactions. Culture of conspicuous consumptions and conspicuous waste. Leisure class is present.

Veblen's drawing of social evolution has not attracted much attention. Its usage has also been limited to a minimum. Only a selected few have remembered this work.

## 6.6 Idea on Modern Industrial World

Veblen argued that the modern industrial world is characterised by two sets of people. One, who belongs to the 'business ownership and pecuniary employments'; the other is those who belongs in the 'industrial and technological employments'.

The first class, whom Veblen would call the 'Leisure class', is a class without any real contributors who walk upon the steps of their forebearers (like in the predatory barbarian economy). Unlike his teacher Sumner, who thought that men of finances are the most able and 'fit' amongst all and are the most precious people in the modern civilization, Veblen considered these peoples as parasites who sucks over the labours of the industrial workers. According to Veblen, "the leisure class lives by the industrial community rather than in it". This class, rather than developing or helping in the process of development of modern economy, hampers and disfigures it. They are the malformed evil who are not only burdensome, but also the heinous aberrations of modern society. The 'captains of industry' are only so-called captains for their captaincy is good for nothing.

Before going any further, let us discuss about, what Veblen has called, 'Leisure Class'.

- **LEISURE CLASS:** Veblen proposed an idea of 'leisure class' with much personal and political charge. He argued that somewhere between the savage or lower barbarian economy and the higher stages of barbarian economy (for example: feudal Europe or feudal Japan), the event of the rise of the 'leisure class' took place. In the lower Barbarian economy, as the idea of 'division of labour' gradually came into the cultural atmosphere, the ideological plays for what sorts of labour is 'worthy' and what are 'unworthy' were decided. In the predatory phase of politics and war, these motifs became established patterns of institutions, and the institution of leisure class revealed its presence. This class, with its rising, brought in a rigorous class distinction within the society. While they get exempted of the industrial employments, instead occupied employments related to warfare and nobility or priestly activities. They attached a higher degree of prestige to these employments, and hence considered themselves as the 'most important' group of people within the existing population. Thorstein writes in his 1899 book ***The***

***Theory of the Leisure Class,*** *"The occupations of the (leisure) class are correspondingly diversified; but they have the common economic characteristic of being non-industrial. These non-industrial upper-class occupations may be roughly comprised under government, warfare, religious observances, and sports"*.

Veblen has made a twofold distinction between forms of employments: 'exploit' and 'drudgery'. He contended that this distinction, however unjust, is present since the predatory Barbarian times. 'Exploits' are those occupations which are "worthy, honourable and noble"; while other employments "which imply subservience or submission, are unworthy, debasing, ignoble" are 'drudgery'. Leisure class has always restricted themselves to the employments of exploits.

The leisure class, in modern industrial society, lives by the industrial class rather than in it. The only relation that these two classes share is a pecuniary relation. If one is to get into the leisure class, her/his pecuniary aptitudes (aptitudes for acquisition rather than serviceability) has to be sharp. Therefore, a sole pursuit of pecuniary goal is the path to the leisure class. However, this is not entirely different from the preceding (barbarian stage) leisure class. The "scheme of life, of conventions, act selectively and by education to shape the human material, and its action runs chiefly in the direction of conserving traits, habits, and ideals that belong to the early barbarian age,—the age of prowess and predatory life".

According to Veblen, the leisure class with its pecuniary interests thinks in terms of 'animistic' or magical categories; while the industrial class has to think in terms of rational, practical or matter-of-fact categories. For Veblen, thinking in terms of magical categories are at variance with the life in modern industrial world. It is for the people who believe upon luck and speculation in response to their existential conditions.

Veblen discussed on the role of machine that explains the modern life. Let us focus upon that discussion.

## 6.7 Role of Machine in Disciplining

For Veblen, the era of modern industrial economy is the era of machines. The machines are rational tools that make jobs easy and prepare goods at hand. Therefore, handling the machines needs more closer-to-reality rationality and discipline. This

sort of disciplining includes handling impersonal facts for mechanical effects. Thus, the industrial class has to go under such disciplining process.

On the other hand, the leisure class, who have restrained themselves from such disciplining processes and follow a magical thought category, do not know how to handle the matter-of-factness of the real world. But as they have been successful in keeping themselves at the dominant stance in society, their speculations guide the marching of civilization. For Veblen, this march is risky and the future is precariat. The future evolution of mankind would only be on the good path if it is stepped in a disciplinarian fashion of the industrial arts.

## 6.8 Competitiveness in Society

The modern industrial society is a society of competitions. Veblen analysed the nature of competition and the effects of it upon individuals living in modern capitalism. Competition in capitalist world, for Veblen, does not only arise from a desire to accumulate more; rather, it is also chased by a feeling of chronic dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction hurts one's self-esteem. Self-esteem is always elusive in capitalist modernity, and one constantly runs after it. Esteem is not something that one attaches individually to herself/himself. Though one may think so, but in actuality, one's esteem is accounted by the people surrounding her/him. So, one feels respected if others consider her/him as a respectful person. But, as the standards of being 'respectful' is 'elusive', new standards are continuously arising. One tries to be at par with these ever-incrementing standards of esteem, for the previous position soon turns out to be producing discontent in her/him.

The relation of one's esteem is in direct connection with property ownership and pecuniary flexibility. One strives hard to accumulate more wealth in order to be respected by other people in the community. But as soon as s/he secures a higher amount, s/he jumps up to the community of that higher grade income group. Now, even if the past community members do respect her/him, s/he cannot be satisfied by that. Now, s/he seeks respectful approvals from the new group; and to gain that, s/he needs much higher levels of income again. This is the amusing paradox of individualistic modern capitalism. While this society promotes the values of achievement over anything else; one eternally stays discontent with her/his achievements. This is the heart of the logic of competitiveness. In it, Sisyphus is never happy, but always in a hurry to roll the boulder higher, to meet an ultimate goal that does not exist

## 6.9 Conspicuous Consumption & Conspicuous Leisure

Before industrial capitalism, the predatory societies observed their leisure classes bent on a clenching competition for accumulating and consuming far more than what was necessary. People from leisure class, who did not care to take the toil of producing, did not flinch though to grapple it all. The reason behind this sort of irrationality, though they premised these acts as logical and reasonable, is to heighten their standards. They conspicuously projected their consumption style as events of majestic celebrations. Not only consumption, they did this for their leisure, too. For example, the king's wedding or the initiation ceremony. A very prevalent ritual that used to be practiced in our culture in the ancient times is named 'Aswamedha Yajna'. It was performed to exert sovereignty of the most powerful king in the land. In some accounts recorded, even one thousand horses were slaughtered in order to fulfil the requirements of the ritual. Another, if we just look at the menu card of any celebration in any Zamindar family of Medieval India; we would probably be astounded. Such was the nature of consumption of the leisure class. Again, as about leisure, it was also a quality that was a distinguishing mark between the two classes. While the industrious class laboured in subservience, the leisure class rested in idleness. This idleness was valued over the labours of the workers. Therefore, the leisure class is all about a show-whether they exploit, consume, or even, sleep.

In the modern industrial society, the situation has changed a bit from the past. As we have seen, in the previous predatory phase, the leisure class was up to conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure. But, in the present stage, this feature permeates the whole society, as Veblen has contended. All members of society are following their superordinate's consumption patterns, trying to become like them. All are competing for the goal that does not exist-but not all at once; rather jumping through gradual dissatisfactory stages. So, people buying pizza from Pizza Hut or big mac from McDonald's is not just about its serviceability or taste or nutritious elements, neither it is anything about its quality or quantity. People buying luxurious gadgets, like Apple iPhone or MacBook, do not just intend to cover the functionality required. Cars like Lamborghini, Rolls Royce is not just for travelling from place to place. The overarching reason behind buying branded products is showcasing status, which does not underline any necessity. It is to express one's status through showing the possessions one has, and, in turn, demand respect from others. It might seem to one that these consumption styles accord one more comfort, and for that reason, one would afford them. But Veblen would argue, arching beyond the faint excuse of comfort, the true intent lies for this type

of consumptions are in its conspicuousness. If given detailed thought to the matter, we would find the relevance in Veblen's logic. Behind the spectacular visibility of modern capitalist world, the primordial cravings for domination and exploitations are found naked; and are present in a more heinous and vicious form. So, the poor in modern industrial world, though they live in better conditions than their forebears, suffer more. Veblen has argued, "*The existing system has not made...the industrious poor poorer as measured absolutely...but it does tend to make them relatively poorer, in their own eyes...and...that is what seems to count*". Therefore, it is the world of spectacles in capitalist illusion that make one think less of herself/himself, feel in a more derogatory sense for her/his own and imagine herself/himself as poorer. This is the torture that the industrial class faces; alluring, yet poisonous.

Also, it is not always that the person who deals with pecuniary transactions is the only one who consumes for showcasing. Rather, people who are dependent on her/him also project similar faculty. Veblen draws an example of a middle-class wife who, despite the hurdles of the family income, wears the expensive ornaments and clothing to project their family's 'comparatively higher' standard onto the others. It is also similar for the driver who, barely suffice her/his own family needs, wears tiptop formal dresses in order to exhibit her/his employers 'high status'.

Another important aspect discussed by Veblen is that the culture of conspicuous consumption is a wasteful culture. The style of such consumption produces tremendous amounts of waste. This waste, unnecessarily, is thought of as normal to have. The leisure class rationalises it. The industrious class, through their living, normalises it. And our society is left with heaps of 'wastes' that were neither a requisite nor unavoidable.

## 6.10 Sociology of Knowledge

Thorstein Veblen has also contributed to the sociology of knowledge. He carries a similarity with Marx here, that, he argues, one's habit of thought is dependent upon the social and occupational position that s/he has. Therefore, one's cognition is dependent upon society and the unique socialisation process that has worked over her/him. For Veblen, "The scheme of thought or of knowledge, is in good part a reverberation of the schemes of life". This explains why, despite producing so much waste, even the industrious class adheres to the norms of 'conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure'. The scheme of life within modern industrial capitalism has generated this scheme of knowledge. So, one's cognition would, normally, be created by such standards of understanding.

Veblen has also discussed about maladaptation. If one's cognitive setting and occupational setting do not align, then a case of maladaptation arises. Veblen has casually coined a term-'trained incapacity'-which indicates one's issues to work in a setting different than what s/he was trained for. If one is trained to do something, s/he becomes incompetent in other settings. Her/his trainings of the past become the obstacle to acting differently within the new setting.

# 6.11 Latent Function

In his functional analysis, Veblen has somewhat indicated about 'latent functions', long before Robert K. Merton's analysis. He was always seeking out the latent intent of conspicuous consumption. For example, the difference between driving a Suzuki car and an Audi car, under the pecuniary schemes, is in its display of status. A car is a means of transportation. Both Suzuki and Audi cars function in that way. But the latent reason one would choose Audi over Suzuki is because of its display of higher status. Now, if one would argue about the profound quality difference between the two cars and the difference of experience in driving them, one must also keep in mind that the 'comfortability' of high-end gadgets comes at a greater amount of waste in exchange. This waste amount outdoes the functional necessity, as well as the luxurious experience, of the gadget itself. So, what ultimately highlights in the consumption of such products is the conspicuousness, the displaying of standards of status.

# 6.12 Social Change

According to Lewis Coser, Veblen's theory of social change is a technological theory of history. Unlike Marx, who saw history as moving through class antagonisms, Veblen saw an antagonism continuing throughout history between 'invention' and 'conservation' of technology. Veblen argued that institutions are hubs of conservation-keeping things as they are; while, industrious work needs invention that would accustom with the current needs of the hour. He wrote in *The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899), "Institutions are products of the past process, are adapted to past circumstances, and are therefore never in full accord with the requirements of the present"*. So new technological inventions contend with the established ways of the institutions and bring social change.

For Veblen, class struggle is relevant when technological disputes are acute. Those who belong from the pecuniary employments seek conservation of the order as it is; while those who belong from the industrial employments are driven by the

urge to bring forth necessary technological changes due to practical reasons. Veblen has argued that, for its ever-inventing ability, science is the realm of industrial workers. And, on the other hand, classical studies, law, and politics are the realm of leisure class for their own pragmatic reasons.

# 6.13 Criticisms

Thorstein Veblen has been criticised for several reasons and by several scholars. Some of these critics are mentioned below along with their criticisms:

- Neo-classical economists like **Alfred Marshall** disliked Veblen's idea of individual. For them, individual is rational and always inclined for seeking more profit-oriented acts. Whereas, Veblen did not imagine individual as such profit minded hedonistic being.

- **Jhon Bates Clark**, who was Veblen's teacher at Carleton and the only person to leave some influence over him there, in his later days criticised Veblen for his rejection of individual as utility-maximising agent.

- Marxist theorists like Karl Kautsky and **Vladimir Lenin** rejected Veblenian theory for they thought that it lacks the necessary revolutionary rigour. Also, they do not align with the advocacy of evolutionary theory of human history.

- Institutional economists find Veblen's works to be speculative and too much oriented to sociology; whereas sociologists find lack of disciplinarian authenticity and absence of sufficient methodological objectivity in Veblen's works.

- The conservatives of capitalism rejected Veblenian theory by arguing that Veblen failed to look on the bright side of capitalist progress and limited himself over cynical and coloured opinions about industrial capitalist reality.

- Veblenian materialism has been critiqued as not being thoroughly constructed and is left with several loopholes.

- It might appear to us that Veblenian theory serves some telos and is unjustly taxonomic.

- We can find, at several places in Veblen's writings, plenty of traces of racist and patriarchal statements.

## 6.14 Conclusion

Among all these, Veblen is best known for his works on the 'Leisure class' and for conceptualising 'Conspicuous consumption' and 'conspicuous leisure'. These ideas have kept Veblen relevant, even after his death, for near a century now. So, weather he is counted among the first-class sociologists of the west during the late 18th and early 19th century or not, his closer-to-reality analysis and findings make him one of the most important sociologists of all time. Veblen might have had a hard time facing the modern world, but his scissor-like intelligence simply exposed the irony of civilisation. We, today, either knowingly or by becoming a total conformist, face the similar modern world that puts a similar toll on us. So, Veblen's understandings are helpful in order to decode the world around-in answering, what is going on around us?

## 6.15 Summary

In this unit, we have studied about Thorstein Veblen. He probably is not remembered as some of the other sociologists of his time, but his works are still relevant. His writings may have been issued with his personal feelings and political charges, but his grudges against the American economic system of that time were genuine. This makes a scholar like him fulfilled. His experiences of early life and the overtly sweet pious culture of religiosity had made him distasteful and bitter of the existing society. The invidious division of labour in society had made him exhausted and generated quite a good degree of despair in him. But his observations and analysis are astute and prudent. So, his expressions, however general or casual they might seem to be, are scholarly. Because, after all, like many of his contemporaries, he did not commit the blunder of doing the undoable-to become 'totally objective' in studying society.

## 6.16 Questions

**Answer the following questions:**                                          **(10)**
- Explain how Veblen has given a class distinction in modern industrial world?
- Describe conspicuous consumption and conspicuous leisure.
- Elaborate upon Veblenian analysis of nature of competitiveness in modern world.

- What is leisure class? Who comprises this class? Discuss the major features of leisure class.
- Discuss the Veblenian theory of evolution of society.

**Answer the following questions:** **(2)**

- Write a short note on: wasteful culture
- What does Veblen mean by 'trained incapacity'?
- State one difference between the leisure class in the predatory barbarian stage and the leisure class in contemporary industrial capitalist stage.
- Briefly discuss how Veblen talked about latent functions.
- Write any two major criticisms of Thorstein Veblen.

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# Unit-7 □ Robert E. Park (1864-1944)

**Structure**

## 7.1 Learning Objectives

- To understand the various sociological concepts used by Robert Park
- To understand the historical and intellectual context which shaped Robert Park's work
- To evaluate Robert Park's methodological contributions in the realm of urban sociology
- To critically engage with Robert Park's work and apply his concepts to modern urban social issues

## 7.2 Introduction

Robert Ezra Park, a noted American urban sociologist and one of the founders of the Chicago School of Sociology (along with W.I. Thomas), was a pioneer in

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originating and developing the field of human ecology. To him goes the credit of changing Sociology from being primarily a philosophical discipline toward incorporating field study into its methodology and thereby becoming an inductive science of human behavior. His empirical research using urban landscape like the streets of Chicago to gather valuable research material led to a new tradition of urban sociology that became the hallmark of the Chicago School of Sociology.

Despite his emphasis on empirical research, Park developed several significant theoretical concepts, which made his influence on sociology broad and enduring. He was instrumental in shaping modern sociological thought, particularly in the realm of study of cities, race relations and social behaviour. Park's work on social groups led him to develop the conception of "social distance" and his study of immigrant position was behind his idea "the marginal man."Again, his very significant work on social groups underscored the difference between human beings and the rest of nature in how they choose to work together for the common good. Further, his work on social change also supports the hope that as people encounter diverse cultures and social groups, they will gradually overcome the barriers that create divisions among them. It would also enable them to learn to live in harmony.

## 7.3 k

### 7.3.1 The Man and his Academic Career:

One of the most outstanding scholars of the Chicago School of Sociology was Robert Ezra Park. Park remains well known even today for his pioneering work on urban life, human ecology, race and ethnic relations, migration, and social disorganization. To him goes the credit of establishment of the first Urban Studies Center in the United States of America. One of the leading figures in what came to be known as the "Chicago School" of Sociology, he initiated a great deal of fieldwork in Chicago.

In order to better comprehend the contributions of Robert Ezra Park, it is very important to get an idea of the influences which shaped his life and also the social milieu into which he was born.

Robert Park was born on 14th February, 1864 at Harveyville, Pennsylvania in the United States of America and died on 7th February 7, 1944, Nashville, Tennessee (Matthews, 1977). His father, Hiram Asa Park, was a soldier in the Union army and his mother, Theodosia Warner, taught at a school. Park's family moved to Red Wing in Minnesota at the end of the Civil War and Park spent the formative years of his life there. He finished his High School at Redwing, Minnesota, but was not

admitted to a college as his father was under the impression that Park was not the "studious type." As a result, Robert ran away from home and found a job on a railroad gang. After earning enough money, he enrolled himself at the University of Michigan. John Dewey, the famous philosopher was his professor there.

Park's concern for social issues, especially issues related to race in the cities and a strong urge to work in the real world, motivated him to become a journalist after graduation. In 1894, Park married Clara Cahill, the daughter of a wealthy Michigan family. They had four children. After working, from 1887 to 1898, for different newspapers in Minneapolis, Detroit, Denver, New York, and Chicago, Park decided to continue with his studies. Although the accurate description of social life remained of his passions, Park grew dissatisfied with newspaper work because it did not fulfill his familial or, more important, his intellectual needs. Further, this career in newspaper did not seem to contribute to the improvement of the world, and Park had a deep interest in social reform (Ritzer, 2011). Thus, in 1898, at the age of thirty-four, he left his newspaper job and got himself enrolled at Harvard University for his Master Degree in Psychology and Philosophy. His professor there was the famous philosopher of that time, William James. After completing his graduation in 1899, Park went to Germany, at that time the heart of the world's intellectual life. In Germany he studied in Berlin, Strasbourg, and Heidelberg. He studied Philosophy and Sociology in 1899-1900, with Georg Simmel at Berlin; spent a semester in Strasbourg in 1900, and took his Ph.D. in Psychology and Philosophy in 1903, at Heidelberg under Wilhelm Windelband. His dissertation titled, *Masse und Publikum. Eine methodologische und soziologische Untersuchung*, was published in 1904.

After returning to the United States in 1903, Park briefly worked as an assistant in Philosophy at Harvard University from 1904 to 1905. During the same time he engaged himself as a social activist in various capacities. In 1904, he was appointed as the Secretary of the Congo Reform Association, a group that advocated for the rights of Black Africans in the Congo. In 1906 Park wrote two magazine articles about the oppression of the Congolese by Belgian colonial administrators.

Through this experience Park became more sensitive to racial issues in his own country, United States and eventually became associated with Booker T. Washington, the well-known African American reformer and teacher, with whom he developed a close relationship that lasted many years.

In 1905, Park accepted Washington's invitation to join him in his work on racial issues in the Southern United States at the Tuskegee Institute. Park worked there first in the capacity of a publicist and later as the director of public relations. He is said to have written most of Washington's *The Man Farthest Down* (1912).

In 1912 Park organized the International Conference on the Negro at Tuskegee. One of the scholars he invited was William. I. Thomas from the University of Chicago. The two became friends, and Thomas invited Park to come to Chicago to teach. In 1914, Park moved to Chicago to join the department of Sociology at the University of Chicago, one of a few departments of Sociology in the United States at that time. Because of Park's connections with Washington and Tuskegee, the University of Chicago attracted a number of black students and produced the first generation of African American sociologists in the United States, including E. Franklin Frazer, Horace Cayton, and St. Clair Drake (Gottdiener & Hutchison, 2011). He served there as a Lecturer in Sociology from 1914 to 1923, and a full time professor from 1923 until his retirement in 1936.

Thus, we can see that during his lifetime, Park became a well-known figure both within and outside the academic world. He became the President of the prestigious American Sociological Association and of the Chicago Urban League, and was a member of the Social Science Research Council. After his retirement, Park continued to teach and direct research activities at the Fisk University (1936-1943), in Nashville, Tennessee. He breathed his last in 1944, in Nashville, Tennessee, a week ahead of his eightieth birthday.

Some of his notable scholarly works are: '*Human Migration and the Marginal Man*' published in the American Journal of Sociology (1928); *The University and the Community of Races* (1932); *An Outline of the Principles of Sociology (1939); Human Communities: the City and Human Ecology (1952); Societies (1955); Race and Culture (1964); On Social Control and Collective Behaviour (1967); The Crowd and the Public and Other Essays (1972)*. With his colleague at the Chicago University, Ernest W. Burgess, Park wrote a standard text, *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921). In *The Immigrant Press and Its Control* (1922).

As discussed above, Robert Park began his career as a reporter for newspapers in various cities of the United States, namely, Minneapolis, Detroit, Denver, New York, and Chicago and it is important to mention here that his encounter with journalism influenced to a great extent his work in Sociology. All his graduate work was done after he gained eleven years of experience as a newspaper reporter in various large cities, where his interest in social problems was stimulated.

As a journalist of his time, Park was interested in the daily life of human beings, their routines and their misadventures, their joys and their sorrows. He took seriously what 'journalistics' called "human interest" (Shils, 1996). According to Park, a sociologist was "a kind of super-reporter, like the men who write for *Fortune*...reporting on the long-term trends which record what is actually going on rather than what, on the surface, merely seems to be going on." (as cited in undated).

Thus, based on the above discussion, we can conclude Robert Park's career can be broadly divided into two major parts-his early career when he worked as a journalist and his later career when he spent as a sociologist and a social activist. It must be reiterated here that his career as a journalist and social activist played a pivot role in shaping his academic interests and the scholarly works that he produced.

## 7.3.2 Intellectual Traditions in Robert Park's Works:

Robert Park's sociological analysis can be located in the tradition of the great sociologists of the nineteenth century. Park, like them, focused his attention on the nature of modern urban, national and rudimentarily emergent international societies in contrast with life in small towns, villages and the countryside. He, like them, was interested in the issues like the transformation of primordial collectivities in consequence of the expansion of their territory, the emergence of individuality, rationality and civility, and the consequent erosion of primordial attachments. The chief exemplars of this sociological interest were Emile Durkheim, Ferdinand Toennies, Georg Simmel, Max Weber, and William I. Thomas (Shils, 1996).

Robert Park's interest in 'urban question' has its origin both in the American and European traditions. In his early years, while studying in Berlin, he came across the works of the Russian sociologist, Bohdan Kistiakowski (a scholar sharing the same views on 'social change' like German sociologist, Ferdinand Toennies), who inspired by on the logics of social sciences. In Berlin, he also encountered the German sociologist Georg Simmel, whose work had a profound influence on Park's sociology. In fact, Simmel's lectures were the only formal sociological training that Park received. He was deeply influenced by Simmel's belief that modernity would express itself most tangibly in the city (Ritzer, 2011; Gottdiener & Hutchison, 2011).

The idea of 'human ecology', a study of the process of human group adjustment to the environment, a conceptual position adopted by the Robert Park and other Chicago School sociologists, was an inspiration which they drew from the works of the work of the philosopher Herbert Spencer, who also viewed society as dominated by biological rather than economic laws of development (Gottdiener & Hutchison, 2011).

Park was also influenced by the French sociologist, Emile Durkheim, in his understanding of the nature of collective self-consciousness. He never elaborated his insight sufficiently systematically and explicitly, but he came closer than any other sociologist of his time to appreciating, however vaguely, this absolutely fundamental phenomenon of social life (Shils, 1996).

In his own country, as a student in the University of Michigan, pursuing his graduation, Park was exposed to the ideas of the great social philosopher, John Dewey. Although he was excited by these ideas, Park felt a strong desire to work in the real world (Ritzer, 2011). Park was deeply influenced by famous book, "*The Shame of the Cities*" by the famous American journalist, Lincoln Steffens, published in 1904. The book depicted very well how the malaise of the modern city was basically everyone's responsibility (Flanagan, 2010).

### 7.3.3 Social Processes & its Key Aspects:

One of the central concepts of Robert Park's contributions in sociology, especially in the context of urban Sociology, is his study of the social processes. This concept lies at the heart of his understanding of how societies, particularly urban societies evolve and change over time and how that have an impact on human interactions. In order to do so, Park studied the concept of 'social processes' which he referred to as the dynamic and ongoing interactions between individuals, groups, and institutions that produce social patterns, norms, and structures.

In this context, it is worthwhile to mention that Park's view of the social process is deeply rooted in his empirical observations and grounded in the context of early 20th-century American cities, where rapid industrialization and immigration were leading to significant social changes among the population. His insights into how individuals and groups navigate complex social dynamics, especially in the context of race relations and urbanization, helped shape the study of sociology. Also, it is evident from his work that he emphasized that the social process is not static entity. It is constantly evolving as individuals interact with each other, adjust to new circumstances, and adapt to changing environments. Park viewed the social process as cyclical, with societies moving through stages of competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation. This cycle, according to him, helps explain the continuous evolution of social structures, especially in rapidly changing environments like cities. For Park, the 'city' was the perfect setting or the 'laborartory' to study these processes because it provided a microcosm of larger societal trends, such as migration, conflict, and cultural assimilation.

Robert Park set forth a four-fold scheme of classification of the social processes in his book "*Introduction to the Science of Sociology*" (1921) which he co-authored with E.W. Burgess. The four-fold scheme enumerates competition, conflict, accommodation and assimilation.

1. **Competition:** It denotes the type of interactions where all individuals or groups pursue their own interests, without paying attention to other individuals or groups.

2. **Conflict:** It refers to those types of interactions where individuals or groups consciously try to eliminate other individuals or groups.

Park is of the opinion that the society is a product of continuous competition and conflict between individuals and groups. He believed that in the urban space human beings are in constant competition for resources, power, and space. This competition often leads to conflict, which he saw as a natural part of the social process. Conflict, however, was not always necessarily destructive. It could also lead to social change and integration as new social norms and structures emerge. Although Park did not mention explicitly, but it is evident that according to him, competition is a state in which, in principle, there exists no social relationship.

3. **Accommodation:** This connotes to those interactions where adjustments are made towards reducing the conflict and achieving the interest of mutual security

4. **Assimilation:** It refers to those interaction processes whereby once separate groups acquire each other's culture, or become part of a common culture.

Park was of the opinion that after conflict or competition, societies enter a phase of accommodation, where individuals or groups find ways to co-exist peacefully within the social structure. Assimilation is a crucial part of this process, especially in the context of multi-ethnic or multi-racial societies. Park, in his work on 'social process', explored how immigrants, ethnic minorities, and marginalized groups gradually adapt to the dominant culture, while also maintaining elements of their original identity. This involves a complex process of cultural exchange and adjustment.

As already discussed, Park is well-known for extending the metaphor of ecology to human society, arguing that cities and urban environments are like ecosystems where different groups and individuals compete for space and resources. This competition among them often leads to a sort of "natural selection", where certain groups dominate or thrive in specific urban areas, while others may be marginalized. He believed that the spatial organization of cities reflected the social processes at work, such as migration, segregation, and assimilation.

One can also observe idea of social process in his concept of 'marginal man', referring to individuals who exist between two different cultural or social worlds, such as immigrants or people of mixed race. The marginal man plays a significant role in the social process, as they are often at the forefront of social change and integration (Park, 1928).

### 7.3.4 Social Distance:

Robert Ezra Park's concept of 'social distance' is an important element in his work on race relations and intergroup dynamics. By social distance, he basically referred to the degree of closeness or remoteness individuals or groups feel towards each other within a society. In other words, according to Park, it denotes the degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterize personal and social relations generally (Park 1924: 339). It is both a psychological and social phenomenon that reflects how people perceive others based on factors like race, ethnicity, social class, and cultural differences. For Park, social distance was not just about individual feelings of alienation or prejudice towards one another, but a broader reflection of how society organizes itself along lines of race, ethnicity etc.

An analysis of Robert Park's idea of 'social distance', as evident in his works like "*The Concept of Social Distance as Applied to the Study of Racial Attitudes and Racial Relations,*" (1924) & "Human Migration and the Marginal Man" (1928), brings out the following key aspects:

- **Social Distance as a Measure of Relationships:** As mentioned above, Park used the concept of 'social distance' to describe the emotional and cognitive barriers that exist between individuals or groups. In this context, it is worthwhile to mention that the concept represents how "distant" individuals feel from others not in terms of physical proximity, but in terms of their willingness to engage socially or personally. Social distance plays a key role in determining the extent to which individuals interact, work together, form friendship or enter into marital relationships.

- **Social Distance and Race Relations:** One of Robert Park's central concerns was with 'race relations', particularly in the context of the rapidly urbanizing landscape of the United States, especially Chicago, in the early twentieth century. He observed that in this diverse demographic context, the African-Americans, immigrants, and ethnic minorities lived in close physical proximity but at the same time maintained strong 'social distance'. The dominant groups in the society maintained 'social distance' from these minority groups to protect their power and social status. Park believed that racial prejudice and segregation were rooted in 'social distance' and was reinforced by stereotypes, cultural misunderstandings, institutionalized forms of segregation and racism, unequal access to economic and social resources.

- **Role of Assimilation in the Reduction of Social Distance:** Park was of the opinion that as diverse groups comes into contact with each other

in the urban space, social distance can decrease through social processes like assimilation. He believed that through interaction, understanding, and shared experiences, groups could reduce social distance over time.

In Robert Park's work on 'marginal man', one can very well see a reflection of his concept of social distance (Park, 1928). The marginal man, who according to Park, is an individual existing between two different cultural or social groups (e.g., immigrants or bi-racial individuals), often experiences the effects of social distance as he or she navigates the conflicting identities and social expectations. While the marginal man may often face exclusion from both groups, he or she can also play a key role in bridging 'social distance' between these two groups by facilitating cultural exchange and promoting greater understanding.

It can be concluded by saying that Robert Park's ideas on 'social distance' inspired later sociologists like Emory S. Bogardus to develop the Bogardus Social Distance Scale (Lee, 2008). Unlike Park, who did not develop any formal tools for measuring social distance, Bogardus created a scale which enabled him to measure the willingness of the respondents to accept members of different racial or ethnic groups into varying levels of social proximity (e.g., as neighbors, co-workers, family members). This scale also provided a tool to quantify Park's notion of 'social distance' and enabled researchers to generate empirical data for exploring the changing patterns of intergroup relations over time.

## 7.3.5 Social Change:

The idea of 'social change' was discussed extensively by Robert Park in his co-authored book "*Introduction to the Science of Sociology*" (1921), written with Ernest W. Burgess. In this work, Park and Burgess explored how social change occurs especially in the urban space through interaction between individuals, the influence of environment, and the role of institutions. Park argued that the cities are as sites of social change. These changes are brought in by the interaction of diverse populations through various social processes like cooperation, competition, conflict and accommodation etc.

Park especially emphasized the role played by conflict and competition in the process of social change. He argued that as diverse groups come into contact, they compete for resources, status, and power. This might lead to not only social conflict, but also to new forms of social organization and integration. In Park's opinion, social change is not a smooth, evolutionary process but one marked by disruption, conflict, and eventual re-integration. His work on social change also supports the hope that as people encounter diverse cultures and social groups, they will gradually overcome the barriers that divide them and help them learn to live in harmony.

According to Park, migration, whether through geographical movement or social mobility, was a major driver of social change. This is because as diverse cultures and races come into contact, old customs and social structures break down, leading to new forms of interaction and adaptation. Such phenomenon is especially witnessed in cities, which Park considered to be the primary sites of cultural convergence and social experimentation. Moreover, as in urban spaces diverse populations live in close proximity, it fosters competition, cooperation, and conflict, all of which in turn might result in social change and transformation.

## 7.3.6. Order:

Robert E. Park developed influential ideas about 'social order', particularly in the context of urban environments. His work focused on how cities function as social ecosystems where different groups interact, compete, and coexist, leading to a dynamic social order. His ideas on social order particularly his theories on urban life, social ecology, and social organization, are most prominently discussed in his various works, many of which were collaborative efforts with other scholars from the Chicago School of Sociology.

In his classic article "*The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behaviour in the Urban Environment*" (1925), published in the book *The City*, which he co-authored with Ernest W. Burgess, containing essays by various authors exploring urban sociology, Park conceived the 'city' as a social organism with distinct constituent parts bound together by internal processes. In this seminal article, Park lays out his foundational ideas on how cities function as social ecosystems. He discusses how competition for resources (such as space and economic opportunities) among different groups contributes to the natural ordering of urban environments. Park's concept of social order is intricately tied to his idea of human ecology, where the city is seen as an organism made up of competing and cooperating parts. The city, for him, was not chaos and disorder, as found in existing scholarly works on the cities of that time period, especially for the city of Chicago, which was often portrayed as a disorderly city in the era of roaring 1920s. According to him, the city tended towards an 'orderly and typical grouping of its population and its situations'. As for example, Park mentioned that every great city has its own racial colonies (China towns of New York, San Francisco, Little Sicily of Chicago). He further discussed how almost every city has its own segregated vice districts and rendezvous for criminals of every sort as well as its occupational suburbs like stockyards in Chicago, its residential enclaves, like the Brookline in Boston, the Gold Coast in Chicago, the Greenwich village in New York. Each of these has a size and character of a complete separate town, city or village, except that its population is a select one (Park, 1967).

In this context, it is worth-mentioning that Robert Park's emphasis on these insights into city's 'orderliness' was responsible for Park urging his students to develop detailed studies of all parts of the city. He stressed not only on studying the VIPs, industrial workers, real-estate officials, but also the migrants, musicians, prostitutes as well as the dancehall workers. Park believed that 'these parts and processes' of the city were intricately linked and this formed the basis of his new social science, which he termed as 'human ecology', as distinguished from plant or animal ecology.

Another important article dealing with his concept of 'social order' is Park's *Human Ecology*, published in the American Journal of Sociology in 1936. In this work, Park introduces the 'ecological approach' to studying urban environments and outlines how competition, conflict, accommodation, and assimilation shape social order in the city. He emphasizes the processes of invasion, succession, and segregation as key mechanisms that contribute to the reordering of urban spaces.

These articles can be considered as the foundational texts for comprehending Robert Park's conceptualization of 'social order', particularly in the context of urban sociology and human ecology. Based on a reading of various works of Robert Park on social order, it appears that the idea of social order forms the very basis of his concept of human ecology as he was of the opinion that social order in urban environments emerged naturally from the competition and cooperation between groups. Just as plants and animals compete for resources in nature, humans do so for space and economic opportunities in the urban landscape.

The idea of 'social order' is also implicit in Park's work on social processes, especially while he was discussing about the idea of competition, one of the four social processes about which he was concerned with. According to Park, competition between different groups in the cities for limited resources in terms of housing, jobs etc. plays a pivotal role in the formation of social order in cities. This competition in turn helps the city's organization by driving the development of distinct social and ethnic communities.

Park's engagement with the notion of social order also is evident in discussion of how cities create both social organization and disorganization. On one hand, the city provides opportunities for diverse groups to interact and thereby form new social structures. On the other hand, it can also lead to social disorganization, as traditional values and structures are disrupted by the various forces of modernization, like migration, industrialization etc..

In cities, neighborhoods and localities often undergo cycles of "invasion" and "succession," whereby one group moves into an area and eventually displaces the existing population. According to Park, this process, though disruptive, contributes

to the continual 'reordering' of urban spaces. Similarly, in Park's concept of "social distance," which refers to the degree of closeness or separation between different social groups, the idea of 'social order' is evident. He was of the opinion that in urban environment groups maintain varying levels of social distance, which in turn influences how they interact, thereby creating a social order.

One can conclude by saying that Robert Park's idea of 'order' revolves around the general conception that social order in urban landscape is dynamic, evolving and constantly changing due to the continuous interactions, conflicts, and negotiations between diverse social groups. This order emanates from the natural processes of urban life, shaped by various social processes like competition, migration, and the ecological relationships within the city.

### 7.3.7 Self:

A very important idea that manifests in the works of Robert E. Park is that of 'self'. He discussed about this concept at length his co-authored book '*Introduction to the Science of Sociology*' (1921), written with Ernest W. Burgess. In this work, Park explores how the self is socially constructed and also emphasized how individual identity is shaped by social interactions, roles, and the broader societal context of urban spaces. Again, Park's insights on the concept of 'self' can be seen in his essay "*The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment*" (1925) which also discussed how urban way of life influenced individual identity and the self through diverse social interactions. It can be stated here that although not explicitly framed as a theory of self, his ideas on social roles and migration reflected his understanding of the process of development of self within complex urban landscapes.

### 7.3.8 Social Role:

Robert Park's discussion of the concept of 'social roles' in the urban space found expression in his essay titled "*Human Migration and the Marginal Man*", published in 1928 in the American Journal of Sociology in his book "*The City: Suggestions for the Investigation of Human Behavior in the Urban Environment*", which he co-authored with Ernest W. Burgess in 1925. His work in 'social roles' very clearly depicts the constant interplay between individual agency and the structural forces of society, such as social ecology of cities, migration, race and ethnic relations.

Park argued that the behaviours and identities of individuals are shaped by the social roles they occupy within their communities and in the wider society. Being sociologist who was keenly interested in understanding the 'city', Park was of the

opinion that the city, which is a dynamic social laboratory with its diversity and density, makes individuals perform various roles and forces individuals to adapt and assume different roles to navigate the social landscape. This understanding of social roles is central to his concept of "marginal man," someone who occupies multiple, often conflicting, social roles due to their position between different cultural or social groups. The marginal man experiences psychological tension from this role conflict but can also serve as a cultural innovator, bridging gaps between communities.

An analysis of Park's perspective on social roles also highlighted the 'fluidity' of identity. He believed that individuals' roles were not fixed but shaped by their interactions with others and the shifting demands of their social environments.

## 7.3.9 Marginal Man:

One of the central ideas in Robert Park's Sociology is the concept of 'marginal man', discussed in his classic article titled "*Human Migration and the Marginal Man*", published in the American Journal of Sociology in 1928. This concept was introduced by Park to refer to those individuals who reside on the fringes of two distinct cultural or social groups, who embody both but are not fully integrated to either. The concept plays a key role in understanding the complex dynamics of individuals who live between two cultures-whether due to migration, racial mixing, or other forms of social mobility. Park's ideas on 'marginal man' had a lot of similarities with the work of later sociologists, such as W.E.B. Du Bois, who wrote about "double consciousness" in relation to African Americans, and also with his teacher at Berlin, Georg Simmel, who examined the figure of the "stranger" in society (Ritzer, 2011).

Park described how the 'marginal man' has been a product of migration, where the movement of people from one place to another often leads to the breakdown of traditional customs and the fusion of diverse cultures. As the migrants navigate new environments, they encounter different and conflicting social norms, which often make it very difficult for them to find a stable identity. This sense of being "in-between" causes psychological conflict, as the marginal man cannot wholly integrate into either culture. He must reconcile the expectations and values of both, often resulting in a sense of 'alienation' and 'double consciousness'. Park highlights that this individual is not only a symbol of the friction between cultures but also the place where these cultures meet, interact, and sometimes fuse.

However, Park had a lot of faith on the potential of marginal man. He believed that such individuals, because of their unique position, often become innovators and agents of social change. Owing to their dual perspective, they are able to

challenge the existing social norms and introduce new ideas and practices. In this sense, the 'marginal man' occupies a creative role, one who is able to see beyond the boundaries of their immediate culture and contribute to the broader society.

In conclusion, Robert Park's concept of the marginal man is a powerful framework for understanding the experience of individuals who live between cultures and societies. While it highlights the internal conflict and alienation faced by such individuals, it also points to their potential as agents of innovation and social change. Thus, in today's increasingly multicultural and globalized era, Park's insights remain relevant, thereby offering a way to comprehend the complexities of identity and belonging in a world where boundaries are continuously shifting and getting blurred.

# 7.4 Conclusions

Robert E. Park's contributions to Sociology, particularly through his work on urban life, social roles, social process, social distance, human ecology and race relations created a lasting impact on the field. His very unique concept of the "marginal man" and his very rich insights into the dynamics of social change in the urban spaces provided a new theoretical framework for understanding human behaviour in complex social environments. His works on migration, social interaction, and the conflict and cooperation that drive societal transformation remains foundational in understanding social processes and thereby continues to influence modern sociological thought, especially in urban studies, race relations, and the sociology of identity in multi-cultural contexts.

# 7.5 Summary

Summing up the ideas of Robert Park, it can be said that Park did not follow the typical career path of an academic sociologist. Instead, he led a varied career before he became a sociologist late in life. Despite his late start, he had been successful in creating a long last lasting and profound impact on Sociology in general and on the theory in particular. The Chicago School of Sociology grew to prominence under Park. Along with Ernest Burgess and Louis Wirth, Park created a theoretical basis for a systematic study of urban society. His effectiveness as a teacher was demonstrated by the list of notable scholars who studied under him, including E. Franklin Frazier, Charles S. Johnson, Edgar T. Thompson, W. O. Brown, Louis Wirth, Everett C. Hughes, and Helen MacGill Hughes. His varied experiences gave him an unusual orientation to life, and this view helped to shape

the Chicago School, symbolic interactionism, and various other areas within the discipline of Sociology. Speaking from the perspective of research methodology, it can be said that he put a new emphasis on doing urban research. He was an earnest protagonist of conducting an on-site investigation of the city, quite contrary to the abstract theorizing of his predecessors like Georg Simmel, Ferdinand Toennies and Emile Durkhiem and the historical work of Max Weber. His main contribution lies in the fact that he always stressed on the need to go out there and observe how the city actually works. He has been instrumental in bringing continental thinkers to the attention of Chicago sociologists. However, Robert Park's contributions before and after his years at the University of Chicago have largely been overlooked, as if he discovered urban sociology there and left it behind when he retired. But in reality he spent his long and exciting career engaged with the city, with sociological study, and with the African-American community before and after his years in Chicago.

# 7.6 Questions

**6 marks:**

1. Give a short account of how Robert Park's early life influenced his academic career in Sociology.
2. Write a short note on the intellectual traditions of Robert Park's Sociology.
3. Write a note on 'social processes' as evident in Robert Park's work.
4. Give a brief account of Park's concept of 'social role'.
5. Explain briefly how the idea of 'social change' appeared in Robert Park's works.

**10 marks:**

1. Explain how Robert Park used his concept of 'social distance' to understand racial relations.
2. Discuss critically Robert Park's idea of 'marginal man'.
3. Give a critical account of Robert Park's ideas of social processes and its key aspects.
4. Comment critically on Robert Park's ideas on 'order'.
5. In what ways did Robert Park's work on urban sociology contribute to the development of the Chicago School of Sociology, and how do his ideas remain relevant in understanding modern cities?

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# Unit-8 □ Charles Wright Mills (1916-1962)

**Structure**

## 8.1 Learning Objectives

- To understand the various sociological concepts used by Charles Wright Mills

- To understand the historical and intellectual context which shaped the work of Charles Wright Mills

- To apply Mills' sociological imagination to current social problems by connecting personal experiences with broader historical and societal force

- To analyze C. Wright Mills' theories of institutional power and apply the same to contemporary social and political contexts

- To evaluate the relevance of Mills' work in contemporary sociological research and its influence on subsequent generations of sociologists

## 8.2 Introduction

Charles Wright Mills, an American sociologist, was one of the towering figures in contemporary sociology and his writings continue to be of great relevance to the

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social science community, even though six decades have passed since his death. He emerged as a central figure of inspiration for the left-wing intellectuals during the turbulent decades of the 1960s and 1970 and is also noteworthy for his almost single-handed efforts to keep a Marxian tradition alive in sociological theory..His work combines a conflict perspective with a strong critique of the social order. Generations of sociology students have learned about the discipline from the reading of his best known book, 'The Sociological Imagination' (1959). He is best known for developing the concept of "sociological imagination"-the ability to understand the intricate connection between personal experiences and larger social structures. His work bridged the gap between individual experiences and broader societal issues. Moreover, for Mill's penetrating analysis of power dynamics, particularly his critique of the 'power elite', resonates in the political and economic landscape of the contemporary world. He was of the opinion that it was possible to create a 'good society' on the basis of knowledge and that men of knowledge must take responsibility in its absence (Mills, 1959). Mills believed in libertarian socialism and supported the Cuban Revolution as he hoped that it would combine revolutionary socialism with freedom (Mills, 1960). This radicalism of Mills put him on the periphery of American sociology. He became the object if much criticism, and he, in turn, became a severe critic of sociology. Of particular note are Mill's severe criticism of the most dominant theorist of his day, Talcott Parsons and his practice of 'grand theory' (Ritzer, 2011). The overall contributions of C. Wright Mills continue to provoke thought even in the contemporary times and provide the impetus to challenge the status quo, thereby securing his place as one of the most influential sociologists of all time.

## 8.3.1 The Man and his Academic Career:

C. Wright Mills was born in Waco, Texas, United States of America on August 28th, 1916 in a middle-class Anglo-Irish Catholic family. His father was an insurance broker and his mother was a homemaker. Because of his father's job the family moved a lot and lived in many places throughout Texas while Mills was growing up. As a result, he lived a relatively isolated life during his childhood with no intimate and continuous relationships (Crossman, 2019). Despite his Christian upbringing, Mills rejected religion early on, becoming an atheist (Masure, 2022).

Mills graduated from Dallas High School in 1934 and began his university career at the Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College. However, he could complete only one year there. Later, he joined the University of Texas at Austin where he obtained a bachelor's degree in sociology and a master's degree in philosophy by 1939. While attending the University of Texas, Mills cultivated passions for books,

music and theatre, and quickly gained a reputation on campus as a flamboyant rebel. Mills was quite an exceptional student, and by the time he left Texas, he had positioned himself as an important figure in sociology by publishing articles with his provocative sociological ideas in two major sociology journals, namely, American Sociological Review and American Journal of Sociology. While finishing uphis master's degree in philosophy, he applied for admittance to doctoral programs in philosophy at the University of Chicago and in sociology at the University of Wisconsin. Though Chicago was his first choice, when officials there failed to offer him a fellowship, he enrolled at Wisconsin, which did (Miller, 2018). Mills earned his Ph.D in Sociology from the University of Wisconcin-Madison in 1942 and his dissertation focused on pragmatism and the sociology of knowledge (Ritzer, 2011; Crossman, 2019 & Masure, 2022).

Mills began his professional career as an Associate Professor of Sociology at the University of Maryland, College Park, where he served for four years. During this time, he began to practice what is known as 'public sociology' by writing journalistic articles for "The New Republic", "The New Leader" and "Politics". Mills spent the bulk of his career, from 1945 onwards at the Columbia University, where he first took a position of a research associate at the University's Bureau of Applied Social Research. Next year he was made Assistant Professor in the sociology department of the University and by 1956 he got promoted to the rank of Professor. C. Wright Mills was the recipient of a Guggenheim Fellowship and a Fulbright Scholarship at the University of Copenhagen during 1956-57 (Crossman, 2019).

Mills had a very tumultuous professional and academic life as he fought with and against everyone and everything. As a graduate student in Wisconsin, he took on a number of his professors. He also eventually came into conflict with his co-author, Hans Gerth. As a Professor in the Columbia University, he was isolated and estranged from his colleagues (Ritzer, 2011).

Mills had an equally tumultuous personal life, characterized by multiple extra-marital affairs, three marriages, and a child from each marriage. He married four times to three women. In 1937, he married Dorothy Helen 'Freya' Smith and divorced her in 1940 and married her again in 1941. From this wedlock Mills had a daughter, Pamela, in 1943. The couple divorced again in 1947 and in the same year Mills married her colleague at the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University, Ruth Harper. The two had a daughter named Kathryn, who was born in 1955. Mills and Harper got separated after the birth of their daughter and divorced in 1959. In the same year Mills married again to an artist called Yaroslava Surmach. In 1960, their son Nikolas was born (Crossman, 2019).

Mills suffered from a prolonged heart condition during his adult life and survived three heart attacks. However, he succumbed to a fourth one on 20th March, 1962 at the age of forty-five years in Nyack, New York.

Some of his notable scholarly works are: *The New Men of Power, America's Labour Leaders* (1948), *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (1951), *The Power Elite* (1956), *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), *Listen, Yankee: The Revolution in Cuba* (1960), *The Marxists* (1962). He co-authored a book titled, Character and Social Structure (1953) with Hans H. Gerth.

## 8.3.2 Intellectual Traditions in the work of Charles Wright Mills:

As discussed above, C. Wright Mills, the noted American sociologist, was one of the most influential and radical social theorists and critics of his time. He had played a significant role in shaping our understanding of the connection between public issues and private troubles, power elites, 'public sociology' etc, to name a few. It is worthwhile to get an idea of the key influences (thinkers, movements and academic fields) which shaped C. Wright Mills's ideas on these diverse ranges of social issues. Unconstrained by disciplinary boundaries, Mills domain of social inquiry was quite diverse and he did not hesitate to embark on ambitious projects during his short career.

His intellectual curiosity flourished while in college at Texas, where he developed a deep interest in the American pragmatist tradition. Mills's primary interest in Madison was also pragmatism and the sociology of knowledge, to which he was introduced through the writings of Americans such as George Herbert Mead and John Dewey as well as Europeans such as Karl Mannheim. (Horowitz, 1983; Miller, 2018). Pragmatism emphasized practical thinking and the idea that knowledge should be used to improve society. This pragmatic approach informed Mills' view of sociology as 'public sociology' that it should be an active and engaged discipline that could address social issues and informs the public.

His introduction to the works of George Herbert Mead, the noted symbolic interaction theorist of the Chicago School of Sociology, began while he was still an undergraduate, and Mead's theory of concept formation and socialization was a foundation stone for his thinking. Mills's Ph.D. dissertation was largely devoted to an analysis of Charles Sanders Peirce, pragmatism's founder, and its two primary articulators, William James and John Dewey (Miller, 2018). Mills' adaptation of Mead's works on the 'generalized others' as the locus of social control stems from an alternative standpoint that is both normative and cognitive (Carrier, 2015).

Although Mills could not attend graduate school at the University of Chicago, he absorbed many ideas from the Chicago School of sociology while a student

at the University of Texas, especially its development of symbolic interactionism, particularly George Herbert Mead's formulations, its emphasis on social psychology, its commitment to democratic traditions, its focus on community and institutions, and its partiality to institutional economics. In addition to reinforcing his interest in pragmatism as an approach to knowledge and a means of critiquing the discipline, practitioners of the Chicago School emphasized that the arrangements of particular social actors in particular times and places helped in better understanding the workings of social life. Chicago School's dual reliance on statistical as well as on qualitative sources such as interviews, participant observation, personal documents, life histories, social mapping, and ecological analysis provided a practical model for social investigation. However, he wanted sociology to be more critical and far-reaching than their often micro-level analyses as found in the works of many symbolic interaction theorists (Miller, 2018).

Mills also drew upon the institutional economist, Thorstein Veblen's views of 'power' in America, with his emphasis upon the conflict of interests that existed between producers and consumers and upon the deceptive role played by advertising and salesmanship. As an economist and sociologist who critiqued consumerism and the influence of "conspicuous consumption" on society, Veblen was highly influential in shaping Mills' ideas on American culture and the upper class. Mills appreciated Veblen's critiques of the wealthy class and their role in perpetuating a consumerist culture that emphasizes status and wealth (Dowd, 1964). Mills discovered in Veblen an alternative theory of power, one which resembled his own version of the phenomenon, as discussed in his book, 'The Power Elite'. Although Mills referred to Veblen as "the best social scientist America has produced," Mills considered many of his views as simplistic and inadequate (Miller, 2018).

Another scholar who inspired C. Wright Mills was Karl Mannheim, noted for his idea of 'sociology of knowledge', particularly his exploration of how social contexts shape thoughts and ideologies. Mills's early interest in the sociology of knowledge was partly stimulated by his reading of Karl Mannheim, especially his *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (1940). Here the indirect influence of Marx is apparent. But Mills's sociology of knowledge drew more upon the work of Americans with Midwestern connections, such as George Herbert Mead and John Dewey, and upon other American sources than it did upon the writings of European thinkers. Although Mills was influenced by Mannheim's sociology of knowledge, he took a more explicitly critical and activist approach. He argued that intellectuals should actively engage with society and critique power structures rather than remaining detached. Mills was particularly critical of how power operates through institutions, a theme he explores in *The Power Elite*, where he describes

how political, corporate, and military elites maintain control over American society. Although Mannheim's and Mills's approaches differ in focus, both emphasized how social contexts shape thought and the importance of understanding society from a critical, engaged perspective (Miller, 2018). It is important to mention here that during the early 1940s he was almost alone among American social scientists in defending Karl Mannheim's approach to the sociology of knowledge. This early interest continued to inform his work throughout his entire career. He did not see sociology as an isolated academic endeavor but as part of a common project in the human sciences that included history, psychology, political analysis, and other forms of social inquiry.

After graduate school, C. Wright Mills's major interest shifted from the sociology of knowledge to stratification and power. Max Weber and Karl Marx were the central sources for Mills's political sociology. To Mills, Marx was one of the most astute interpreters of modern society, and he believed that any adequately trained social scientist needed to be knowledgeable about his work. Mills possessed a library of around 300 volumes on Marxism. Karl Marx's theories on class struggle, capitalism, and the concentration of power had a profound impact on Mills. Though not an orthodox Marxist himself, Mills was deeply inspired by Marx's focus on social classes, economic power, and their role in shaping history. In the 1950s, Mills's interest moved in the direction of Marxism and in the problems of the Third World. This influence is most visible in famous book *The Power Elite* (1956), where Mills examined the concentration of power within economic, military, and political institutions of the American society and in his another influential work, *The White Collar* (1951), an acid critique of the status of a growing occupational category, called white-collar workers (Ritzer, 2011; Miller, 2018).) Like Marx, Mills sought not simply to understand the world but to change it. Mills, like Marx, wanted to unmask false consciousness and to give people a true image of reality, which is a precondition for transforming the society. It is interesting to note that Mills was highly critical of many of Marx's formulations. Yet, he drew upon Marxian ideas, both directly and indirectly. He believed it necessary to go beyond Marx (as well as Freud, Mannheim, and others). He became acquainted with Marxist intellectuals around the world and drew upon the work of the Frankfurt school of critical theory, working with German scholars like Theodore Adorno and Herbert Marcuse (Tilman, 1979). Mills engaged with left-wing intellectuals and was inspired by their critiques of American capitalism, inequality, and the political system. Although caught up in political issues and controversies throughout his life, Mills mostly remained a studious non-joiner. He never joined any socialist group, scoffed at the American Communism, and apparently never voted. His radical brand of politics was intellectual, not organizational (Horowitz, 1964).

C. Wright Mills work drew heavily on the works of the German sociologist Max Weber. In fact, Max Weber was the most important European influence upon him. This can be attributed to his professor and later on his collaborator, Hans Gerth, a refugee from Nazism, with whom he established his closest bond at the University of Wisconsin Even though Mills did not take any courses from him, but. he obtained a first-hand view of European intellectual trends and sociological theory, especially the theories of German sociologist Max Weber from this German scholar. Mills was influenced by Weber's differentiation between various impacts of class, status and power in explaining stratification systems and politics. Weber's ideas on bureaucracy, rationalization, and authority shaped Mills' perspective on the "iron cage" of modern society and the dominance of bureaucratic institutions. Mills adapted Weber's theories to understand the structures of authority and the role of power in American society, as he found Weber's work very significant in interpreting the institutional impacts on individuals. He also used Weber's "ideal type" method in discussing such phenomena as the "cheerful robot," "abstracted empiricism," "grand theory," and "overdeveloped society." Like Weber, Mills was interested in the subjective interpretation of action, and he attempted to link individual action with social structure. Gerth and Mills were the early translators of Max Weber's works into English (Miller, 2018).

It would be unfair to end the discussion on the intellectual influences on C. Wright Mills's work without a mention of the most dominant American sociologist of his time, Talcott Parsons. In fact, according to George Ritzer (2011), many sociologists were more familiar with C. Wright Mills's critique of Talcott Parsons than they were with the details of Parson's work. In his path-breaking work, *The Sociological Imagination* (1959) Mills was extremely critical of intellectuals for not speaking out on the issues of the time. He lambasted sociologists for avoiding the real issues and problems that people constantly faced. Mills ridiculed "grand theorists" such as Talcott Parsons for being so abstract and vague that they seldom touched upon problems that had any concrete relevance (Miller, 2018).

We can conclude by saying that C. Wright Mills was at various times called a Marxist, a leftist, a pessimistic radical, an optimist in the American mold, a Weberian, a, a pragmatist, a radical humanist, and several other things. Some scholars have argued that he progressed from symbolic interactionist to Weberian to Marxist or through some other intellectual odyssey. However, the best way to view Mills's intellectual journey is to recognize and appreciate the eclectic nature of his thought from the very beginning of his career. Mills was more influenced by American ideas than he was by ones emanating from Europe, but he drew upon wisdom wherever he could find it (Tilman, 1979).

### 8.3.3 The Sociological Imagination:

Charles Wright Mills introduced the concept of the 'sociological imagination' in 1959, in his famous book titled, *The Sociological Imagination*. The goal of this book was to try to reconcile two different and abstract concepts of social reality: the "individual" and "society." This concept of sociological imagination' is perhaps Mills's most famous concept, which is used to describe a unique way of thinking that connects personal experiences with larger societal structures. In other words, it refers to the ability to see the relationship between individual experiences and larger social forces (Scott & Nilson, 2013). It allows individuals to understand how personal problems (like unemployment) are connected to broader social issues (like economic depression). According to Mills (1959), the sociological imagination allows people to step outside their personal circumstances and see the influence of historical, economic, and social forces on their lives. This idea has since then become a cornerstone of sociological thought and has initiated a great deal of debates and discussions among social scientists.

The sociological imagination encouraged people to think critically about the world around them and recognize the influence of societal structures on their lives. Further, the concept, according to Mills, help to link macro and micro levels of analysis. To quote him (Mills, 1959:5):

> *The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the large historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions.....By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues.*

An analysis of Mills's famous book, *The Sociological Imagination* (1959), brings out the following key aspects:

First, sociological imagination helps in connecting personal troubles to public issues. In this regard, Mills made a distinction between 'personal troubles' and 'public issues'. Mills was of the opinion that people often see their own struggles, such as job loss, debt, or family problems as "individual failings" or "personal troubles." However, by employing sociological imagination, individuals can recognize that these troubles are frequently tied to broader "societal issues" or "public issues" (e.g., economic downturns, unemployment rates, or social expectations). To explain this, Mills presents the example of unemployment. If

only one person in a city of 100,000 is unemployed, then it is a personal issue. But if 5 million people are unemployed in a nation of 50 million, that is a public issue. Further, it also reflects that an individual's unemployment might not just be a personal issue but may reflect economic shifts, automation, or outsourcing etc.

Secondly, sociological imagination helps in providing a historical context. Mills argued that understanding one's place in history is essential in better grasping of personal and social circumstances. He argued that without considering the historical context or the milieu, one would have a limited or surface-level understanding. This means recognizing ways in which the historical era in which one lives in, with its specific power dynamics, cultural expectations, and social structures, shapes one's personal experiences.

Thirdly, sociological imagination emphasizes the link between "biography" (the personal experiences of individuals) and "society" (the collective structures and systems that shape human behaviour). Mills argued that individuals' choices, behaviours, and outcomes are often constrained by social structures, institutions, and cultural norms. By examining this relationship, people can better understand how society influences their lives and how their lives might, in turn, impact society.

Fourthly, sociological imagination can lead to empowerment of individuals. By understanding how personal issues are connected to broader social forces, individuals can gain insight into how social change might be possible. This knowledge can also foster critical thinking among them and thereby encourage them to challenge status quo and the established norms and structures. Thus, for Mills sociological imagination is not just an analytical tool but also a form of empowerment of individuals through awareness generation about the society.

Fifth, sociological imagination is vital for sociologists who in their capacity as public intellectuals play a pivotal role to guide people. Mills was a strong advocator of the fact that sociology should be relevant to public life and help people in understanding and navigating the complexities of modern society. He was highly critical of academic sociology as he found it overly theoretical and detached from real social issues.

C. Wright Mills's concept of 'sociological imagination' has been very influential and has been made use of by a number of sociologists. One of the most notable studies using this concept was that of Dobash and Dobash (1979), entitled as 'Violence Against Wives', where the authors have shown how laws and ordinances have throughout history legitimized the physical abuse of women (as cited in Wallace & Wolf, 1995). They have combined this study with an analysis of nearly thousand police and court cases of assault against wives and in-depth interviews with battered women. From the study it came out very clearly that for

each woman what was considered to be a personal and private trouble has been made a public issue because of the magnitude and scale of the problems as well as law's lack of concern about this issue.

Thus, we can conclude that C. Wright Mills believed that the sociological imagination is essential for an engaged, reflective, and empowered society. It provides a framework for people to understand the world, see beyond their own lives, and feel less isolated in their personal experiences.

## 8.3.4 The Power Elite (1956):

The Power Elite (1956) became C. Wright Mills's most controversial as well as his best known work and signaled his shift to a more leftwing position. The book's greatest acclaim came from non-academics, while pluralist intellectuals attacked it from the right and Marxists criticized it from the left (Milller, 2018). The book is a sociological study that explores the relationships and interconnections among the political, military and economic elites in the United States of America, suggesting that they form a distinct, centralized ruling power structure. The author argued that this group operates outside of the democratic process and has significant influence over the nation's policies and decisions. The book also discusses the implications of this power concentration on the American democracy and society. In this context, it is worthwhile to mention that although C. Wright Mills is remembered most for his statements about 'power and the power elite', his book *The Power Elite* clearly derives from a broader conception he entertained about elementary relationships existing between the individual and society.

Mills's main argument in this book is that a small group of powerful people, whom he called the power elite, controlled the key institutions in American society—namely, the military, corporations, and political institutions. According to Mills, the above-mentioned three domains are interlocked, so that the leading men in each of the three domains of power-the warlords, the corporate chieftains and the political directorate-tend to come together to form the power elite of the United States of America. Mills believed that power can be based on factors other than property. Through coercion, authority, and manipulation, a small group of politicians, corporate heads, and military leaders possessed real power in the United States. In addition, they exhibited similar psychological traits. These power elites manipulate the public through the mass media, who remain passive spectators to the actions that controlled their lives. Mills avoided using the term "ruling class," because he wanted to underline the fact that the power elite was not merely an economic class. For him, power resides in institutions-it is a person's position in the institutional framework that secures the power. Class and status followed from

power. Mills is of the opinion that these elites wield disproportionate influence over government and society, often at the expense of democratic ideals (Scimecca, 1977; Wallace and Wolf, 1995 & Miller, 2018).

Mills idea of 'power elite' has been subjected to criticism on the ground that he believed in a single 'power elite', pursuing its united interest and excluding others from influence. They argued that powerful interests may and frequently do conflict with each other. As for example, while some business undoubtedly has power primarily derived from the protective policies of the government, others might have plans delayed or demolished by the various plans of the government (Wallace and Wolf, 1995).

This work on power elites by C. Wright Mills laid the groundwork for later discussions of inequality and power in various social science disciplines. It also highlighted the intersection of power across different sectors and questioned the democratic nature of American society. The book very clearly brings out how power in all of its ramifications stood out above every other issue in Mills's thinking.

### 8.3.5 Critique of Bureaucracy and Technocracy:

Another important contribution of C. Wright Mills was his critique of large bureaucracies, as found in his two works, namely, *The Power Elite* (1956) and the *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (1951). Mills examined bureaucracy as part of his broader critique of social structures in modern society. He argued that bureaucracies often dehumanized individuals, concentrate power in the hands of small elite, leading to an imbalance in power dynamics and a lack of true democratic participation. This critique extends to corporations and governmental institutions that prioritize efficiency over human needs.

In *The Power Elite* (1956), Mills identified how bureaucratic structures support and uphold the elite's power in three key domains: the military, corporate, and political institutions. This concentration of power means that a small group of decision-makers effectively controls major aspects of society, making decisions that affect millions of people without meaningful input from the public. Mills argued that bureaucracy promotes conformity and discourages independent thinking by creating a system where rules and hierarchy limit individuals' freedom.

Furthermore, Mills viewed bureaucracy as self-perpetuating and resistant to change. Bureaucratic systems, with their rigid rules and hierarchical structures, prioritize organizational interests over the welfare of individuals, often resulting in inefficiency and alienation. He believed that bureaucracy stifles creativity and initiative, leading to a sense of powerlessness among workers and citizens alike.

In *White Collar: The American Middle Classe*s (1951), Mills examined the lives and roles of white-collar workers, such as office employees, managers, and professionals, within bureaucratic organizations in the contemporary American society. He argued that these workers often felt alienated and powerless due to the existing bureaucratic hierarchies that restricted autonomy and individuality. Mills described how the bureaucratic structure in these workplaces often led to a culture of conformity, robbing workers of their creative freedom and promoting a sense of resignation.

He also expressed concern over the rise of technocrats, or people who hold power because of their technical knowledge rather than their democratic accountability. Mills worried that technocrats would prioritize narrow technical expertise over broader societal concerns.

## 8.3.6 White Collar: The American Middle Classes (1951):

The book titled, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (1951) brought him considerable critical acclaim to C. Wright Mills. In this book Mills explored the rise of the white-collar middle class in post-World War II American society, examining how this class was shaped by changes in the economy and employment structures. The book thus described what had happened to the American class structure during the twentieth century and the consequences this had for individual lives. Mills argued that the middle class was not aware of its powerlessness, that is, they were a group of passive losers who were so blinded by the cultural apparatus that they possessed no notion of their true condition. This was one of the first studies to critically examine the conditions of the growing middle class in American society.

The term "white collar", according to Mills (1951), was an ideal type, encompassing office workers, managers, professionals, and most of those in the middle class. Social scientists at the time were just in the process of analyzing and interpreting the concept of a "new middle class" in America. Since people in that category lacked freedom on the job, they often sought release in leisure-time activities. Increasingly alienated from their jobs and from themselves, mostly because of a routinized nature of their jobs in large bureaucratic organizations, they often were confused, apathetic, and dominated by a 'herd mentality'. They operated under the illusion of having power, but in fact they had none. Uncertain of their status, they engaged in a continuous but futile drive for prestige, which simply made them more subservient to the groups that did wield effective power (Miller, 2018).

### 8.3.7 Mass Society Theory:

C. Wright Mills also contributed to the development of mass society theory as part of his broader critiques of modern society. The theory examines how individuals in modern societies can feel disconnected from the traditional social institutions (like the family, church, or community) and become passive participants in a society dominated by mass media and corporate culture. He was particularly concerned with the ways that society was increasingly dominated by large bureaucratic institutions and powerful elites, leading to a decline in individual autonomy and democratic participation. His work on 'mass society' was a precursor to later day of analyses of the concepts of media influence, cultural homogenization, and the decline of civic engagement in modern life. While Mills's discussed in great detail the concept of mass society in his book, *The Power Elite* (1956) and touched upon this concepts in his other works like The Sociological Imagination (1959) and the White Collar: The American Middle Classes (1951). The key aspects of Mills's mass society theory include:

First, the rise of power elites which made significant decisions that affected society as a whole, often without accountability or public scrutiny. This centralization of power led to a reduction of the public's ability to influence key societal directions

Second, mass society diminishes individual agency and freedom by creating conditions where people feel disconnected from the overall decision-making processes. Bureaucratic organizations and powerful elites make choices on behalf of the population, leaving little room for individual action or civic participation.

Third, creation of 'cheerful robots', a term used by Mills to describe how individuals in mass society become passive and conformist, merely fulfilling their roles in the bureaucratic machine without questioning the larger social structures. This sense of powerlessness contributes to a culture where people feel disengaged from the overall political and social issues.

Fourth, loss of community and democratic institutions as traditional structures like close-knit communities and smaller, localized institutions) weaken. In such situations, individuals lose meaningful connections and become isolated. In Mills' view, this isolation contributes to a passive acceptance of authority and reduces people's willingness to challenge power structures.

## 8.4 Summary

Charles Wright Mills was one of the most prominent and influential American sociologists of the last century. Irving Louis Horowitz (1983), his biographer, called

him "the greatest sociologist the United States has ever produced". His contributions to sociology involved a deep critique of power, bureaucracy, middle class, white collar, mass society theory and social structures. He is widely acclaimed for his concept of sociological imagination and this concept continues till today to resonate in efforts of contemporary social scientists to understand the intersections between personal troubles and public issues. His work remains foundational in contemporary sociology, political theory, and critiques of inequality and power.

As discussed above, one of the most striking things about C. Wright Mills was his combativeness. He seemed to be constantly at war in his personal life, professional life and also with the American society of his time at large and challenged it on various fronts. Mills was highly critical of mainstream American social science, particularly its focus on abstract theorizing and empirical research detached from real-world problems. He advocated for 'public sociology', a sociology that was more engaged with pressing social issues and play a more prominent role to challenge the status quo. He critiqued the complacency of mainstream sociology and encouraged sociologists to engage in more critical, radical analysis of power and social inequalities. He was a vocal critic of both capitalism and Soviet-style communism, and his ideas inspired various left-wing intellectuals and social movements in the 1960s and beyond. He played a key role in influencing the New Left Movements of the 1960s, which sought to challenge established power structures and promote social justice.

## 8.5 Questions

**6 marks**

1. Write a short note on the intellectual traditions of that shaped C. Wright Mills' sociology.
2. Give a brief account of C Wright Mills' early life and academic career.
3. Comment critically how the pragmatic tradition influenced C. Wright Mills.
4. Discuss briefly the influence of Karl Marx on C. Wright Mills.
5. Write a brief note on C. Wright Mills's views on white collar workers.

**10 marks**

1. Explain how Mills's concept of the "sociological imagination" challenges conventional approaches to sociology.
2. Discuss the difference between "personal troubles" and "public issues" as described by Mills with a suitable example.

3. Examine critically C. Wright Mills's concept of the "power elite". How did Mills argue that the power elite influence democracy in the United States? (5+5=10)

4. Make a critical assessment of the role of bureaucracy as found in the works of C. Wright Mills.

5. Discuss critically the mass society theory of C. Wright Mills.

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# Module VI-American Sociologists

## Unit-9 □ Pitirim Sorokin: General Contributions to Sociology

**Structure**

## 9.0 Learning Objectives

The unit aims to give the learners a clear cut idea about

- The vast scholarship of Sorokin and his substantial legacy in sociology.
- The way his works paved the path for new fields of study and broadened the scope of sociology.
- How he did contribute in the fields of rural sociology, social mobility, social change, the sociology of knowledge, sociological theory and many other things.

## 9.1 Introduction

Pitirim Alexandrovitch Sorokin was a Russian-American sociologist who is well respected for his vast contribution in sociology both in Bolshevik Russia and in America. He is recognized as one of the most prolific writers of the twentieth century; due to the depth of his knowledge, his grasp over factual details and his

broad historical interests he is respected as one of the most distinctive sociologists of the modern world. Life was not always kind to him and his own personal experiences had left a profound influence on his political and sociological outlooks. He himself has revealed that at the very starting of the socialist revolution in Russia he believed in the egalitarian principles that fuelled the revolutionary spirit, but once the revolution had started he came to realize that the egalitarian principle would not be able to sustain itself. At the same time he was anti-Czarist, from an early age he participated in anti-Czarist activities for which he was arrested twice. His writings during the time of revolution have been criticized by Marxian thinkers but, no doubt, these have offered many clues to understand the revolutionary time.

Barry V. Johnson (1989) has described Sorokin as one of the most colorful, erudite and controversial figures in American sociology; as a prolific writer wrote six books in six years during his stint at the University of Minnesota. He urged that to improve the humane condition sociologists should learn how to make people more humane, compassionate and giving. He has also made important contributions on social mobility, sociological theory and rural sociology.

## 9.2 Life and Time of Sorokin

Sorokin was born in 1889 in a small village named Turya in Czarist Russia; his mother was from a Komi peasant family and his father, a Russian, was a travelling craftsman specializing in gold and silver. When he was only three years old he lost his mother and the family split up. Sorokin and his elder brother accompanied their father whenever he moved in search of work and his little brother, who was only about a year old, was kept in the care of their aunt. Till Sorokin was eleven years old, he stayed with the father. During their travel for work throughout the countryside he was enriched by a deeply religious and moral culture of the Komi people, their sincerity and respect for hard work; his intelligence and innovative ideas also earned recognition from people and he won a number of scholarships that helped him take admission in university. His father became so much alcoholic and abusive that by the age of eleven Sorokin left his father and started to live with his elder brother. In the early 1900s he took admission in the Saint Petersburg Imperial University from where he graduated with a degree in criminology in 1922, did his PhD and became a professor. In 1913, at the age of 24 he became a coeditor of a journal named New Ideas in Sociology that used to publish both original and translated articles in Russian. In 1914 his first book 'Crime and Punishment' was published and as many as seven books were published even before he went to America.

In the early years of his life he had to face wrath of the people in power for his political convictions and had been jailed six times. He was anti-Czarist since the age of fourteen, was arrested first at the age of 17 and then twice again for his anti-Czarist activities. He was also anti-communist, a supporter of the White movement and a Secretary to Prime Minister Alexander Kerensky. His political activism against the new communist regime continued relentlessly and he was arrested several times and finally he was condemned to death by Lenin; but after much persuasion from political allies he was released and ordered to leave Russia. Sorokin and his wife Elena left Soviet Union in 1923 for Prague, Czechoslovakia and one year later they moved to the United States; he then joined the University of Minnesota. During his stay there he became extremely productive; wrote six books in just six years, of which four defined the fields of their subjects during that time and within a short period established himself as a leader in American sociology. As the reputation of these books spread he was invited by Harvard University to chair the university's first Department of Sociology. Many thinkers believe that it was a great step forward for the discipline of sociology as his inclusion in Harvard accorded sociology with academic respectability and he stayed there for the next three decades. From 1930 to 1944 Harvard's department of sociology flourished under his leadership and attracted an entire generation of bright, young scholars. These years were also very productive for Sorokin as he published several volumes of his magnum opus, Social and Cultural Dynamics. This was also the time when he became embroiled in a bitter battle with Talcott Parsons over the control of the Department. Parsons ultimately was able to sideline him and transformed sociology into the Department of Social Relations. As a result, Sorokin's ideas remained ignored and misunderstood for over a century. His years at Harvard changed his sociological vision from positivistic, comparative and scientific to something based on philosophy of history and integralism. With an aim to improve the human condition he came to believe that instead of studying destructive social behavior, sociologists should learn the measures to make people more humane, caring and giving. With this concern in mind he ventured into a decade-long study of altruism and amitology and established one very active Harvard Center for Creative Altruism; however, this Center of his dream did not receive any support from mainstream sociologists and reduced his status to ''somewhat of a margin figure in the discipline.''(Footnotes, Vol-17, No.1,pp.1-5,1989).

In the early 1960s Sorokin's contribution to sociology got recognition afresh when renowned American sociologists of that period including Talcott Parsons,, Robert Merton, Wilbert Moore, G. Gurvitch, W. Firey, Matilda White Riley, N.S. Timasheff, Alex Inkeles and many others started to discuss his ideas published in the 4 volumed book, Sociological Theory, Values and Sociocultural Change(1962).

Then, in April 1963, he was elected the President of the American Sociological Association; during the campaign the members spoke unequivocally in support of him which led to his win by a huge margin. He breathed his last in 1968 with the dignity of an accomplished and well respected scholar.

# 9.3 Intellectual Roots

Sorokin's intellect in general and his sociological ideas in particular had been influenced by the natural environment of his birth land, his childhood experiences, Russian philosophical tradition and Russia intelligentsia including Leo Tolstoy and mainstream sociologists like Emile Durkheim, Weber, Pareto, Ferdinand Tonnies and Oswald Spengler. Friedrich Engels, too, had impressed him very much. His academic works show an extensive range including 37 books and over 4oo articles, some of these are controversial too. His work has followed a distinct pattern throughout time-in early period he started with miscellaneous writings, then came sociocultural dynamics and social criticism and finally altruism appeared.

Sorokin grew up in Komi homelands bordering Finland and was directly influenced by Komi culture. The Komi people were well known for their contributions to the arts, sciences and humanities. They were all independent deeply religious folks and these traits shaped Sorokin's character. From his Shaman uncle he learned about the forest, animals and plains; his naturalistic knowledge of the woods and its creatures was infused by this transcendent pagan mythology, fear of cold dark night. These experiences of his early life shaped his early beliefs about the natural and supernatural. Russian catholicism also contributed important elements to his character; religion, education and Komi traditions intertwined and shaped his early personality and later drove his scholarship toward Integralism.

Among other intellectual influences on Sorokin the impact of mainstream sociology and Russian intelligentsia of his time can also be counted.

(a) Impact of Russian Intelligentsia: Sorokin's career was influenced by the moral activism of the Russian intelligentsia in the 19th and early 20th centuries. His intellectual attitudes were shaped by his Russian education and his open gaze on history and mankind. From his youth he was greatly inspired by the writings of Russian author Leo Tolstoy; his religious and moral teachings, according to Sorokin, was representative of a harmonious and logical system. He was emotionally shaken by the death of Tolstoy in 1910, for him Tolstoy's teaching exceeded the usual bounds of traditional philosophy to blossom into a certain kind of moral philosophy-Sorokin was attracted towards it. He marked out

the structure of Tolstoy's teaching by grounding it in 'the tradition of four great philosophical problems: the essence of the world; the nature of ego; the problem of cognition and the issue of values' (Johnston et al., 1994:31/Wikipedia). Sorokin followed the foundation of Tolstoy's Christian ethics of the principle of love, the principle of non-violent resistance to evil and the principle of not doing evil; he adhered to these principles throughout his life. He believed that Tolstoy's teaching was a harmonious and logical system that went beyond traditional philosophy.

(b)  We can also mention here that Russian philosophical tradition has shaped his epistemological method. He believed that the knowing process is connected to the degree of involvement of the human being in its entirety.

(c)  Socio-cultural change has influenced his thoughts and Sorokin came to believe that the process of such change consists of phases of depression, purification, charisma and revitalization. He believed that civilizations experience transformations in successive short and long intermittent cycle.

Mainstream Sociology: Sorokin was critical of the mainstream sociology of the mid-20th century, which he believed, focused too much on numerical details and results. This led him to develop his own theory of knowledge which he has named Integralism. Yet, sociologists and thinkers like Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Vilfredo Pareto, Oswald Spengler, Friedrich Engels did influence his thoughts.

# 9.4 General Contributions to Sociology

Sorokin was influenced by the Russian revolutionary ideas on the one hand and the scientific study of society at the Psycho-Neurological Institute, on the other. Early in his writings he favored the positivistic and deterministic behaviorism of the scientific community. As he became disenchanted with both the Russian revolution and the communist ideology he dedicated himself to humanitarian methods in sociology and rejection of all forms of reductionist behaviorism. As a thinker he was extremely productive and had written 37 books and over 400 articles; some of his theories are controversial such as the theories of social process and the historical typology of cultures. He was also interested in social stratification, the history of sociological theory and altruistic behavior. His writings have followed a distinct pattern throughout time, starting from an early period of miscellaneous writings, then socio-cultural dynamics and social criticism and then he proceeded towards altruism, which he believed had a lot of scientific support. His study of world civilization had started in 1930s and it produced his best known work titled Social

and Cultural Dynamics where he expressed his concern about imminent danger of collapse of modern human civilization because of its extremely materialistic nature and disorganized character. Then, for over a decade he had campaigned to make people aware of this danger, sought a way out and a path to change the society. In another of his books-Russia and the United States (1944)-he suggested that due to the commonness of Russian and American culture, such as, their spirit of unity amidst diversity, their culture of cosmopolitanism, and their pride in themselves along with tolerance of other societies. He was hopeful that in future these two states would emerge as the two strong post-war power centers and be friends with each other.

(a) **Subject matter of Sociology:** Sorokin has defined sociology as the study of the general characteristics common to all classes of social phenomena and a careful investigation of the relationship between social and non-social phenomena (Abraham & Morgan: 1985). He classified sociology into two parts, namely, structural sociology and dynamic sociology; the former deals with the structure of social, cultural and personality features of the super-organic while the latter focuses on repeated social processes and change, together with the uniformities of how and why as well as changes of personality in its relationship with social and cultural processes. His sociological theory is based on the already established distinction between social statics and social dynamics; but his analysis of statics failed to generate sufficient interests amongst sociologists whereas his ideas of social and cultural dynamics were quite impressive. From his writings it is clear that Sorokin's sociology largely encompasses four principal areas of interest: social interaction, social change, social mobility and social stratification. Sorokin believes that the discipline of sociology unlike other social science disciplines has not secluded itself in the understanding of any one single specified area of knowledge; it studies society as a whole along with the relationship of society with economy, state and other phenomena. 'In his Society, Culture, and Personality he has defined sociology as the generalizing theory of the structure and dynamics of (1) systems and congeries (functionally inconsistent elements); (2) cultural systems and congeries; and (3) personalities in their structural aspects, main types, inter-relationships, and personality processes.' Throughout his life he criticized major trends in modern sociology; he put emphasis on the understanding of social behavior with the help of values because that would help sociology to prepare society for the likely aftermath of change from the sensual quality of the modern world.

(b) **Social Interaction:** Sorokin's understanding of human interaction involves three essential elements; these are-(i) human actors as subjects of interaction, (ii) meanings, values and norms that guide human conduct, (iii) material phenomena that carry meanings and values to include them into a sequence of actions. He never agreed to study human interactions without any reference to norms, meanings and values but has always put emphasis on cultural factors as determinants of social conduct. For him, both personalities, i.e., human beings and society as a collectivity of interacting personalities are rooted in culture that is composed of totality of meanings, norms and values which remain embedded in society and are carried by ritual objects or works of art that express those hidden elements.

Sorokin has spoken of three forms of component of social interaction, for example, organized, unorganized and disorganized ones. He has also spoken of various types of legal and moral controls besides solidarity, antagonistic and mixed systems of social interaction, family-oriented, compulsory and mixed or contractual types of social bonds in great detail. He has also classified organized groups in terms of their functional and meaningful ties as well as in terms of degrees of intensity of group interaction and depth of intimacy between group members. Regarding the types of group, he has further mentioned that groups may be tightly bonded or loosely bonded ; may be uni-bonded with only one single principal value as it is found among the religious or occupational or kinship groups; or the ties may be based on multiple bonds. Again, all these types of groups may be either open or closed. Sorokin has also studied how and to what extent socio-cultural environments shape the human personality. By avoiding 'sociologistic' interpretation of human behavior he concerned himself more with the interdependent and interacting elements of the individual and personality on the one hand and society and culture on the other as integrated totalities. He believed in the multiplicity of 'social egos' of the individual that resulted from his (individual's) various group members. For him, the multiple 'social egos' of the individual is nothing but a reflection of the pluralism of groups.

(c) **Social and Cultural Change:** His ideas on social change accompanied by cultural change have been expressed in his magnum opus Social and Cultural Dynamics (4 vols. 1937-1941). In this work he has presented 'a panoramic survey of all human societies and cultures' (Coser,2011) in their historical and socio-cultural contexts. He was totally opposed to any unilinear explanation of human evolution as well as quasi-biological analogies of culture and preferred wholesome and coherent cultural

outlooks or "mentalities" that leave their imprints on 'specific periods in the global history of humankind'. However, he believes that no culture is fully integrated, hence each contains fragments that are not fully reconcilable. In spite of that, socio-cultural phenomena emerge out of a few major elements that build their overall character.

According to Sorokin, for conceiving and apprehending the nature of reality only three fundamental premises are required: it may be accessed through the senses (Sensate Culture), or through an Idealistic or transcendental vision (Ideational Culture) or via an intermediate form (Idealistic Culture); this last type has the capability to balance the other two opposite principles. In correspondence with these three types of culture there are three forms of truth, e.g., sensory, spiritual, and rational. History has witnessed the rise of one premise over the others to mark its own impression on the thinking, feeling or experiencing of an era. For this reason, the principal social institutions like law, art, philosophy, science and religion of a particular period in history-all correspond to one or the other cultural premises. For example, a Sensate period would reveal rigidly empirical leanings in methods and procedures, art would be realistic and religion would show concern for concrete moral experience than for the truth of faith or reason. In this way Sorokin has connected phases of world history with one or the other type of these three varieties of culture. He also believes that human history, being free of any control from any quarters, always follows its own pace and rhythm to arrive at the next phase of its journey. The pace and rhythm of social change are determined only by its own internal factors; once the cultural system reaches its zenith, it starts to degenerate, prepares its own demise and finally gives birth to a new cultural system. Like noted German philosopher Hegel, Sorokin also accepts change as the rise of a new life to impart dissolution.

According to Sorokin the cycle of change follows its own course that remains balanced on the three main types of cultural mentalities in reliable sequence. Sensate forms will be followed by Ideational and that will be replaced by Idealistic forms of cultural integration. Once the cycle is complete, it will be replaced by a fresh three-phased cycle of change. He felt that the human society of his time was living in a Sensate phase that lasted for hundreds of years but off late had become decadent and meaningless without any significance in life. As the once dominant principles started to lose their relevance, the ideas more suitable for the new age started sprouting to welcome the Ideational cultural form. In due course that would also inevitably give way to the next form, i.e., the Idealistic form of culture. Sorokin has also studied how and to what extent socio-cultural environments shape the human personality. By avoiding 'sociologistic' interpretation of human behavior he

concerned himself more with the interdependent and interacting elements of the individual and personality on the one hand and society and culture on the other as integrated totalities. He believed in the multiplicity of 'social egos' of the individual that resulted from his (individual's) various group members. For him, the multiple 'social egos' of the individual is nothing but a reflection of the pluralism of groups.

(d) **Modalities of Interaction:** In his discussion of individual-personality and society-culture Sorokin was sure that social phenomena should be interpreted with only in terms of 'interaction'. He identified three closely linked inter-related components; these are-i) personality as the subject of interaction; ii) society as the sum total of interacting personalities and iii) culture as the totality of the meanings, values and norms possessed by the interacting personalities and the totality of the measures that apply and interpret those elements.

Interaction requires three components which Sorokin himself has described as (i) rational, intelligent and interpretative individuals' (ii) meanings, values and norms that encourage individuals to interact, realize and interexchange; (iii) expressions, overt actions and material phenomena that are exchanged during interaction. The modality of an interaction depends on the kinds of relationship such as solidarity, antagonism or mixed; their intensity of their feelings and expressions in antagonism or solidarity too can vary from coldness to intensely heated; the extensity too can vary from a small fragmentary one to totality of involvement.

(e) **Three Types of Interaction:** Sorokin's work addressed three important theories examining social differentiation, social stratification and social conflict. To explain social differentiation he has classified relationships into three types such as, familistic, contractual and compulsory, the first type being the most desirable one.

**Familistic relationship-**It is an 'Ideal' type based on mutual love, sacrifice and devotion; such relationships are found among the members of a close-knit family and among very close friends. Such relationships are characterized by solidarity, depth of intensity as well as broadness of extensity, durability, directness, mutuality. These are also marked by the fundamental, normative and purposive types of motivation and harmonious relationship and a deep sense of the socio-cultural oneness of the interacting parties. In this kind of interaction leadership or government remains natural and spontaneous and acts like a protective father. Furthermore, such relationships are all-embracing, all-forgiving and all-bestowing where the 'ego' fuses into the collectivity.

**Contractual relationship-**This kind of relationship is comparatively narrow or limited in character, it covers only a part of the lives of the parties concerned;

it is specified as the rights and duties of the parties concerned remain specified by contract. Again, such relationships are, limited and specified, temporary in nature and occupies only one portion of the interacting individuals' lives. It is self-centered, too, as each party tries to take maximum advantage of the relationship. Examples of contractual relationship may include the buyer-seller or the employer-employee relationships.

**Compulsory relationship-**It is characterized by antagonism ranging from mild discomfort to the highest level of hatred. It originates either due to the fundamental, the normative or the purposive type of motivation or due to the combined strength of all these three. Despotic governments using force and fraud to achieve their goals are examples of such type of relationship.

In his discussion on these three types of interaction Sorokin moved away from the propositions of renowned thinkers like Durkheim and Max Weber and focused on human behavior that influences others, that are mutually and tangibly inter-dependent.

Sorokin believes that the groups that interconnect the society into a compact whole can be classified as per four distinct yet interrelated characteristics: such as, (1) each group has a central set of meanings or ideas and values; (2) this central set of ideas and values must be consistent internally; (3) these values and ideas act as norms of behavior for the group members; and (4) these norms-that act as law norms-should be effective enough to be enforceable.

(f) **Culture and Change-**Sorokin not only discussed personality as a subject of social interaction, he was also interested in the study of society as the totality of the interacting personalities i.e., human beings. In his opinion, both personality and society remain rooted in culture. For him, a culture contains the totality of meanings, norms and values cherished by interacting individuals and expressed through material elements like ritual items or works of art through which the meanings are conveyed. He has viewed change in connection with the cultural aspects of a society.

(g) **Sociology of Knowledge-**A very important aspect of Sorokin's sociology is his sociology of knowledge. His ideas in the field of sociology of knowledge are found in a modest work of his, namely Sociocultural Causality, Space, Time (1943);here he has rejected the ideas of many other equally prominent sociologists like Marx, Weber and Mannheim who reasoned that changes in ideas were linked with changes in social structures. On the contrary, he recognised connections between the totality of cultural environment and mentalities with philosophical,

religious, artistic and scientific thought. Thus, he tried to prove that in the Sensate periods, scientific ideas were based solely on sense experience, empirical proof and validation; on the other hand, during the period of Ideational awakening intuitive insights into the nature of universe were given importance. Such arguments of his had to face criticisms from many quarters; for example, Merton found his arguments very circular or tautological in nature and Sorokin had failed to answer satisfactorily to all his critics. But some of his arguments are genuinely interesting; he has argued that the external influence on a particular culture depends on the type of agents that have come into contact with the other culture and absorbed their values specific to their group. For example, if the agents of change are merchants then various commercial commodities enter the culture first, or if they are missionaries then the ideological values are the first to enter and to influence the existing society to change. By going through his illustrations and elaborations Coser has commented that this insight into the connection between ideas and the existential conditions of their carriers has left no scope for tautology.

(h) **Social Differentiation, Social Stratification and Social Conflict-** Sorokin has immense contribution in the study of social stratification and mobility by inventing or defining much of the terminology used in this field. He has built up three valuable concepts like social differentiation, social stratification and social conflict. His ideas on social differentiation has already been discussed, so here we discuss his concept of social stratification.

Social stratification suggests that all societies are societies are hierarchically divided into upper and lower strata that speak of unequal distribution of wealth, power and influence across strata; these strata are not water tight as there is always some movements possible between these strata. People or groups may gain or lose power, wealth and status that may change their position in the social hierarchy.

Sorokin has presented his theory of war in reference to social conflict. Peace, be it internal or external, national or international, is rooted on similar values. War can destroy values in its destructive phase and can restore some in its declining phase. He was hopeful that the number of wars would decrease with increase in solidarity and decline in animosity. If altruism is given due importance in society, the number of warfare would definitely be less.

(i) **Theory of Altruism/ Five Dimensions of Love-**Sorokin can be described as a pioneer of balanced research in altruism and for him love's energy is five dimensional in relation to its inner purposes, such as-Intensity,

Extensity, Duration, Purity and the Adequacy of Manifestation in objective actions. On a scale of intensity love ranges from Zero to the highest possible point or infinity. Again, coming to extensity, love may range from the Zero point of self-love, that is, one's love for oneself only, to the love of the whole mankind, all leaving beings and also for the whole of the universe. From the point of duration, love may last the shortest possible moment or a prolonged period or a life time of an individual or of a group. Coming to the issue of purity, it can be 'pure' love motivated by love alone and thus it may remain free from any ugly taint or it may be based on some 'utilitarian' motive like utility, pleasure, advantage, financial gain or other kind of profit so that one's selfish aspirations or purposes may be fulfilled. When the adequacy of love is considered, it is witnessed as based upon the expectation of all the concerned persons to express love, be nice, and understanding of the consequences of their own actions. While Sorokin worked on the issue of altruistic love, his motive was to discover the characteristics of people who might be friendly, or neighborly or saintly; for this he had studied the lives of different categories of people from various sex, gender, race and socio-economic categories. He also developed one program for saving humanity through altruistic ethics of love and social solidarity.

(j) **Other Areas of Sorokin's Interest-**Being active in politics in his early years Sorokin was interested in issues concerning the legitimacy of power, Russia's representative democracy, etc. He was hopeful of seeing a new Russia once communism would fall. Sorokin had focused on rural society as well and in collaboration with Carle Zimmerman he expanded on the perspective of rural-urban sociology.

## 9.5 Conclusion

In his long and distinguished career, Sorokin had produced a huge body of amazingly diverse and substantial body of work which in many cases set the standard for the field. On many occasions he had moved away from conventional sociology and ridiculed other sociologists which made him unpopular amongst his contemporary sociologists in America, his ideas had been consistently ignored and misunderstood that pushed him towards relative insignificance.

Talcott Parsons, a fellow American sociologist was not only his colleague at Harvard but was also one of the most influential sociologists of the modern world,

and Sorokin became involved in a bitter rivalry with him over the control of the department which resulted in his gradual insignificance in the world of sociology for a long period. But it cannot be denied that his works have a timeless appeal, they have opened up new arenas of sociological research and investigation and have made way for innovative thinking. However, his critics have found many a faults in his writings, for example, he is often accused of unjust comparison between different types of elements like the best in the one form with the worst in another. In spite of many other criticisms we cannot deny that his intellect, vision and analytical mind has enriched the world of sociology in many ways.

## 9.6 Summary

This unit presents a biographical and intellectual account of Sorokin; it has also discussed his overall contributions to sociology including his ideas on social and cultural change, different types and modalities of social interaction, sociology of knowledge, social differentiation, social stratification, social conflict, as well as his theory of altruism. From this brief analysis of his views learners will be able to get a glimpse into his overall contributions to sociology.

## 9.7 Model Questions

**A. Answer in brief:**                                        **5 Marks each**

1. How did Komi culture influence Sorokin?
2. Make an assessment of the impact of Russian intelligentsia on Sorokin?
3. What, according to Sorokin, is the subject-matter of sociology?
4. What, according to Sorokin, are the components of interaction?
5. What does Sorokin mean by familistic relationship?
6. How has Sorokin defined contractual relationship?
7. Discuss, in brief, Sorokin's contribution in the field of sociology of knowledge.
8. What, according to Sorokin, are the five dimensions of love?

**B. Discuss in detail:**                                         **10 Marks each**

1. Make a critical assessment of Sorokin's theory of social interaction. What are its modalities and types?
2. Make an assessment of Sorokin's presence in sociology.

## 9.8 Reference

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# Unit-10 □ Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941) and Robert Mitchells (1876-1936)

**Structure**

## 10.1 Objectives

After going through this unit learners will be able:

- To understand the definitions of the elites.
- To know about the classic theorists of elite theory.
- To understand the contribution of G. Mosca and R. Michels.
- To know about the ruling class and non-ruling class of Mosca and "Iron Law of Michels."
- To understand the difference between elitism and pluralism, and elitism and democracy.

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## 10.2 Introduction

The word "elite" is derived from the Latin word "Elegere" that means to choose or to select or to sort out. In political and sociological theory, the elite is a small group of powerful people who hold a disproportionate amount of wealth, privilege, political power or skill in a group. Defined by the Cambridge Dictionary, the "elites" are "the richest, the most powerful, best educated or best trained group in a society. Vilfredo Pareto was the person who first used the concept 'elite' in social sciences. In 1823 the word elite is first used in English. It has been used in English to discuss regarding the groups. During the nineteenth century the elite is used as social status in the stratified social system. At present it is used to identify higher status-oriented people.

### 10.2.1 Definition of the Elite:

To Harrold Lasswell, the elite is a powerful group which gets the maximum needs that are to be gained. Elite is always the minority class, and the people are majority class who is the policy-maker and decision to be taken by this minority class. And the rest are the majority. Further, he opines that those who get maximum benefits,they are elite, the rest are the general people who are ultimately governed and controlled by the minority class. In other words, in the simplest terms, elites are those individuals or groups that hold a disproportionate amount of power and influence in a society. This can manifest in various forms-be it through wealth, political strength, military control, or social influence, their distinct qualities and how they acquire their status are what Political Sociologists are deeply interested in exploring. Elites do not just magically appear; they must gain and then maintain their power. This is done through various means such as economic control, institutional power, or even through cultural and ideological dominance.

## 10.3 Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941)

Along with V. Pareto and R. Michels Gaetano Mosca is commonly regarded as the main representative of the Italian School of Elitism. He was an Italian political philosopher, political scientist, journalist, and public servant. He is credited with developing the theory of Elitism and the doctrine of the political class. Born in Palermo, Sicily,—which was part of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies before Italian unification in 1861,—April first, 1858, Gaetano Mosca belonged to a middle-class wealthy family. Since he was a young boy, he set his life looking for firm cultures' basis; he matured a great passion for reading and as a young man, he

opted for historical judicial studies. He attended profitably the Faculty of Law in his town (together with his friend Vittorio Emanuele Orlando) and he graduated in 1881 with distinction. Immediately after his graduation, in order to gain his economic independence, he started teaching History and Geography in a high school in Palermo and in the at the Faculty of Law. This University had just established some Social Sciences courses and Mosca taught many years of the History of Political Science The following years, besides winning the open competition to become Professor, he embedded himself in the Italian cultural and academic world: he established firm relationships with the most important academics of his time, as meantime he started his academic career which brought, in a few years, to obtain the chair in Constitutional Law at the Universities in Palermo and Rome, where he taught from 1888 to1896 and became chair constitutional law at the University of Turin in 1896. He held this position 1924, when he settled permanently in Rome to occupy the chair Public Law of ….///. At University of Rome. At the end of 1896 he moved to Turin (together with his wife and their three children), where he was appointed Associate Professor in Constitutional Law Einaudi, Ferrero, Lombroso and Michels. He also held important conferences and presided over various cultural associations. Since 1901 he even increased his influence on the Italian political debate, thanks to his regular collaboration with Luigi Alberini's Corriere Della Sera. In z1902 he was appointed Professor in Constitutional and Administrative Law in the new-born Bocconi University in Milan. He kept this chair until 1918 when he accepted to teach Political Science. In 1909 he was elected in a Sicilian constituency. Being a member of the elective House of the Parliament, where he collocates himself with the Right in a liberal-conservative position, he led enthusiastic debates often clearly contrasting Giolitti's positions, against both the universal suffrage and the introduction of the proportional electoral law. In 1914 he joined Salandra's government in the role of parliamentary secretary of the Colonies. In 1919 he was nominated Senator of the Kingdom as a member of Parliament in the last two terms, he mostly took care both agriculture and alimentation issue, and the colony and emigration problem. In 1924 he went back to Rome where the Faculty of Law appointed him Professor of Internal Public Law. In 1925 he signed Benedetto Croce's antifascist manifesto and joined the Liberal Party established by Croce himself together with Giolitti, Orlando, Ruffini and Fortunato. At the end of the same year, he made the most important and well-known speech of his parliamentary life against the bill, imposed by Mussolini, about the attribution and the prerogatives to the Head of the government. In the following years he edited a number of other important publications (including the last edition of Element) and was awarded several honorary degrees, as well as the nomination at the Academia dei Lincei As a national member. He died in Rome, November 8, 1941.

In 1909, Mosca was elected to the chamber of Deputies of Italy, in which he served until 1919. During this time, he served as Under-secretary of state for the colonies from 1914 to 1916. In 1919, Mosca was nominated life senator of the Kingdom of Italy by King Victor Emmanuel III. He worked actively and sincerely in this capacity until 1926; during the Fascist dictatorship, Mosca retired to teach and research. His last speech in the Senate was an attack on the fascist leader Benito Mussolini.

Mosca's "Theory of Governments and Parliamentary Government" (1884) was followed by The Ruling Class (1896). In these and other writings, but especially in The Ruling Class, he stated—contrary to theories of majority rule—that societies are necessarily governed by minorities: by military, priestly, or hereditary oligarchies or by aristocracies of wealth or of merit. He showed an impartial indifference to the most diverse political philosophies. For him the will of God, the will of the people, the sovereign will of the state, and the dictatorship of the proletariat were all mythical.

The concept of "Political Class" was first introduced by Gaetano Mosca. His assumption was based on the observation of reality, and in his view, the political class derives his strength from the objective fact that it is organized. Mosca did not focus only on the division present in every society between a small group of people that govern, even using violence, if necessary, over the majority of the population. But he explained the assumption through the concept of organization. By organization, Mosca refers to both the relationship based on common interests who lead the members of an (organized) minority to make a solid and homogeneous group against the biggest but disorganized majority and as a synonym of the political hierarchy, necessary to the functioning and the surviving of the State. In Mosca's view, elites are not always hereditary, as people from all classes of society can theoretically become elite. When this happens, the reproduction of powr is defined as democratic; in contrast, when the members' turnover remains inside the elite, the reproduction of power is defined as aristocratic. His sociological view is evident not only in his rejection of geographic Climatc, social-Darwinian and racial theories, but especially in his explicit use of concepts such as "Social Structure", "Social Types", and "Social Forces", According to Mosca, rsulers and ruled have existed throughout history. He believed that in every developed society "political Control in the broadest sense of the term (administrative, military, religious, economic, and moral leadership) is exercised always by a special class, or by an organized minor....."

Like V. Pareto Mosca divided the people of all the societies into two: the ruling class or political class and the ruled majority class. Mosca says that in any type

of society at any point of history, there are two classes of people-a class that rule and the other class that is ruled. The former contains a few numbers of people and possess all political power and privileges whereas the latter consists of larger number of people and is subjected to rule of former and provides essential instrumental for political organization. For Mosca, two political facts must be considered to analyze the relationship between the ruling class and the ruled class. The first fact is that there is always one person who is the leader of political organization among the ruling class. This person, for example, can be Prime Minister or King or President. Under certain conditions, this supreme power can be in the hands of more than one person. The second fact is regardless of the type of political organization, pressures of masses in ruling class. Therefore, the ruling class, of the head of the state, must be sensitive about thought and feelings of the masses to get their support, otherwise he cannot rule. For this reason, at least a large group from the masses is created to support the ruling class and the system. The organized minority succeeds in stabilizing its rule by making it acceptable to the masses. This is done by means of a "Political Formula", a term roughly equivalent to Marx's ruling-class ideology, Weber's "Legitimation" of power, Sorel's 'Myths" and 'Pareto's"Derivations". Mosca opines, "Every governing class tends to justify its actual exercise of power by resting it on some universal moral principle." The "Political Formula" is not invented and employed "to trick the masses into obedience". It is a "great superstition" or illusion, at the same time, is a great social force. It includes the common values, beliefs, sentiment and, habits that result from a people's community of history and make that people receptive to the fictions employed by the governing class to legitimize its rule.

Every successful regime rest on the careful cultivation of the beliefs of the lower classes in the ruling political formula. Failure to develop such all-embracing general beliefs means that the rulers have failed to unify the different social groups and classes of society. The principles underlying the formula must be rooted in the consciousness of the more populous and less well-educated strata of society." Mosca was a forgotten man under the Fascist regime. He was remembered on wisely as a useful target of totalitarian rhetoric. While intellectually a rigid Positivist, devoid of philosophical or moralizing themes, he was above all a moralist. His opposition to Socialism was based not merely on scientific but on moral grounds.

His opposition to the Fascist

To Mosca, the fate of a ruling class depends on its energy, wisdom, and political sophistication. But one could learn much in this regard from the great political thinkers of the past. According to Mosca, two contradictory tendencies are continuing in every society: one is democracy and the other Aristocracy. In

the case of aristocracy hereditary tendency is prevailing. On the other side, in case of democracy, new members come regularly. At the same time, two fundamental principles are available. (a) liberal principles and (b) autocratic principles. Mosca was a liberal in the sense that he had great respect and admiration for liberal principles, traditions, and institutions. The liberal principle, he believed, " has had a more brilliant record than the autocratic principle…". Liberalism is best in the sense that it allows both principles to work side by side with neither overpowering the other. Officials are appointed or elected from 'below' i.e. directly or indirectly by their subordinate. They have authority but not unlimited power, since definite limits are imposed upon their powers in relation to " individual citizens and to associations citizens." These limits—checks and balances-are the essence of Liberalisms, they are the fundamental elements of what Mosca calls "juridical defense", which in turn is the real criterion of the advance of civilization. On the other hand, too much closure results in autocracy, it leads to the isolation of the rulers and eventually to their downfall. Mosca is opposed to the weakening of the representative system. He regards parliamentary institutions as an essential aspect of liberal Government.

Mosca's theory of ruling class has been criticized in many ways. (i) To Mosca, middle class, owner of property, political personal, intellectuals, bureaucracy are considered as ruling class. (ii) To Mosca, ruling class and political class is regarded as same. This is not proper (iii) Mosca's understanding of Marx is inadequate. James H. Meisel has shown that Mosca knew firsthand only a few fragments of Marx's total work (iv) According to C.W. Mills, the concept "class" is an economic word and the "ruling" is political word. So, Mosca's explanation regarding these words are not satisfactory. (v) Distinction between elites and masses is oversimplified. (vi) Mosca's theory of elite is anti-democracy and anti-socialism. For Mosca, the government of the people is a myth, or merifiction. Almost all the states are governed by the minority people of the masses who are elected by the majority people or the masses i.e. by the people, of the people, for the people. Raymond Aron correctly opined, "It is quite impossible for the government of a society to be in the hands of any but few..... There is government for the people, there is no government by the people." (vii) Mosca's elite theory is unable to engage with normative issues of democracy and justice.

## 10.4 Robert Michels (1876-1936 January 9)

Robert Michels was a German-born Italian Sociologist. Along with Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, Michels was one of the classical famous members of the Italian School of Elitism. He was a disciple of Max Weber and friend of Wermer

Sombart, and Achille Loria. Michels was born to a wealthy German family in Cologne, on January 9, 1876. He studied in England, Paris(at the Sorbonne ), and at Universities in Munich, Leipzig(1897),HalParis(at and Turin. He became a socialist while teaching at the Protestant University of Marberg and became active in the Social Democratic Party of Germany for whom he was an unsuccessful candidate in the 1903 German Federal election. He moved from the Socialist Democratic Party of Germany to the Italian Socialist Party. Later he associated with Italian Revolutionary Syndicalism, a leftist branch of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI). He left both parties in 1907.

Robert Michels criticized Karl Marx's materialistic determinism. Michels borrowed from Werner Sombart's historical methods, because Michels admired Italian culture and was prominent in the social sciences, he was brought to the attention of Luigi Einaudi and Achille Loria. They succeeded in procuring for Michels a professorship at the University of Turin in 1907, where he taught Economics, Pollical Science and Socioeconomics until 1914. He then became professor of economics at the University of Basel, Switzerland, a post he held until 1928.He also taught at the University of Messina in 1921. In 1924, he joined the Fascist Party, led by Benito Mussolini, former director of the Italian Socialist Party's newspaper "Avanti." In 1928, he became Professor of Economics and the history of doctrines at the University of Perugia and occasionally lectured in Rome. He caught an illness in Bordeaux and died shortly thereafter in Rome on May 3, 1936.

The following writings of Robert Michels are mentioned below:

1. Unionism and Socialism in German (1908)

2. The Proletariat and the Bourgeoisie in the Italian Socialist Movement (1908; 1975 )

3. On the Sociology of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy (1911).

4. Boundaries of Sexual Ethics

5. Problems of Social Philosophy (1914)

6. Italian Imperialism: Political and Demographic Studies (1914)

7. Love and Chastity: Sociological Essays (1914)

8. The Organization of Foreign Trade (1925)

9. Socialism and Fascism in Italy (1925)

10. Critical History of the Italian Socialist Movement (La Voce, 1926,. 1911).

11. First Lectures in Political Sociology (1927)

12. Morality in Numeric? Criticism of Morale Statistics (1928).

13. Influence 0f the Fascist Arbeitsverfassung on the World Economy (1929)

14. Italy Today: Political and Economic Cultural History from 1860 to 1930 (1930 )

15. Introduction to the history of Economic Political Doctrines (1932)

16. Boycotts, an essay on an aspect of crises (1934

17. International Boycotts (1936)

18. Pauperization Theory-Studies Research into international Dogmas: History of National Economy (1970)

19. Elites and /or Democracy (1972)

20. Works on paper,1918—1930 (Babara Mathes Gallery, 1984)

21. Critique of Socialism: contribution to the debates at the start of the 20th century.

Articles selected and presented by Pierre Cours-Salies and Jean-Marie Vincent (Editions Kime,1992ISBN2-908212-43-9)

In his book "PolitEical Parties" he analysed the tendencies that oppose the realization of democracy and claims that these tendencies can be classified in three ways: (i) dependence upon the nature of the individual (need for leaders); (ii) dependence upon the nature of the political structure (utilization of facilities by leaders within their organization), and (iii) dependence upon the nature of organization (the importance of the psychological attributes of the leader). Robert Michels, author of the classic work "Political Parties" was typically described as a disillusioned socialist who drifted from Marxism and became a proponent of anti-democratic elite theory after encountering the works of Gaetano Mosca and Vilfredo Pareto. Michels argued for broad continuity in his writing during his most political period (1904-14) which publication of political parties. By reinterpreting Michels and his relationship to socialist and syndicalist thought of the period, his work is recontextualized as part of a larger conversation on socialism, democracy and the mass political party. Michels emergesd as a complex thinker whose work diverged from Mosca and Pareto's in tone and purpose.

Following the above three tendencies Michels opines "democracy leads to oligarchy, and necessarily contains an oligarchical nucleus." He argues that the "Iron law of oligarchy" is the idea that in any organization, power will ultimately become concentrated in the hands of a small group of individuals, even if the organization began with a democratic or egalitarian structure. Various issues like

democracy, socialism, revolution, class struggle, labour union, mass society, etc. are discussed in his book Political Parties. He was very anxious about the intellectuals and the eliists' role. He was very interested to discuss about the new issues like engenic, feminism etc. He achieved international recognition for his sociological and historical study, which was published in 1911; its title in English is Political Parties: A Sociological Study the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy. In it, he presented his theory of the "iron law of oligarchy" that political parties, including those considered socialist, can not be democratic because they quickly transform themselves into bureaucratic oligarchies.

Michels attended the first International Eugenics Congress in 1912 where he delivered a paper entitled "Eugenics in Party Organization."

# 10.5 History of the Law of Oligarchy

Early in his adult career, Michels himself was an active socialist and a member of the German Socialist Democratic Party. In some senses, Michels' "Iron Law of oligarchy" "Can be seen as the product of his personal experiences as a socialist member of the German SDP. His "Iron Law" is based upon Michels' empirical study of German SDP and a number of associated trade unions.

## 10.5.1 The Iron Law of Oligarchy:

The iron law of oligarchy is a term coined by Robert Michels. The term "oligarch" is derived from the Greek word "oligarches", where "olig" means few, while "arches" means rulers. Therefore, oligarchy can be defined as any organization that is run by a few people. This law states that all organizations, including those practicing democracy, are prone to be ruled by a few elites individuals. Naturally, this subtracts democracy in such systems. There are several rules attributed to an oligarchy, control of resources by the minority, lack of leadership turnover, and low levels of participation in governance by the majority are main. The term oligarchy was initially used to refer to a type of government which is controlled by a few individuals or a small group of people with a motive of fulfilling their corrupt and selfish interests. Rulers or leaders of this type of a government are called oligarchs. The iron law of oligarchy a sociological theory, states that all organizations are subjected to ruled by an elite few (oligarchs).Therefore, oligarchy can be defined as any organization that is run by a few people. The elite few can be the wealthy or high-ranking people in a society or an organization.

The most significant theorist of oligarchy is Robert Michels who coined the term "Iron law of oligarchy" in the 20th century. Robert Michels first developed

the "Iron Law of Oligarchy" as a political theory in his book Political Parties". This book was first published in the German language in1911, and then an Italian version was published in 1912. And finally, the first English version of this book was issued in 1915. The translation of its full title gives a clear picture of the iron law of oligarchy in Sociology, being, Political Parties: A Sociological study of the Oligarchy Tendencies of Modern Democracy. The iron law of oligarchy, a sociological theory, states that all organizations are subjected to be ruled by an elite few (oligarchs), creating a dynamic balance between justice and injustice and also between democracy and cruel, oppressive rule (tyranny). The elite few can be the wealthy or high-ranking people in a society or an organization. According to Robert Michels' iron law of oligarchy, an organization is not likely to remain democratic over time as oligarchs assumed leadership. But he defined his subject more precisely in the subheading, "on the oligarchic tendencies of group life." He lies the theme of the book: All organizations, regardless of whether they have democratic constitution or agenda, in practice develop into oligarchy.

To Michels each organization's original aims, whatever may be eventually, oligarchy comes into existence. According to Michels, "who says organization, says oligarchy". For its survival every organization must have a competent leader. The need for effective leadership becomes more and more essential. Every organization develops within itself an elite, comprising the leadership and executive staff. only this elite has the specialized knowledge leader required to make the organization successful. On the other hand, the masses majority are apathetic, indolent and slavish. They are normally unorganized and unable to take decision. They are bound to surrender to the elite minorities. In modern political system, the people majority (the masses) cannot participate directly in decision making issues. As a result, representative system come into existence. In the system of representative government bureaucratization is becoming powerful. To Michels, two factors-(1) Organization and psychological factors are responsible for bureaucratization. Michels stressed several factors that underline the iron law of oligarchy. Darcy K. Leach summarized them briefly as "Bureaucracy happens. If bureaucracy happens, power rises, power corrupts".

Any organization as it becomes larger, bureaucracy is must in order to maintain its efficiency and to function effectively, because many critical decisions and issues cannot be fulfilled properly by the large numbers of disorganized people majority. According to Michels this process is further compounded as delegation is necessary in any large organization, because the people majority cannot take decisions via participation, democracy, so bureaucratization, specialization, reutilization, rationalization are the driving processes for the iron law. Bureaucracy by design

leads to centralization of power by the leaders. Leaders also have control over sanctions and rewards. People achieve leadership positions because they have above average political skills. As they advance in their careers their power and prestige increases. Leaders will also dedicate significant resources to persuade the rank and file of the rightness of their view. This is compatible with most societies. People are taught to obey those in positions of authority. Therefore, the rank-and-file show little initiative, and wait for the leaders to exercise their judgment, and issue directives to follow.

## 10.6 Nature of the Elite

The concept of elite is a central theme in Sociology. It may be considered that the elites have been a dominant theme in the history of western political and sociological thought since the turn of the last century. Elite theory is a concept in philosophy, Sociology, Political Science and Economies that claims that a select few individuals hold majorities of power and control over society. This elite group is often policymakers and leaders who control the political, economic, social and cultural aspects of society. According to the elite theory, the society is controlled and governed by the elite. The mass people (the majority people) i.e. non-elite common people have been influenced and dominated by the minority elite. With the help of special quality and devices of the minority elite class impose control and influence over the political affairs, administration, educational system, culture and literacy, religion, economics, social system etc. For the smooth running of the society elite is essential. As a result, it is not only practical it is also welcome for the society. For political affairs, elite is used in power distribution. Elite is that minority class that political power is centered. And the elite enjoys actual power by which the mass people is guided and controlled. The elite helps us understand the nature of political power structure. So, elite theory is a theory of state that seeks to describe and explain power relation in contemporary society. The theory posits that a small minority, constituting members of the political-economic elite and policy planning networks holds the most power and that this power is independent of democratic election. The core doctrine of the elite theory is that it is a minority that makes decisions that affect the public and that the minority ruling gap is composed of those who occupy—commanding political positions. It over time changes in different ways. At times, it is through the recruitment of people from the lower strata of society into the ruling elite group. At other times, a new group is incorporated into the governing elite or a complete replacement by a "counter-elite" through a revolution, which Pareto called the Concept of Circulation of elite. It is, therefore,

imperative to state clearly that the cure doctrine of the elite theory stresses that it is the minority that makes decisions that bind and affect the public. Hence, the bulk of the population (masses) is destined to be ruled by their decisions. Mosca refers to this minority as the"Political class" which includes a "wider circle of those whose influence governmental decision as well as those who formally decide policies."

Moreover, the elite is a group of people with disproportionate amounts of power, influence, and wealth relative to the rest of society. The group can be defined by several factors, including social class, political affiliatio, or wealth. This elite class typically comes from a certain social atmosphere is characterized by their wealth, social connection, access to power, education, and ties to influential institutions. Though all of these attributes, webs of powerful individuals are able to dictate the policies that govern society and shape social, political and economic outcomes. Furthermore, major narratives and ideologies that outline public discourse are often seen as being determined by these elites.

## 10.6.1 History of Elite Theory:

The root of the elite's theory can be traced in Plato who theorized that the best government was one Composed of philosopher kings and a guardian. Class-people with the highest level of wisdom and moral character. A minority of individuals reveal superior moral and intellectual qualities which make them best suited to leading society. Polybius referred to what we call today "Elite Theory" as simply "autocracy". He posted with great confidence that all three originating forms of sources of political; one man (monarchy/executive) few men (aristocracy) many men (democracy) would eventually be Corrupted into a "mixed government." Monarch would become "tyranny", democracy would become "mob rule", and rule by elites (aristocracy) would became corrupted in what he called "Oligarchy". Polybius effectively remarked, this is due to properly apply checks and balances between the three mentioned forms as well as subsequent political institutions. At the beginning of the twentieth century an increasing number of studies approached this phenomenon, but the topic became prominent only starting from the end half of the twentieth century when a more empirical declination of So.ciology and Political Science was entrenched.

The idea of superior elitist leadership was echoed by various famous theorists over the centuries, including 13th century theologian Thomas Acquinas and 17th century author John Milton. In the 19th century, the work of Italian economic and social theorists Vilfredo pareto, Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels provided a more concrete foundation for the elitist theory. The work of these three scholars is

often referred to as the Italian school of Elitism. This school of thought assumes that elite power structures are inevitable while attempting to explain how and why these structures form and function. Pareto puts a strong emphasis on the superior intellectual and psychological qualities of the elites and provided an in-depth analysis of how individuals can transition in and out of elite status. G. Mosca focused on the personal attributes and sociological factors that lead to individuals becoming and maintaining their status as elites.

R. Michels is famous for the "Iron Law of oligarchy", which suggests that social and political organizations, regardless of their ideological or democratic foundation, eventually fall into the control of an oligarchy or elite few. A key part of this theory relates to the division of labour and bureaucracy in organizations. However, throughout history, thinkers like V.Pareto, Gaetano Mosca and R. Michels developed theories to understand how elites come to power and maintained stheir status. They suggested that no matter the form of government or economic system, there will always be a minority that rules over the majority, often referred to as the "iron law of oligarchy".

## 10.6.2 The Purpose of the Elite Theory:

The purpose of the elite theory is to find a scientific explanation of the fact that—no matter when or where—in every society, most of the existent resources—economic, intellectual, and cultural—are concentrated in the hands of a small group of individuals which use them to exercise power over the rest of the population. Elite theory envisions society as divided between the mass of people and a ruling minority where the political power—the power to take and impose decisions valid to the whole society—always belongs to the latter.

Now we will discuss about the classic elite theories, namely G. Mosca's theory of ruling class and R. Michels' theory of Iron law of oligarchy.

## 10.6.3 Main Features of the Elites:

From the above discussion we may mention the following features:

(i) Exclusivity: Barriers to entering the ruling class.

(ii) Concentrated wealth: one small group of people has most of the wealth (monetary wealth or other forms of wealth).

(iii) Limited political influence from citizens: the public is unable to influence political decisions in significant ways.

(iv) Inevitability of oligarchy: Robert Michels argued that within any democratic organization there is an inevitable tendency for power and

decision making to become concentrated in the hands of a small, elite group of individuals.

   (v) Rule by elite: This elite group known as an oligarchy, gradually gains control over the organization's leadership and decision-making processes. They hold power and influence over the majority of members.

  (vi) Tactical and technical necessities: Michels attributed this concentration of power to what he called "tactical and technical necessities". He argued that as organizations grow and become more complex, they require a leadership structure that can effectively make decisions and coordinate activities. This necessity leads to the emergence of an oligarchy.

 (vii) Democracy vs. oligarchy: Michels' theory challenged the idealistic notion of pure democracy within organizations, suggesting that even in democratic settings, power would eventually be concentrated in the hands of a few, leading to oligarchic rule. Elitism offers a critical view on democracy, equal representation and meaningful citizen participation. Education and occupation elites are more privileged than non-elite population non organized.

(viii) Elitism is the exact opposite to pluralism: Pluralism and elitism are two different theories that are used to explain how power is spread between individuals and groups in society. Pluralism suggests that power is spread amongst different groups in society. Powerful pressure/ interest groups are a classic example of pluralism because they show how power is divided amongst these different competing groups and not concentrated with one organization.

On the other hand, in elitist theory power is concentrated amongst a few groups or individuals, including the government.

## 10.6.4 Types of Elites:

Elites can generally be categorized into three broad types: ruling, economic and power elites. Each type wields control in different domains of society and their roles often intersect creating a complex web of influence and governance.

   (i) Ruling Elites: Ruling elites are those who directly influence political decisions and policies. They can be monarchs in a monarchy, party leaders in a democracy or dictators in an autocratic regime. For instance, the politburo in a communist state or the senior officials in a democratic government.

The ruling elites' decisions can shape everything from foreign policy to the allocation of resources, directly affecting the lives of the masses. Their governance style can also dictate the level of freedom and equality within a society.

(ii) Economic Elites: Economic elites are those who hold significant wealth and control over resources, business and markets. These could be industrial magnates, financiers or tech moguls who can influence economic policies and trends.

Economic elites can shape job markets, wage levels and even the overall health of an economy. Their investment decisions can lead to economic booms or recessions affecting millions of lives. Economic elites can invest in education and health, ensuring better opportunities for their offspring and perpetuating their statues across generations.

(iii) Power Elites: The concept of power elites was extensively discussed by C. Wright Mills who identified them as a coalition of military, corporate and political leaders. This group transcends traditional boundaries of power wielding influence across multiple domains. Power elites can manipulate both economic and political systems to serve their interests often at the expense of democratic processes and the general welfare.

(iv) Cultural and Ideological Influence: Elites can also wield power through cultural hegemony, where they set the norms, values ideologies that become dominant within a society. This can be seen in the way media moguls influence public opinion or how educational curricula shape the next generations world-views.

Moreover, "Institution like the government, military and educational systems can consolidate and perpetual power, elites often occupy key positions within these institutions to maintain their status and implement policies that favour their continued dominance.

The interplay between different types of elites: The lines between the different types of elites are not always clear cut. In many cases, there is a significant overlap with individuals or groups wielding influence in multiple domains.

Elites may collaborate and conflict among elites. Elites may consolidate their collective power, but they can also come into conflict when their interests diverge, political elites might push for regulations that economic elites oppose or power elites may have different visions for the country's direction.

In addition, knowledge elites, who control or influence social knowledge. These arenas of social power are not exclusive more powerful elites have access to more resources.

Vilfredo pareto discussed about the existence of two types of elites: (i) Governing elites, and (ii) Non governing elites.

To Gaetano Mosca elites are of two types: (i) organized minority and (ii) unorganized majority. In addition, the ruling class is composed of the ruling elite and the sub-elites. He divided the word into two groups: (i) Political class and (ii) non-political class.

Robert Michels was a German born Italian sociologist who contributed to the elite theory by describing the political behavior of intellectual elites. He proposed the famous "Iron Law of Oligarchy".

# 10.7 Criticism

Critics have criticized the elite theory in many ways.

   (i) Some sociologists opined that all historical societies have not been hierarchical with an elite e.g. acephalous tribes and egalitarian societies. (Though elitism as a theory only usually appeared sto modern societies.

  (ii) The iron law of oligarchy by Robert Michels has received criticism. Robert Dahl, in his 1989 book "Democracy and its critics", criticized R. Michels' "iron law of oligarchy". R. Dahl argued that despite having one ruling party as an oligarchy it does not mean that all the other competing political parties will have the same form of system (oligarchy) Moreover, some writings have indicated that R. Michels' law is not a theory, but an analysis of how elites tend to domineer all complex organization.

 (iii) On democracy, Pareto always separate ideal democracy and democracy applied, and prefers to talk about the subjects of democracy rather than democracy itself. Michels is clearly in favour of democracy. Mosca was previously against democracy but after the experience of Fascism in Italy, he changes his mind.

 (iv) In terms of methodology, Pareto and Mosca used historical methods in their studies, but they took history as true knowledge. That was one of their weaknesses. On the other hand, Michels' analysis was based on more concrete data.

  (v) Another important commonality of them is to reject to explain social events by one factor. However, it seems that psychological factors in Pareto's theory and structural factors in Michels' theory are dominant.

(vi) According to elite theory power and influence in any society developed or developing is concentrated in the hands of a select few who are minority organized. To elitists people majority are irrational, unorganized. This thinking about the general public (masses) is not always correct.

(vii) vii) The elite theory is very much interested to preserve the traditional conservative idea of inequality in society. It is also an opportunity to democracy, socialism and Marxism.

## 10.8 Conclusion

From the above discussion we may conclude that when elites have much influence, democratic processes can become compromised. Elections may be swayed by campaign contribution and policies may favour the wealthy over the needs of the majority. Understanding the types of elites and their role in society is critical for a comprehensive grasp of Political Sociology. Elites shape much of our world from the policies that govern us to the economic system that sustains us. However, their influence is a double-edged sword that can both drive progress and hinder fairness and democracy. In other words, it may be said that "no one" speaks for the people. Nowadays elite groups may show publicly that their policy is "public-associated, but there is always their interest that will be top prior.

## 10.9 Summary

Studies on elites have been one of the largest subject in social sciences, particularly in sociology and political science. Elite theories introduced not only elites, but also new important subjects like power and rose questions, for example on oligarchical tendencies in democracy. Basic discussion on the classic theories, namely Pareto's circulation of elites Mosca's theories of ruling class and R. Machel's theory of Iron Law of oligarchy are included.

Elite theory emphasizes how the policy operates, who controls and dominates and benefits from it. Or concisely: who rules and governs? To govern, elites must hold the power. Power is centered in institutions. Therefore, key leadership positions in these institutions are reserved for the elite. This class controls the economy and preserves the economic status quo.

To V. Pareto, there are two types of elites: (i) governing elites and (ii) non-governing elites. To Mosca sociology and personal characteristics elites are

emphasized. The Iron Law of oligarchy was developed by R. Michels who asserts social and political organization and labour division are basic features.

## 10.10 Questions

**A. Answer in brief**                                              **(5 marks each)**
   1. What do you mean by elite?
   2. What is V. Pareto's theory of the elite?
   3. What is G. Mosca's theory of the elite?
   4. What is the "Iron Law of oligarchy"?
   5. Define ruling class and non-ruling class?
   6. What is the difference between pluralism and elitism?

**B. Answer in Detail**                                              **(10 marks each)**
   1. Explain V. Pareto's circulation of elite theory.
   2. Discuss in detail the "Iron Law of oligarchy"?
   3. Mention the contribution of G. Mosca's elite theory?

## 10.11 Suggested Readings

   1. Study material (NSOU) PGPS, paper-iv
   2. Study material (NSOU) ESO-3 Elective Sociology(H).
   3. Rajnaitik Samajtattwa by Anadi Mahapatra Suhrid Publications
   4. Rajnaitik Samajtattwa by Kalyan Kr. Sarkar, Nabadaya Publication.
   5. List of Sociologists: en.wikipedia.org/wi ki/list of sociologists.
   6. Robert Michels: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert Michels
   7. Robert Michels: encyclopedia.en.wikipedia.
   8. Robert Michels new world Encyclopedia.org/entry/R.M.A
   9. V. Pareto; en.wikipedia.org/wiki/v-pareto/Biography
   10. A. The elite theory: democracy for criticism, conclusion.
   11. Gaetano. Mosca-en.wikipedia.orgn/G.Mosc
   12. Ideology and the development of sociological theory Qrving Zeitlin, Indiana university, Bloomington, Inviana. Prentice-Hall sociology series, Neil J Smelser

# DSC-4 (Major)
# Sociological Thinkers-II
# Module-V: Continental Sociologists

## Unit 11 □ Karl Mannheim

**Structure**

## 11.0 Learning Objectives

- Introduction to Karl Mannheim, his sociology of knowledge and other seminal works.

● To be able to locate Mannheim's work within a specific socio-historical context.

● To have a general idea of the sociological constructs Mannheim deals with, with the help of relatable examples.

● Having a brief outline of the discipline of Positive Sociology and its problems.

● Learning about the significant influences that encouraged Mannheim to commit to his own works.

● Knowing about different conceptions of ideology that are revealed in Mannheim's work.

● To understand how the category of 'generation' gets a Marxist twist in Mannheim's theorization.

● To be able to remember his notable works.

● To be exposed to Mannheim's own ethical and political orientations.

● To learn about the various critiques levelled against Mannheim's works.

● To be able to formulate appropriate answers with the help of the instructive material.

## 11.2 Karl Mannheim: Biographical Sketch

Karl Mannheim (1893-1947) was a Hungarian-born sociologist and one of the pioneers of the sociology of knowledge, a field that explores how human thought is shaped by social and existential conditions. Born in a Jewish family, to his Hungarian father and German mother, Mannheim was acutely aware about the unostentatious condition of the apatride Jewish people. Mannheim pursued studies in philosophy and literature at the University of Budapest and later expanded his education by studying in Berlin under the tutelage of Georg Simmel. Mannheim returned to Hungary around the onset of World War I and eventually earned his Ph.D. from the University of Budapest with a doctoral thesis entitled as "The Structural Analysis of Epistemology". The same logical roots, which were there as the principal impetus in that thesis, would later culminate and thicken into one of his most important works: Ideology and Utopia (1929). During the First World War, Mannheim participated in several intellectual circles, i.e. The Galileo circle founded by Karl Polanyi and The Sunday Circle led by a prominent Marxist thinker, György Lukács. Though Mannheim was not in accord with Lukács's political proclivities, particularly with Lukács's adherence to Communism, until now a

spirited impression of Marxian thought had effectively contaminated his own ideas. Time and again, when he was met by people inside the European academia, as well as worked or studied under someone, he witnessed them somewhat engaged with the challenging questions that non-academic Marxian analyses posited (non-academic because Marxism was not so loudly allowed to enter the contemporary Western Academia). Mannheim would also, henceforth, embark on a project throughout his life where he would attempt to pursue a more non-dogmatic Marxism, trying to invent a rigorous method by synthesizing other (classical philosophical, hermeneutic and humanitarian) influences, that may be able to study the human's world in a non-positivistic way.

Following the ascension of conservative and antisemite Miklós Horthy as Regent of Hungary in 1920, Mannheim was compelled into exile and relocated to Germany. There, he married Julia Lang, who would become a significant collaborator in many of his intellectual endeavors. In Germany, Mannheim also came into contact with Alfred Weber, the brother of Max Weber, under whose mentorship he commenced his academic career. With Weber's support, Mannheim secured a teaching position in the sociology faculty at Heidelberg. From 1929 until 1933, he held the prestigious post of professor of sociology and political economy at Goethe University Frankfurt. However, this period of tranquility and academic distinction was fleeting, as the rise of Nazism and antisemitism in Germany forced him into exile once more, this time in Britain. His life can be characterized by a continual geographical migration, which not only exposed him to a diverse array of scholars from various disciplines but also provided a precarious yet fertile environment for the development of his own intellectual ideas.



*Karl Mannheim*

| Figure-1: Words and Meanings | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Unostentatious** | *Conveys a sense of being understated rather than flashy.* | **Non-dogmatic** | *Non-dogmatic refers to an approach or attitude that is open-minded.* |
| **Apatride** | *The term apatride refers to a person who is stateless, meaning they are not considered a citizen or national by any country.* | **Antisemitism** | *A form of prejudice and discrimination against Jews, which manifests in various ways, including negative stereotypes, hostility, social exclusion, and acts of violence against individuals or communities of Jewish heritage.* |
| **Epistemology** | *Episteme is a Greek word which signifies know- ledge or wisdom. Epistemology is a philosophical sub-discipline which attempts to study knowledge and its source.* | **Precarious** | *Refers to a situation or condition that is unstable, uncertain.* |

# 11.1 Introduction

Mannheim's time was a time of political unrest and war. From the aforementioned biographical outline, it is probably clear that he had witnessed two back-to-back monstrous wars, both of which were somewhat the products of Western Imperialism, of contestation for colonies, of the "great" divides between the West and the East or between the "civilized" and the "barbaric/uncivilized"; divides which are invented within Western knowledge-systems and used as a justificatory weapon for subordinating the colonies. One cannot simply separate imperial conquest and these wars from the historical and cultural context/background which gave birth to them; and since European enlightenment-which gifted new modes of understanding, new technologies, new disciplines for delivering "adequate" explanations behind natural and social phenomena, which simultaneously walked along with a new economic reality (namely, the bourgeois and industrial economy), as well as

crafted the sciences (even sociology) for explaining/justifying this reality, which attempted to cast away superstition, and the dogma of theology for making a path so transparent that the "reality" can be revealed to us (yet the "reality" revenged and revealed itself as two horrifying wars, killing countless)-is so firmly tied to that cultural context that one can actually connect the series of scientific and industrial advancements to a series of wars. It is then necessary to inquire into the history of Western enlightenment and the knowledge it has produced, or more specifically to locate the historical-cultural context of the series of scientific and philosophical advancements and see if the same context had birthed in the world a condition of crisis and unrest it had never witnessed before. We are simply trying to look back at his predecessors to understand what Mannheim was doing and how it was relevant at his time.

The era of European enlightenment can be marked with a quest for truth or true knowledge. This is partly because old theological schools could not satisfy man's questions anymore, and partly because the theocentric ('Theo' means God) world could no longer hold man's world together with its militarism and repressive apparatuses. Urban settings with their industrial division of labor, where men were simultaneously exposed to diversity and national power that tore them off of their old feudal landscapes and feudal belief systems by rehabilitating them into the suburbs and the cities, added another dimension to this crisis. In a similar backdrop, sociology gained its popularity as a science to understand man, as opposed to theology (a discipline centering God). Emerging as a positive science, Sociology negotiated with the long-standing epistemological tension between Rationalism and Empiricism. The subject adhered to both reason and sense-experience, taking from both deductive disciplines like mathematics and inductive disciplines such as Physics and Biology. In its intent, it can be said, positive sociology was almost fully contaminated by these scientific disciplines, not merely because it imitated the methods of natural sciences and applied them in the study of society, but because it posited that an objective, true, constant knowledge about man and society can be gained by treating society as an external reality; that an unchanging, generalizable, and eternally acceptable, pure knowledge can be acquired, and that there is no mediation in this acquirement is a dogma it shared with both rational and empirical sciences. We should also remember that in its rationale, positive sociology emerged as a teleological (from Greek 'telos' = end/ultimate purpose/ goal) discipline, producing objective knowledge about men and the world based on a forceful claim to bias-lessness and positing that knowledge as unadulterated truth being its telos; endeavors that commented on social reality yet could not or did not bear this objectivity in its commentary, were then strictly expelled from the discourse of Sociology.

This brings us to another conclusion that positive sociology must have emerged as a discipline that spoke the academic language of the industrial economic order, specifically of its ruling portions. To put it in simple words, it came forth as a liberal bourgeois subject; and to what extent we can separate the 'social truth' it posited from the dominant mode of living is questionable.

What we are trying to understand is that the history of sociology and other sciences are equally the history of war, domination, exploitation and colonization. If we are to study the history of knowledge, that is a historical and structural study of epistemology, exactly what Mannheim was doing in his doctoral work, we cannot simply do it devoid of the history of war, unrest, coercion and corruption. The history of books is not so much apart from the history of guns or bombs, and the history of the pen is not far from the history of the dagger. This is exactly why positive sciences gain its superiority by "defeating" theology in a particular historical context, to name it in the bourgeois, industrial capitalist society. But we shall discuss about this later in detail.

In this introduction section, we were trying to have a basic understanding of the developmental context of natural and social sciences. Mannheim was himself active in a similar epoch. Yet he did not adhere to the methods or intents of positive sociology. Neither did he simply do away with objectivity and truth. His approach to knowledge was a synthesis of Marxian and Weberian methods. In this unit, we shall look at how Mannheim treated knowledge, science and truth, but also at his general contributions to sociology.

## 11.3 Intellectual Influences

It has already been mentioned that Karl Mannheim was engaged in his sociological works when central Europe was still recovering from the horrors of World War I. Though by the virtue of national propaganda everyone had anticipated the war to be a "Great War", those who had first hand witnessed the violence caused by the War were dismayed and felt their beliefs in man's world, their optimism regarding science and liberal political state decaying. "*A complete reorientation was felt to be necessary; a re-examination of all traditional ideas about reality, all values, all principles…one no longer lived in the shameful situation of taking the unreal for real, of trusting illusory authorities and values.*" (Kecskemeti, 1968:2)

In response to this reality, several intellectual movements challenged the traditional and conservative aspects promoted by Positivism. These schools of thought were unable to place unquestioning faith in science, the industrial economy, or the concept of progress. Among them were the Critical Marxist Schools influenced

by Hegel, Marx and Weber, Phenomenology of Edmund Husserl, the Existential philosophical thought of France propounded by Jean Paul Sartre, Simone De Beauvoir, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Albert Camus but which also emerged as Existential Ontology in Germany with Martin Heidegger, and the new formal Psychological and Sociological schools of thought led by Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Simmel which focused on studying interrelations between individuals and the groups. What was clear from this that sociology and other social sciences were gradually moving away from the production of singular true explanations about social phenomena, and from the traditional positivist notion of strongly "posited" or established truth. Critical thought and Phenomenology did not enter European consciousness all of a sudden rather these were silently fostered at its core for a long time. For example, one can find instances of celebration as well as of irritation and lamentation for modernity and science in the writings of classical philosophical thinkers like Hegel and sociological thinkers such as Emile Durkheim. Max Scheler was a leading advocate of the objectivist theory of value, yet surprisingly, he later emerged as one of the first social theorists to use the term "sociology of knowledge". This shift came as a strategic effort against positivism, where he aimed to demonstrate that scientific knowledge is neither the most valid nor the higher form of knowledge compared to religion or metaphysics. Scheler argued that science is prioritized in capitalist societies, which focus on the control and manipulation of the external world, while other societies may embrace different values and foster alternative forms of knowledge. Mannheim's own idea was to some extent influenced by Scheler, but also by an array of intellectual predecessors who challenged positivist conception of objective truth and knowledge, whose ideas flow through his works. Four primary intellectual currents shaped Mannheim's work in distinct ways: (1) German Classical Philosophy (phenomenology, ontology), especially the Hegelian tradition and Martin Heidegger's work; (2) non-academic critical sociological ideas, particularly Marxism; (3) Methods preached by Max Weber and his brother Alfred Weber against positive sociology; (4) the Geisteswissenschaften (human/ group science), with key figures like Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Simmel. He developed the concept of history as a structured and dynamic process, drawing upon Hegel's ideas. Hegel's notions of negation and contradiction (dialectic), enable us to understand an event or phenomenon within the broader context of a totality. This is somewhat paradoxical, as one must first isolate or separate (a form of negative action) the phenomenon in order to identify it against the totality and then examine it in relation to the totality in which it exists. From this, Mannheim learned to see facts, knowledge, idea and thought not as isolated elements, but in relation to the dominant social forces and existing trends, or precisely in relation to the historical and cultural context. This led him to conclude that knowledge is

inherently contextual, meaning that a particular form of knowledge appears true within the specific historical epoch in which it emerged. Mannheim's foundational approach was predominantly influenced by Marx, who posited that the evolving class structure within a society emerges from transformations in the mode of production and the division of labor. He argued that the ideologies prevalent in a specific society during a particular era are intrinsically linked to the existing social classes and reflect the objective conflicts of interest that arise among them. Mannheim is somewhat indebted to Marx when he talks about ideas and its relations with our social existence. But it is in Weber's influence we find him undertaking a project to develop a rigorous method-not to simply give explanations about social phenomena, but to understand them (in relation to a cultural totality/context). Max Weber also developed his own empathetic approach of *Verstehen* against the brutal value-neutrality preached by positivism. Weber did not simply reject the objective explanations of some social phenomena, rather he believed in the *relevance of value*. Reconciling between two extremes of "*value-free sociology*" and "*value-judgements*" (personal or institutional biases, stereotypes and dogmas) Weber wished to propose to us a more interpretative approach, where the sociologists' own subjecthood, imagination, past experiences are not claimed to be suspended during research. Mannheim himself did not reject the notion of truth-value completely. He identified that different systems assign the marker of truth to an idea or mental-creation differently. For instance, Newtonian science comes forth as 'truth' only as the Ptolemaic science loses its truth value, and by proving the falsity of Aristotelian science. Allopathy emerges as a truth or dominant medical tradition by toppling down other traditions of medicine like Ayurveda, Acupuncture, Ethnomedicines etc. On the other hand, two pieces of artwork can co-exist side by side and express different truths. This must be because the standards used by the systems of science and arts to assign truth-value are different. Mannheim uses this *postulate of system* to show that each cultural endeavor has its own criteria for validity and truth. Here he also attempts to show how one might reconcile the doctrine of stable criteria of validity and truth with the perspective that phenomena should be understood within their socio-historical context. One can also find parallelism between Weberian approach to Marx and Mannheim's approach to Marx in that they both tried to reject economic-determinism, and to do Marxism or more accurately socio-historical analysis of human actions and ideas in a non-dogmatic way. It is no wonder that both of them have been called out as "*a bourgeois Marx*".

From *Verstehen*, Mannheim developed his own ideas of understanding, believing that the simple explanations of phenomena might suffice the studies of physical sciences but not of the sociology. The central argument for Dilthey, Simmel, Weber and Mannheim were that sociology must have its own methods

because a comprehensive understanding of human actions necessitates engagement with the purpose, motives, and values of the individuals involved that is not possible without an 'empathetic intuition'. Since, now the subject matter of sociology was not anymore, an external reality, it became important to understand how men give meaning to their own actions and to their surroundings. To this, Mannheim answered that meanings have a context, because people have a common/group consensus under which their ideas and actions are deemed as meaningful. He contended that thought is inherently "group thought" as it is grounded in "group action" (Ditterberner, 1979:13). He posited that knowledge emerges as a collective endeavor within the context of shared existential conditions, "*within a framework of common fate, a common activity, and the overcoming of common difficulties (in which, however, each has a different share)*" (Mannheim, 1936:29).

In this section, we explored various ideas and concepts that significantly shaped Mannheim's work. For brevity, we highlighted only a few of the key thinkers who influenced him, so the list provided is by no means exhaustive, and certainly not all-encompassing.

# 11.4 Contributions

Mannheim made notable contributions through the publication of some major books, along with numerous essays. The following discussion will delve into his notable works and the key concepts he engaged with throughout his scholarship.

| Figure-2. Notable works of Karl Mannheim |
| --- |
| ● Ideology and Utopia (1929) |
| ● The Structure of Thinking (1936) |
| ● Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction (1940) |
| ● Diagnosis of Our Time (1943) |
| ● Freedom, Power, and Democratic Planning (1950) |

## 11.4.1 The Sociology of Knowledge:

Mannheim's approach to knowledge was a structural historical one. In his doctoral dissertation, Mannheim argued that cultural elements must be understood as part of a larger, logico-meaningful whole, emphasizing that understanding comes from situating concepts within their broader context. He asserted that every intellectual and cultural domain has its own structure, rejecting the idea of isolated concepts and highlighting the interconnectedness of ideas within their appropriate frameworks. The very process of thinking, according to Mannheim, means locating

a cultural element or construct within accepted orders and hierarchies. For instance, if a sociologist attempts to think about or inquire into the concept of "caste", s/he must locate it within a cultural whole, in which s/he is alive and experiences social life. Of course, one has to, for the purpose of studying "caste", abstract and distinguish its unique features to identify it separately and often opposingly from other concepts like class and gender. However, the totality or "gestalt" (whole structure) in which "caste" manifests itself is rather a complex composite, where all such phenomena are tied to each other and can only be experienced in that totality. So, a holistic understanding of caste is possible only in relational thinking, meaning, by locating it in a broader socio-historical time-space and noticing how caste is related to that time-space or to other elements in that time-space. This socio-historical time-space is what Mannheim would call a context. Mannheim's sociology of knowledge suggests us that knowledge is not a pure or unadulterated category, rather knowledge is historically shaped by the socio-economic structures in which it is produced. It is contextual, which means that a particular knowledge may be deemed as valid in one culture or one era, while be considered as invalid and false in other cultures or other eras. We can say that this knowledge is particularly correct, or has some truth value, but by the virtue of its own truth-value it cannot render other knowledges as completely false.

We can understand this by conducting a simple thought experiment. In a classroom, the students sitting on the last benches may complain that the teacher is so low-toned that they are unable to hear the lecture, while the students who are sitting at the first benches may object that the teacher is being too loud. Both of these knowledges, which is produced by students sitting in different locations with respect to their teacher's position, are individually correct but cannot express the total reality. First of all, this thought experiment will suggest us that knowledge is situational, meaning that from the standpoint or context of each student, they are correct; and the other thing is that without placing this classroom-interaction in an imaginary totality (of a classroom) where someone is sitting at the end and someone in the front, that someone is distant while others are proximate with respect to their teacher, this thought experiment would have been meaningless.

Mannheim knew that his ideas maybe taken as relativistic, for which he wanted to preserve the criteria of truth and validity. He did this by using the term "relationism" instead of relativism. This meant that we cannot simply generate knowledge and claim truth-value for them, rather that knowledge acquires its meaning and truth-value in relation to a particular socio-historical context. On the other hand, it also means that when a knowledge is produced, it's always produced within a specific context, and so that knowledge always adheres to a particular cultural unity. Mannheim argued that explaining a mental creation in relation to its

historical period does not imply a relativistic stance on its validity. He sought to mediate between the idea of stable criteria for truth and the notion that concepts must be understood within their socio-historical context.

Mannheim believed that the history of philosophy revealed a recurring "priority contest" among three fundamental epistemologies: (a) psychology, (b) logic, and (c) ontology. The dominance of one over the others at any given time depends on the philosophical perspective of the epoch. Psychology asserts that knowledge comes from experience, while logic counters that experience is mediated through reason and logical categories. Ontology, however, contends that everything, including experience and logic, is a manifestation of "being," and thus all knowledge must be understood ontologically. Each epistemology aligns with a specific discipline and has distinct criteria for truth: psychology values evidence, logic prioritizes formal necessity, and ontology seeks correspondence with total reality (*Being or 'Dasein'*). Despite these varying standards, Mannheim concludes that the notion of truth and truth-value remains as a constant across all epistemologies, as "*the only variable being the standard*". For Mannheim, all historical knowledge, is then relational knowledge and can only be formulated with reference to the position of the observer/knower; and the "vain hope" of discovering truth or absolute objective knowledge in a form which is devoid of socio-historically determined set of meanings "*will have to be given up*". (Mannheim, 1929:71)

## 11.4.2 Interpretation of Weltanschauung (world-view):

Mannheim conceived Weltanschauung or worldview as an "*atheoretical reality*", a spirit (*zeitgeist* = spirit/essence of an epoch) that permeates all cultural creations. *A-theoretical* as to bring it into a 'theoretical explanation' would not only mean the reduction of that reality, but a fragmentation of that reality; and a theoretician will end up losing the essence of that reality while dealing with those fragments. In other words, social reality is not a mere logical or mathematical reality, like the 2+2=4 expression. In case of this particular expression, we can at least say that the essence of '4' which is the sum-totality, is present in its fragments-'2', '2' and in the function of summation. A more fitting analogy for the complexity of society can be drawn from biology. While biology ('bios' = life), in its study of life, may dissect a frog into various components, the process ultimately loses the essence of life itself, as simply reassembling the organs cannot restore the vitality of the living organism. Similarly, in social reality, the individual parts cannot fully capture the essence of the whole, even though that essence permeates each part.

Mannheim's studies of _Weltanschauung_ aimed to (1) advocate for the emancipation from natural science methodologies in cultural analysis, and (2) assert

that, in the intellectual realm, understanding must proceed from the whole to its parts, not vice versa. He saw it as self-evident that the diverse cultural creations of humanity form a unified whole. However, he believed this unity had been obscured by the fragmentation of culture into seemingly separate domains like religion, art, literature, and philosophy. This division stemmed from the various theoretical perspectives used to analyze culture. This "whole" can refer to an individual artwork, the collective pattern of an artist's works, or in a more *Mannheimian sense* to the broader culture and '*weltanschauung*' (worldview) of an entire epoch. Here he had drawn importance upon the process of interpretation or interpretative methods. He emphasized that interpretation requires reaching the deeper totality that underpins the interconnectedness of cultural fields, a method distinct from the natural sciences, which focus solely on explanation rather than interpretation.

Mannheim suggests that every cultural product or social event can be understood on three levels of meaning: (a) objective, (b) expressive, and (c) documentary. The objective level of meaning gives us only an explanation of what is taking place and who or what things are involved based on some external facts. To grasp beyond this is to understand the intents and motives of the actors involved in a particular incident. It reveals to us the expressive level of meaning of a certain event or idea, and an interpretative approach is required for this. Further, one needs to place that event in different situations and broader contexts to reveal what an event or idea means within a particular context. To illustrate, Mannheim offers a scenario where his friend gives alms to a beggar. At the objective level, the situation can be interpreted externally—terms like "beggar," "giver," and "charity" sufficiently explain the social interaction without knowing the internal motivations of either party. This is the most basic and most superficial level of understanding. For Mannheim, methods of natural sciences can only reach to this level. To move beyond this, one must grasp the expressive meaning, which involves the almsgiver's personal intent. The friend's act of giving may represent a desire to demonstrate "mercy, kindness, and compassion." Understanding this requires intimate knowledge of the individual's intentions. Finally, the documentary meaning emerges when we place the act in the broader context of the almsgiver's character. If the almsgiver is generally insincere, the charitable act may be hypocritical, revealing a deeper, inauthentic nature of the act itself.

### 11.4.3 The Phenomenon of Generations:

In his analysis of '*generations*' Mannheim expanded Marx's concept of class. Marx differentiated between the objective and subjective aspects of class, and Mannheim applies this distinction to the category of '*generation*'. Through this

application, he developed a sociological framework that moved beyond earlier interpretations of the idea of '*generation*'. For instance, Dilthey viewed generations as temporal units in the history of intellectual evolution, replacing external markers like years or decades with an internal, experiential measure. Dilthey emphasized that coexistence and succession define the generational experience, where individuals, though at different life stages, are shaped by the same social and cultural forces, which he saw as uniting them into a single generation. This, however, obfuscated the idea of generational differences.

In contrast, Mannheim's approach highlighted the need to incorporate the "*social facto*r" in understanding generations. He suggested that the *social factor* here is more of a *social location* that characterizes generations. Mannheim posits that a generation constitutes a social category (like gender, class, caste, etc.) rather than a group. Unlike a group, whose cohesion relies on the group-consciousness of its members and which often dissipates with physical separation, a generation serves as a social category. He compares it to class, highlighting that members of a generation, despite lacking direct interaction or a generational consciousness, are bound by common social and historical contexts that profoundly influence their experiences and viewpoints. Mannheim contends that a class is not a concrete group, like a small community. In Marxian terms, he explains that "*class position is an objective fact*" regardless of whether individuals recognize or acknowledge it. Although "class consciousness," as defined by Marx, does not automatically arise from class position, certain social conditions can cultivate this consciousness, potentially resulting in the formation of a "*conscious revolutionary class*." "Social location," a key aspect of both class and generation, refers to the constraints imposed by specific spatio-temporal contexts. Individuals encounter certain experiences while being excluded from others. As a result, the "experiential, intellectual, and emotional data" available vary for each class and generation. However, it is essential to consider the stratification and varying locations within a single generation. While each generation may possess its own social-psychological layers of meaning, these layers are not homogeneous. Mannheim agrees that this 'location' is depended on "*the biological rhythm of the human organism*" (Zeitlin, 1968, P:300).

The category of generation is significant because it shows us that: (1) new participants in the cultural process continuously emerge, while former participants fade away; (2) members of a generation can engage only in a limited segment of the historical process, making it essential to pass on the accumulated cultural heritage. (3) The transmission of knowledge and culture from generation to generation is a continuous process.

## 11.4.4 Ideology and Utopia:

In his seminal work, Ideology and Utopia (1929), Mannheim deals with the problem of "thinking"-of how men think-by discussing the relations between existing modes of thought and modes of social existence. Setting aside the principle of economic determinism, Mannheim elaborates upon the Marxist conception that our social conditions shape both the content of our ideas and the manner in which we engage in thought. He contends that individual thought is rooted in '*collective thought*' and ultimately in '*collective action*'. As they engage in collective actions, their thoughts are accordingly shaped through processes of agreement and disagreement. Thus, thinking itself becomes a form of interaction, influenced by the diverse and often conflicting dynamics of '*group life*'. Mannheim, similar to Marx, opposed the alienation of thought from material-social action. He argued that the integration of theory and practice is essential, enabling individuals to develop a deeper consciousness of the impact of their actions. This unity between thought and action, Mannheim agreed with Marx, would not only give us theoretical perspectives to interpret but would guide us to change the world. He thought that sociology of knowledge has a similar task-to provide guidance to action and to direct this action toward social change-what he called the "*planning for freedom*". (Zeitlin, 1968, P:303) Here, we finally come to learn about Mannheim's own ethical and political orientations.

The existential conditions and conflicting interests between oppressors and the oppressed give rise to opposing or 'antithetical' currents of thought. Mannheim terms these "*ideology*" and "*utopia*". Early Christian thought, for example, was "utopian", expressing the oppressed class's rejection of Roman "ideology", and glorifying 'abstinence' and 'passivity' against Roman values of 'indulgence' and 'imperialism'. For Mannheim, both forms of thought—ideological and utopian—are shaped by their social context; they not only mirror the distinct conditions of rulers and ruled, *but "ideology" reflects the "values" and "interests" of the ruling class, while utopian thought embodies the "interests" and "aspirations" of the oppressed*. Utopia, for Mannheim, is an imaginary place which does not reside in our physical reality. [*'U/Eu' = no, Topia from Greek Topos = Place or space*] It only exists within group thought and collective-imagination, from which the individual inherits it (by the virtue of her/him being as a member in that group) and furthermore negotiates with it.

While Marx regarded ideology as false-consciousness of a class, Mannheim develops his own concept of ideology differently from Marx. In the development of the concept of ideology, Mannheim identifies two distinct meanings: *the particular and total conceptions*. The particular conception refers to conscious or sub-conscious

distortions of reality, where individuals conceal the true nature of a situation because it conflicts with their interests (for example, a propaganda). These distortions can range from deliberate deception to self-deception. The total conception, by contrast, refers to the broader worldview of a class or historical epoch, shaped by the social conditions in which it exists.

In the particular conception, one opposes particular statements or ideas of an individual or group, uncovering hidden personal interests. In the total conception, however, a group or an individual opposes an entire worldview, seeing it as rooted in the collective life of a social group. For instance, ideologies such as "conservatism" or "liberal-bourgeois" thought represent examples of the total conception.

Mannheim also distinguishes between two versions of the total conception: the "*special*" formulation occurs when a group recognizes the ideological nature of its opponents' worldviews but remains unaware of the social influences on its own thinking. The "general" formulation, on the other hand, is used when one applies ideological analysis to all viewpoints, including one's own. When this analysis is conducted without passing judgment on the truth or falsity of the ideas, it becomes the basis for the sociology of knowledge. Such an analysis is associated with another construct which Mannheim elaborated, namely, the *free-floating intelligentsi*a.

## 11.4.5 Free-floating Intelligentsia:

The concept of *free-floating intelligentsia* is formally introduced by Alfred Weber, the brother of Max Weber. In Germany, Mannheim worked under A. Weber for a considerable period of time, which left an intellectual mark on his own thoughts. The free-floating intelligentsia can be imagined as a group of social thinkers and sociologists, who are somewhat (temporarily) intellectually emancipated from their class, generational and other social locations at a subjective level. *The genera*l formulation of the *total conception of ideology* is what Mannheim associates with this group of sociologists. To apply ideological analysis to all viewpoints (including one's own) without passing judgement on the truth and falsity of ideas almost means to take an empathetic-intuitive approach (*Verstehen*): to put oneself in the socio-cultural context of others and then an intuitive exploration of sources of ideas that are born in that particular context.

Once again, consider the thought experiment of the classroom that we had conducted earlier. The students sitting at the end of the class are correct that with reference to their location the teacher is lecturing at a low-toned voice; on the other hand, those who are sitting close to the teacher are also correct that the teacher is being too loud. A general-total conception of ideology would however arise from taking all locations and their corresponding truth or knowledge into consideration.

In a situation of political unrest, Mannheim put his faith on sociologists as he felt that only sociologists and intellectuals are able to de-ground themselves temporarily, or in other words, to suspend their own ideas and perspectives temporarily to explore others. This notion was somewhat shaped by the ideas of his own Jewish heritage. The followers of orthodox Judaist religion believe that they do not belong to any particular nation-state or territories. They are unattached to any particular territory and floating citizens of the world and they can sympathize with men they meet within different contexts. This is rather a pristine metaphor of free-floating intellectuals, since Mannheim felt that sociologists are able to wander about within the ideological landscapes, from one social context to other.

For Mannheim, the intelligentsia represented a "*classless aggregation*" or an "*interstitial stratum*" that, often unintentionally, became aligned with one or another of the dominant social classes or political parties. This group, lacking a firm class identity of its own, found itself in a position where it was drawn into the orbit of various existing power structures. But, he asserts, intellectuals do not represent a "superior" group, nor does their social status inherently validate their perspectives. However, their position allows them to adopt diverse viewpoints on social issues, which may be more difficult for others.

While many intellectuals align with specific classes or political parties, they are not necessarily better at overcoming their own biases than other groups. However, here Mannheim talks about the '*potential*' of this intellectual stratum. This concept of a "relatively unattached intelligentsia", highlights that intellectuals do not respond to social issues as cohesively as workers do. Ultimately, being part of the intelligentsia does not guarantee insight; rather, it provides opportunities for certain intellectuals to explore and analyze various social perspectives and their inconsistencies.

## 11.4.6 Man and Society in the Age of Reconstruction:

The era of crisis, unrest in the European world affected Mannheim to a great deal. He witnessed the European nations, one by one, falling either into the hands of fascist or bourgeois totalitarianism. The horrors of two consecutive wars had demolished social cohesion and cast away all feelings born out of a collective consciousness and empathy, giving rise to a dangerous individualism which, once again, adhered to fascist rule. This fragile age, Mannheim believed was the high time for a social change. For him, this change had to be a *reconstructive* or, in other term, a democratic change. Mannheim argued that bureaucratization weakened democracy by distancing the populace from power and enabling the dominance of elite minorities under both capitalism and communism. While democracy in the

18th and early 19th centuries was bolstered by the people's military power, the 20th century saw a shift due to bourgeois-technological advancement, as the large-scale military technologies were centralized at the hands of ruling elites which allowed dominant minorities to control and intimidate masses. This concentration of power, he believed, is an irreversible process. Although this didn't render the people entirely powerless, as suppressed groups could still adapt and resist, Mannheim emphasized that intellectuals must secure voluntary cooperation from the masses to merge into a common interest based collective, and furthermore guide them to the common action of revolution. Drawing on Marxist, Weberian, and Freudian ideas, Mannheim proposed "*democratic planning*" (not totalitarian planning) as the only solution, the task of which he had entrusted to the intellectuals, arguing that they should realize that their laissez-faire liberalism had become obsolete in today's era. He believed that societal "*planlessness*" was the root cause of socio-economic crises and social disorder. What is interesting here is that he contended that "*democratization*" and *social-reconstruction* would demand a preliminary learning of the planning and other social techniques, which one could learn from the totalitarian states.

# 11.5 Criticisms

We have now a general idea of what Mannheim's key arguments were and how he posited them in the different concepts he had worked with. Now we will look at a few significant critiques that have been leveled against Mannheim's body of work:

## 11.5.1 Accused for Relativism:

Mannheim has often been criticized for promoting relativism in his '*postulation of system*' and historical analysis of epistemology. Critics argue that by suggesting that all knowledge is mediated by social and historical contexts, Mannheim's work leads to a form of epistemological relativism, where no knowledge claim can be deemed objectively true. Karl Popper and his followers saw Mannheim's formulation as a form of historicism that relativized all forms of knowledge to their social conditions of production. Though Mannheim, time and again, clarifies his position by arguing that he does not compromise truth-value and objectivity in any way, but, for him, knowledge acquires its meaning and truth-value in relation to a particular socio-historical context. For him, the category of truth value is a common standard in all systems, yet it may vary in relation to the socio-historical context. However, his notion of 'relationism' is often considered as vague and not so different than epistemological relativism.

### 11.5.2 Ambiguity in the Conception of Ideology and Utopia:

Mannheim distinguishes between "ideology" (thought that justifies the existing social order) and "utopia" (thought that aims to transcend it). However, later Marxist scholars and critical theorists have pointed out that this distinction is not always clear in his work. Critics claim that Mannheim's categories can become blurred, making it difficult to differentiate between ideology and utopia in practical or analytical terms. Herbert Marcuse criticized Mannheim for failing to offer a clear critique of power structures in his formulation of the concept of ideology, as his approach allowed ideologies to be seen as *alternative perspectives* rather than as tools of domination.

### 11.5.3 Overemphasis on Intellectuals:

Mannheim placed a significant emphasis on the role of intellectuals in his analysis of knowledge, particularly in his concept of the "free-floating intelligentsia." Critics argue that Mannheim overestimates the potential and autonomy of intellectuals, neglecting their involvement in class, political, and power structures. This is because Mannheim considered the intellectual *relatively detached* from class-interests and class-positions: as an *interstitial stratum* and as a *classless aggregate*. However, Marxist thinker Antonio Gramsci criticized the idea of an independent intellectual class. In Gramsci's framework, intellectuals are always tied to specific social classes and are agents in the maintenance or transformation of hegemony.

### 11.5.4 Political Neutrality and Failure to Address Power-dynamics:

Critical sociologists have accused Mannheim of political neutrality or of promoting a form of technocratic governance. They argue that his emphasis on understanding different perspectives and ideologies risks turning political issues into merely technical ones that can be "managed" by intellectuals, thereby depoliticizing them. The dissolution of all political ideologies and political tension into the free-floating mind might pacify culture, eliminating its radical elements and promoting its liberal ones, which might eventually provide the bourgeois powers with easy and newer modes of domination. This is why, Mannheim has been called *a bourgeois Marx* by leftist critiques. His sociology of knowledge has been claimed to be lacking a sufficient analysis of power and domination. While Mannheim focuses on the ideological conditions of knowledge production, critics argue that he fails to adequately address the role of institutional power and control in shaping dominant ideologies.

# 11.6 Conclusion

Karl Mannheim's contributions to sociology, particularly his development of the sociology of knowledge, have provided a critical framework for understanding the relationship between thought and its socio-historical context. His notion of relationism offers a nuanced alternative to relativism, emphasizing that ideas are shaped by, but not entirely bound to, their contexts. Mannheim's work on ideology, and his emphasis on the role of the free-floating intelligentsia, underscore the potential of intellectuals to analyze and influence social structures. His advocacy for democratic planning reflects his commitment to reconstructive social change in the post-war era, illustrating his belief in the transformative power of intellectual agency. Overall, Mannheim's synthesis of diverse intellectual traditions has left a lasting impact on the sociological understanding of knowledge, ideology, and social planning.

# 11.7 Summary

Mannheim is one of the most influential sociologists of early 20th century who attempted to synthesize several sociological, philosophical and psychological ideas and, by doing so, to initiate a sociology of knowledge and thought. His efforts to create a rigorous socio-historical method for analyzing different epistemologies were not in vain, as along with other thinkers, it has shaped the foundational logic of 21st century sociology. The sociology of knowledge has largely contributed to the trend that sociology as a discipline cannot remain as a positive science; that its subject matter is much more complex than that of the laboratory-based sciences, a fact which alone demands new and critical methodologies for the study of social life.

This unit attenuates the vast area of Mannheim's work for maintaining its brevity. Nonetheless, one should keep some key points in mind while reading Mannheim:

● Mannheim is greatly influenced by Hegelian, Marxist, and Hermeneutic or Interpretative traditions.

● For Mannheim, knowledge, idea or any creations of mind is contextual.

● He believes that modes of thinking are determined by existential conditions of men.

● Mannheim distances himself from relativism by negotiating between situationally valid knowledge and their corresponding cultural and historical context. He calls this relationism instead of relativism.

- Mannheim believes that the study of society should commence with the study of the whole or of the cultural composite-within which all events take place, all ideas and knowledge are situated-and move towards the study of the parts or constitutive elements, not the vice versa.

- Mannheim prioritizes the method of interpretation and understanding, more than explanations.

- He categorizes three levels of meaning while discussing about 'understanding'-objective, expressive and documentary. He considered the objective level as the most superficial understanding.

- Mannheim contends that all history of epistemology is a priority contestation among three ends: *psychology, logic and ontology*.

- Mannheim treats the category of generation like Marx treated the category of class.

- Mannheim developed two conceptions of ideology: *particular and total*.

- He also discussed about two formulations of the total conception of ideology: *Special and General*.

- The general formulation of total conception of ideology is what he associates with the notion of 'free-floating intelligentsia'.

- He emphasizes the potential of the intellectual stratum to conduct ideological analysis on cultural elements of society while not passing any judgement on their truth or validity.

- He was optimistic about this group of intellectuals whom he believed to be "between classes" (interstitial stratum) rather than a class aggregate. Their position allows them to adopt diverse viewpoints on social issues, which may be more difficult for others.

- Mannheim believed that a reconstructive change requires 'planning', and democratic planning, to him, was gravely necessary in the post-war era, the task of which he had entrusted to intellectuals. He also believed that planning techniques could be learned from totalitarian nations.

## 11.8 Exercise

Having completed this passage and gained a comprehensive understanding of Mannheim's concepts, attempt to formulate responses to the following questions.

1. What is Weltanschauung? Elaborate on the approach Mannheim employs to deal with it?

2. Write a short note on the discipline of Positive sociology with regards to the socio-political context in which it emerges.

3. What, according to Mannheim, is wrong with positive sciences and its explanatory approach to social phenomena?

4. What is ideology for Mannheim? What is Utopia?

5. Write an essay on Mannheim's sociology of Knowledge?

6. According to Mannheim, how should one deal with the concept of generation?

7. Discuss about the different currents that influenced Mannheim.

8. What is the free-floating intelligentsia? What does Mannheim think about it?

9. Write a short note on the criticisms against Karl Mannheim.

10. Write a short note on the importance of 'planning'.

11. Who developed the concept of free-floating intelligentsia?

12. In Mannheim's account, how does sociology of knowledge help in the planning for freedom?

13. What are the three epistemologies that are historically in a 'priority-contestation' with each other?

14. What is Utopia?

15. What is a Context?

16. What is social location?

17. What are the key aspects that render the category of generation its sociological significance?

18. What are the three levels of meaning at work, in case we need to build an understanding of any cultural element?

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# Module 5: Continental Sociologists

## Unit-12 □ William I. Thomas (1863-1947): General Contributions to Sociology-Social Behaviour, Cultural Evolution and Social Change

**Structure**

## 12.0 Learning Objectives

This Unit is an attempt:

● To focus on the contributions of The American sociologist W.I. Thomas, a key figure in the early-20th century period.

● To understand the fundamental principle of sociology he formulated

● To examine his observations on social behaviour of man

● To assess the importance of his views on cultural evolution

● To understand his views on social change.

## 12.1 Introduction

William Isaac Thomas' name is linked with that of Florian Znaniecki, a Polish philosopher-turned-sociologist so intimately because they have worked together for several years to produce a five volume magnum opus like The Polish Peasant in Europe and America. But both of them were brilliant, hard-working scholars in their own ways and made many other noteworthy contributions before and after their joint collaborative work. Thomas, an empiricist, started with folk psychology; and later combined sociology with his orientation towards psychology. His life was full of turbulent events yet his early writings reveal an orderly and scholarly life, a lucid, unpretentious prose style, a grasp of varied but relevant literature, and a flair for interpreting human phenomena (Encyclopedia.com). As Lewis A. Coser has observed, throughout his life Thomas strived to gain greater intellectual clarity and analytical depth. In his early writings we find biological and psychological biases, but he was gradually able to overcome those biases to emerge first as an ethnographer then to a sophisticated social psychologist with a sociological bent.

## 12.2 W.I. Thomas and His Time

William Isaac Thomas was born in rural Virginia, USA, in 1863 in a religious family of Dutch origin but the family later shifted base for better educational opportunities for the children; at that time Thomas was a little boy. He completed his graduation, Masters and PhD degrees at the University of Tennesse in English language and literature; he also taught courses in Greek, Latin, French, German and natural history. Simultaneously, he developed an interest in ethnology and social science as he came into contact with Herbert Spencer's ideas in Principles of Sociology. His teaching career started as a Teacher of English at Oberlin College where he raised some issues that later became central to his sociology of culture, change and multi-perspectivalism. He completed his second PhD, this time in sociology from the University of Chicago and started teaching sociology and anthropology there in 1896. For some scandals he was dismissed by the Chicago University and the Chicago University Press severed the contract of publishing three volumes of The Polish Peasant in Europe and America, his collaborative work with Znaniecki, in 1918. The charges, the violation of the Mann Act and false hotel registration were later dismissed. But the publicity destroyed his teaching career, and he never could obtain a tenured position again in any other university even though he made some very important contributions in sociology after leaving Chicago. In 1927, with support from some young scholars he was made president

of the American Sociological Association, but it was a purely honorary position for one year and it failed to restore his official career. In 1936, Pitrim A. Sorokin, the chairman of the department of sociology at Harvard University invited Thomas as a visiting lecturer where he lectured for a year. After that he gradually withdrew into retirement and in 1947 he breathed his last in Berkley, California at age 84.

# 12.3 Intellectual Influences

Early in his life Thomas came into contact with the works of many brilliant scholars of his time that molded many of his ideas; for example, Herbert Spencer's Principles of Sociology drew him towards social sciences from the field of his original interest, i.e. literature. When he entered the world of social science in general and sociology in particular, the discipline was thriving in both Europe and in America. It was late-nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer was still producing volumes of sociological writings expressing his larger synthetic philosophical ideas. The third volume of his (Spencer's) Principles of Sociology was published in Britain in 1896. In America, by 1895, the American Journal of Sociology was getting published to give a professional platform to scholars. By that time, sociology departments in a number of prominent American universities like Columbia, Kansas and Chicago started functioning under the leaderships of brilliant scholars like Frank W. Blackmar, Franklin H. Giddings and Albion W. Small. In 1894 Charles H. Cooley started teaching Sociology at Michigan. In 1893 Lester F. Ward's book The Psychic Factors of Civilization was published. Gidding's Principles of Sociology got published in 1896 and E. A. Ross started to publish his valuable articles in American Journal of Sociology. In the field of psychology, too, leading figures like William James, G. Stanley Hall and J.Mark Baldwin emerged as leading figures who started to explore issues like habit formation, consciousness of self, cultural learning in the rise of personality, social influences in child development and so on.

John Dewey and George Herbert Mead, both professors at Chicago University, combined philosophical and interpretations to explore social behavior. In anthropology, too, Spencer, J.H. Morgan and E.B. Tylor had wide spread impacts; ethno-methodology was gaining ground. Social psychology, folk psychology, anthropology, ethnology, and other such specialized areas were breaking boundaries and Thomas's works clearly reflected the impact of these new age developments. His interest in ''the individual in changing societies'' took shape when he worked with eminent Swiss born American psychiatrist Adolf Meyer and came to be known as a pioneer of psychological approach to social phenomena; his name is also

linked with William Graham Sumner and Wilhelm Wundt as a path-breaker in cultural psychology. He had adapted Meyer's 'life course' approach and merged it with multi-perspective analysis because for him individuals were always shaped by their immediate and multiple social environments. He was quite close to his teachers and friends John Dewey and George Herbert Mead and is believed to be influenced by them; he absorbed their concepts of 'adaptation' and 'efficiency'. Nevertheless, he himself admitted that he was profoundly influenced by Mead and Charles Cooley but about Dewey's influence he was not quite sure. However, even though his thoughts moved within the orbits of pragmatist tradition, he never willingly committed himself to pragmatism or any other philosophical traditions (Coser.543). By 1914, he assembled the social-psychological foundation of all his later work. During the First World War period, in 1914, he met Polish immigration official and philosopher Florian Znaniecki and they worked together till 1923 on the five volume book titled The Polish Peasant in Europe and America using the casebook format already familiar to Thomas from his acquaintance with Meyer, his connections with social work and his involvement in Chicago's progressive reform movement (Ellsworth Faris, Obituary, American Sociological Association, 1947).

## 12.4 General Contributions to Sociology

While discussing Thomas's active career of over forty years, critics have noticed that he was author coauthor and editor of seven books and thirty eight articles as an erudite, imaginative scholar with seminal ideas. But he did not found any school of sociology nor did he initiate any doctrine or sociological system (Encyclopedia. Com). He made empirical studies on a wide range of subjects ranging from sex differences, migration to delinquency and organization; he also selected methods and concepts according to the requirements of the topic under discussion. During his student days at Chicago, he read many books on folk psychology, ethnology and sociology apart from English and continental European literature. For ethnological research he carefully collected statistical reports, case histories, folklore, descriptions of primitive life, many quotations from literary works and his own observations on different issues for future use. Theorizing on scanty data or on no data whatsoever seemed extremely dangerous to him. He favored certain central themes that frequently recurred in several of his works and determined his essential contributions in sociology and social science in general.

In 1907, Thomas's first major work, Sex and Society, was published; from today's point of view this work may be regarded as sexist, but considering the intellectual setting of its time it should be considered quite progressive. In this

book he made a case for ending the subjugation of women in society; argued that women had superior cunning and superior endurance than men that could produce greater capacity for intellectual work.

Thomas's most renowned work, a research on the problems of immigrants' assimilation, was published in five volumes and was coauthored with Florian Znaniecki, a celebrated Polish scholar. Thomas initially planned to study the assimilation problems of multiple communities, but when he received financial assistance from Ms. Helen Culver to study the background of this problem he restricted it to one community only. For the sake of the study he learned Polish language, made contacts with the Polish community of Chicago and even visited Poland for the purpose of fieldtrips because he initially thought of applying only field observation method in his research. But when he accidentally came across a letter written by a Polish immigrant woman, he became inspired to use personal written material as an ethnographic source and developed the biographic approach. He started to collect both oral reports and written materials like newspaper reports, archive materials of different organizations, personal letters, diaries, memoirs and other documents from Chicago's Polish immigrant communities by putting up advertisements in Chicago's Polish language press and paying 10-20cents for each letter sent from Poland.

Thomas met Polish sociologist Florian Znaniecki together with whom he wrote the five volume book on the Polish peasant immigrants and they explained the reasons behind the large-scale immigration of Polish peasants from the country sides of Poland to America; for example the hardships they endured in their own country, the problems of new values they had to encounter in the new land, the gap between the generations and many more. Polish Peasant in Europe and America (1918-1920) has succinctly revealed how the older generations of parents tried to conserve Polish traditions and culture in their new country while the younger generations were more at ease with the American culture and did not wish to adhere to the traditional attitude of family solidarity.

In 1923, The Unadjusted Girl, a highly acclaimed book by Thomas was published in which he developed the concept of the 'definition of the situation'. According to him, definition of a situation can be provided from many aspects and these definitions may not be compatible with each other, for example, members of an organized society define a 'situation' based on both its objective features and its subjective meaning. Once the meaning is assigned to a particular situation, people's subsequent behaviors are determined by that meaning.

His famous concept of "Thomas theorem' was published in his book The Child in America(1928) which he co-authored with his then research assistant Dorothy

Swaine. In this book he remarked that ''If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences''; later this became known as the Thomas theorem.

## 12.4.1 Social Behavior:

Thomas became interested in human behavior when he started to explore subjects like modesty, feminine character, sex-based division of labor, the sources and consequences of sex differences with the help of both biological and socio-cultural data. Though he sensed that behind every behavioral difference between the sexes both the internal or organic and external or socio-cultural factors play important roles, following the practices of his time he gave primacy to the organic factors. He also developed a principle of ''four wishes'' and the situational approach to behavior.

Thomas first presented his ideas about the four wishes in 1917 in a paper titled ''The Persistence of Primary-group Norms''. He described these norms as ''interests'' connected with the ''desires'' for new experience, for mastery, for recognition and for safety and security, but he did not specify the exact place of these wishes in the spectrum of motivation. He derived them from ''original emotional reactions'' like fear, rage, love, etc., (Encyclopedia.Com). His observation was that all forms of behavior could ultimately be caused by two fundamental appetites like food hunger and sex hunger and with such observation he suggested the primacy of biology over all other factors. He related sexual differences with the mentality of men and women as well as their interactions in various social organizations. He believed men were katabolic and women, being related to plants, were anabolic. He has also related sexual divergence with food preference. On the basis of metabolic differences, he believes, men are built for action and women are for reproduction and sedentary existence.

For Thomas, the general life-process invariably involves adjustment, and the forms of adjustive effort are ''behavior'' (W. I. Thomas. ''The Comparative Study of Cultures''-American Journal of Sociology, 42(1936): 177-85). In a human society the problem of the adjustments of individuals and groups is related to a cultural situation. But even within the same cultural milieu all the people do not behave or react in a similar fashion because the attitudes, values and attitudes towards values are parts of a person's personality. Any change in the cultural situations (e.g., internal mobility of populations, urbanization, migration, invasion, colonization, the dissemination of cultural traits, race prejudice, technological advance, shifting of occupation, changes in attitudes and values, etc.) require continuous readjustment of individuals and groups to promote and direct cultural change. (Thomas,1936).

In the book, The Child in America, he specifically investigated misbehavior of children to conclude that much depends on communal expectations of behavior and often children define their own situations to indicate their own conceptions of maturation and acceptable behavior. Though such types of definitions appear to be inherently individualistic, Thomas argues that these definitions that determine people's behavioral pattern actually emerge out of social institutions like family; these definitions are neither rigid nor static and can be changed ''spontaneously'' through a process of negotiations. However this claim of Thomas has been contested by many sociologists.

Another study of human behavior is his The Unadjusted Girl in which he has examined and interpreted various forms of female delinquency with the help of human motives. In this book Thomas has presented the case study of a girl who is demoralized or de-socialized because firstly of the breakdown of traditional social order, and secondly by the emerging chaos of a changing industrial-commercial system. Due to the turbulence of the changing norms, the values and sanctions of the yester years are gone; the new age values attach more importance to ''individualization of behavior'', that is, adjustment on the basis of one's own terms than on the terms of the family or of the society which was quite common in the simpler older times and among the older generations. The social behavioral norms to be followed by a girl have been laid down by her parents or other senior members of the community and the family is not ready to alter its value preferences when it confronts the values of the new generations. Thomas argues that neither the family nor the community, not even the education system makes any consideration for non-uniformity of personality; the society, the family and the school try to mold every child in a similar way.(Kimball Young,1962).

## 12.4.2 Cultural Evolution and Social Change:

The subject of change was a favorite topic for Thomas. From his knowledge in anthropology he formed certain ideas regarding cultural evolution and different stages of culture based on the concept of its unilinear progression. He also witnessed the social changes that took place around him in the form of rapid urbanization, mass migration, scientific and technological revolution affecting food production, transportation, communication etc., therefore, he felt the need to study the sources, processes and consequences of change. In as early as 1909, he rejected unilinear theories of cultural evolution as being too simple and mechanical, just as he could not accept Gabriel Tarde's concept of 'imitation' and F.H. Giddings' notion of 'consciousness of kind''. As an alternative he suggested a more complex scheme

involving concepts like 'control', 'habit', 'crisis' and 'attention'. The objective of all purposive activity is 'control', which is maintained by habit, but when crisis in social life arises due to large-scale changes, it needs some alternative patterns for new solutions.

In fact, when Thomas was studying the problems of integration amongst the Polish immigrants in America at the turn of the twentieth century, he became aware of different levels of change among different communities. He noticed that among the non-literate and peasant societies, the rate of change was rather slow and this allowed the entry of new elements within the existing cultural system on the one hand, and on the other, prevented widespread demoralization among people. However, modern industrialized societies witness such rapid and complex levels of change that traditional modes of social control become ineffective, group solidarity becomes weak and behavior becomes individualized; in this situation the primary groups get replaced by a differentiated mass society with different and conflicting definitions of situations. Thomas with Znaniecki presented a new model of social change in The Polish Peasant in Europe and America. According to them, in every group some deviations from the norms occur, either innovative or destructive in character, but if such deviations are few and far between the validity of the norms is not challenged and the group can handle minor deviations through the process of "social reorganization". But if deviations become frequent and widespread, younger generations adopt newer values by rejecting the older ones and social disorganization sets in, then it requires nothing less than social reconstruction which in turn needs new codes, new institutions and new leadership.

Thomas, thus, formulated macro-concepts of a distinct sociological theory of change. Consequently, he also observed that the modern society was facing such rapid and widespread changes that it was also experiencing social disorganization. The traditional source of stability and peaceful integration within the primary groups, in the old order, was the strength of mutual dependence of the individuals and of groups; but the turbulences caused by the complex, tough-to-handle forces and pressures of such massive change would seem incomprehensible to many. Common sense explanations of these events were not proving adequate enough to understand the causes and trends of change; therefore the need of the time was a social science that would study, systematically and empirically, large classes of social events, to find out explanatory principles that could then be applied to social control(Thomas. The Persistence of Primary-group Norms, 1917 & 'Methodological Note' of The Polish Peasant, 1918-1920).

## 12.5 Appraisal of Thomas' Scholarly Contribution

Thomas was mostly famous for The Polish Peasant, the five volume book he coauthored with Znaniecki, a Polish sociologist, but he wrote many other books and chapters in books and articles leading academic journals of his time. The subjects of his discussion were varied and interesting starting from Sex and Society: Studies in the Social Psychology of Sex (1907), Source Book for Social Origins....(1909), The Unadjusted Girl: With Cases and Standpoint for Behavior Analysis(1923), The Configuration of Personality (1927), The Relation of Research to the Social Process (1931) to Primitive Behavior: An Introduction to the Social Sciences (1937). His articles in different journals covered a wider range of topics. He never deviated from the belief that a successful science definitely needs rigorous method, though in later years he sometimes doubted whether social sciences would be able to discover 'laws' like natural sciences, with accuracy and perfection. He concluded that social sciences have too many variables, the properties of its phenomena, e.g. people, family, group, etc. change from time to time; also the systems of personality, society and culture are all open-ended. Through his contributions in sociology and social psychology, he positioned sociology away from the abstraction of earlier generations of thinkers to concrete studies of group life and social behavior.

Thomas, undoubtedly, was an empiricist, rather than a theorist and his greatest and most lasting influence in sociology was to recognize life history or a person's narration of his own life and personal documents like letters, diaries, archival records, etc., as the basic sources for social research. He tried to bring sociology and social psychology closer with the observation that social problems required an understanding of social organizations and subjective or experiential aspects of social reality as well as a commitment to both sociology and social psychology. He also pioneered comparative studies in social sciences, especially in the field of culture and history.

In many ways he has enriched sociology by addressing issues like sex, sexual behavior and prostitution not as problems of morality but as problems of human behavior; to do this he applied research methods from anthropology, clinical case studies and fieldwork. (Encyclopedia of Social Theory, Vol. II, pp. 834-835).

## 12.6 Conclusion

Referring to eminent American sociologist Kimball Young's homage to Thomas we can say that his contributions to the advancement of sociology were

of very high order; he was and still is considered a pioneer in the field of race relations and his contribution in empirical sociological research is priceless. In fact he taught us about the need for empirical research before taking up any effective action program. Much before many other social scientist, in 1909, he established a link between sociology and cultural anthropology, as evidenced in his Source Book for Social Origins (1909). His Polish Peasant (1918-'20) is still cherished for its high watermark in description and analysis of acculturation. Moreover, his contributions in the development of social psychology-both in matters of theory and in empirical research are quite noteworthy. His use of the concepts of the four wishes, of attitudes and values, and his situational approach-all helped extend the frontiers of our knowledge about social behavior.

## 12.7 Summary

This article contains a brief biographical history of Thomas's life, his scholarly background, the intellectual influences of his time and his contributions in the development of modern sociology in America. Though he has written many books and published many articles in academic journals of repute, in this unit only some of his writings have been discussed.

## 12.8 Model Questions

**A. Answer in brief:**                                              **6 Marks each**

1. Write a brief note on the impact of various scholars in the development of Thomas's sociological thought.
2. Explain what Thomas has meant by social behavior.
3. What is Thomas's stand on cultural evolution?
4. Write a brief appraisal of Thomas's contribution in sociology.

**B. Answer in detail:**                                            **10 Marks each**

1. Make a critical assessment of W. I. Thomas as a modern American sociologist.
2. Discuss, in detail, how Thomas has enriched sociology.

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# DSC-4 (Major) Sociological Thinkers-II
# Module-5 Continental Sociologists

## Unit-13 □ Florian Znaniecki (1882-1958)-General Contributions to Sociology.

**Structure**

## 13.0 Learning Objectives

- To understand Znaniecki's position among the 20th century's western sociologists.

- To know about his contribution to the interpretation of Polish culture with reference to the Polish peasant life.

- To understand his interests in different fields of sociology

- To understand his role in pioneering the importance of sociology as a special science.

## 13.1 Introduction

Florian Znaniecki is well-known in polish and American sociology for his contributions in theoretical and methodological aspects of the discipline and till date he is considered as one of the major figures in the history of Polish and American sociology. One of his books, which he has co-authored with W.I. Thomas, namely The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (1918-1920) is regarded as a very important founding stone of modern empirical sociology. His contributions to sociological theory through which he introduced new concepts like 'humanist coefficient' and 'culturalism' are highly appreciated in sociology.

Znaniecki was of Polish origin, a descendant of aristocratic landowners, the first part of his life was spent in Poland where he made major contributions for the development of sociology as an academic discipline by establishing the Department of Sociology at his workplace, that is, Adam Mickiewicz University and that marked the starting of formal, academic study of sociology in Poland; later he shifted to the USA and his career flourished there.

## 13.2 Life and Time

Florian Znaniecki was born in 1882 at Swiatniki of Poland, which was then under the control of the Russian Empire. He attended schools at Warsaw and Czestochowa; though his grades were not great and even had to repeat a year, as he was more attracted to Polish-language study, which was then prohibited under the Russian regime, than his class syllabi. At the age of 20, in 1920, Znaniecki took admission in the Imperial University of Warsaw but was soon expelled from there for his participation in a movement for the protection of students' rights. In 1904, to avoid conscription into the Imperial Russian Army he left his motherland and went to Switzerland where he continued his higher education first at Geneva and then at Zurich. In 1908 he shifted to the Sorbonne in Paris where he attended lectures by Durkheim, one of the founding-fathers of Sociology. In fact, at the starting of his life he aspired to be a poet and went to Paris for the fulfilment of that aspiration, but as he came under the influence of Henri Bergson's concept of 'creative evolution' his interest in poetry gave way to his love for philosophy and in 1910 he successfully completed his Ph.d on The Problems of Value in Philosophy.

With publication of a volume on Humanism and Knowledge in 1912 his fame as a great Polish philosopher spread throughout the country. In 1914 he met William I. Thomas, a creative and imaginative person like him, who invited

him to Chicago and from whom Znaniecki came to know about the sociological viewpoint. In 1919 he published Cultural Reality which contained the essence of many of his later writings. One year after that, in 1920, he was offered a Chair of Philosophy at the University of Poznan in Poland where he started courses in sociology and established an institute for sociological research that attracted many bright, young souls to take up sociological research. During his tenure at Poznan, he wrote important scholarly books, mostly in Polish like The Downfall of Civilization (1922), Contemporary Man (1927), The Sociology of Education (1930),etc. and The Laws of Social Psychology which is in English. Once he returned to Poland he started working on a program of systematization of socio-logical knowledge with reference to social action, social relations, social persons and social groups. The first outcome of this work was a volume named Social Action (1937). In 1939, he was invited by Columbia University to teach during the summer, but his attempt to go to the USA from Poland was initially thwarted by the onset of the Second World War. However, he returned to America later and taught at the University of Illinois from 1942 to till the time of his retirement. Respect for the depth of his knowledge and his contributions to sociology had been so great that he was elected as the 44th president of the American Sociological Association in 1953. He has been highly acclaimed as a pioneer in the field of empirical investigation and is regarded as an authority on Polish peasant culture. The path-breaker in many aspects of sociology, Florian Znaniecki breathed his last in March, 1958.

## 13.3 Intellectual Influences on Him

Znaniecki's educational and cultural background reveals the impact of philosophy, pragmatism and phenomenology and the ideas of many European and American scholars on his thoughts. His philosophical orientation did pave the path of his interests in sociology that can be named as humanistic sociology with concern for the study of values and culture. From his major works like Cultural Sciences, Social Actions,we can easily sense his respect for the sociological standpoint of Simmel, whom he considered to be ''a man of the highest cultural achievements' (Znaneicki,1967:333). Nevertheless, on many occasions he differed from Simmel, especially when the latter used the notion of social relations instead of the concept of interaction.

Znaniecki preferred to look deep into the subject-matter of cultural sciences, especially the study of values as a branch of philosophy. From the citations mentioned in his Cultural Sciences (1952) and Social Actions (1967) it can be easily assumed that to him the relevance of renowned French sociologists like Comte,

Durkheim and Tarde was quite great. The influence of French philosopher Henry Bergsson's 'creative evolution' was also there on him early in his life. He was also familiar with the writings of his contemporary American sociologists like Robert E. Park and Burgess He cited them several times in his book Social Action (1967). His empirical sociological ideas were influenced by fellow American sociologist William I. Thomas with whom he co-authored the book The Polish Peasants.

## 13.4 Contributions to Sociology

Znaniecki always wanted to bridge the gap between empirical sociology and theoretical approaches. For this he made several empirical studies. In 1910, as the Director of the Society for the Protection of Emigrants in Warsaw he conducted several studies of villages and farms in Poland and prepared an extensive report of about 500 pages on seasonal immigration. It served the purpose of extensive ethnographic research and the collection of an enormous amount of data on Polish seasonal and permanent emigrants. He also edited and published Polish Later Emigrants, A Monthly Magazine for one year (1911-1912). The magazine offered information in order to contain potential emigrants there, made them aware of the dangers that might come from dishonest agents and the emigration rackets; it also contained information about living conditions and organizations helping emigrants in other countries.

With funding from Poland's Central Agricultural Association Committee he conducted many studies of villages and farms in Poland and prepared an extensive report on seasonal immigration in Poland. His expertise on emigration was so well known that American sociologist W.I. Thomas and directed to him.When he (Thomas) was seeking information on Polish peasants Znaniecki provided him with extensive data, but some of the data got lost during transit to the US. Later, they collaborated together and co-authored a five volume book titled The Polish Peasant in Europe and America. In 1918 Znaniecki moved to New York and completed the fifth volume of the Polish Peasant all by himself. In 1920 he came back to Poland to take up teaching sociology, starting an Institute of Sociology and to publish a journal called the Polish Sociological Review. At the onset of World War II Znaniecki returned to the United States with his family and started to teach at the University of Illinois as a professor. By then the Polish Peasant received wide recognition from the American scholars as not only a major work but as a classic sociological work for its theoretical and methodological contributions. However, in 1938, Herbert Blumer pointed out that there was a serious gap between the theory and the actual data. Apart from Cultural Reality (1919) and the five volume

Polish Peasants he also wrote some books like The Downfall of Civilization (1922), Contemporary Man (1927), The Sociology of Education (1930) in Polish and The Laws of Social Psychology (1931), The Method of Sociology (1934), Social Actions (1936), Modern Nationalities (1952) and the Cultural Sciences (1952) in English. In 1940 a series of his lectures at Columbia University was published in a book form titled The Social Role of the Man of Knowledge and in 1964 his Social Relations and Social Roles was published posthumously. From these books we can assess his processual, relational and simultaneously historical approach and his focus on changes in the form of social and cultural becoming. This same approach is prevalent in The Polish Peasant too.

Znaniecki has viewed sociology as an objective inductive and generalizing science, whose method is different from that of the natural sciences. He has shown genuine interests in the larger field of the sociology of science, has analyzed the social roles of scientists and the concept of a school of thought. (Wikipedia)

## 13.4.1 Concept of Civilization:

Znaniecki's understanding of civilization and its inter-relationship with culture is quite different from either MacIver's or Alfred Weber's views, for whom culture and civilization were two separate and different orders; civilization being utilitarian in character is governed by the criterion of efficacy, whereas the products of civilization can be classified as superior or inferior and cultural expressions as an antithesis of civilization. He also rejected ideas of many other stalwarts like Auguste Comte, Norbert Elias and many others to come to the conclusion that civilization is a reflection of many systems of cultural actions, values, created, maintained and changed by distinct and organized social groups. In many of his writings the issue of civilization has occupied a significant place. For him civilization is an amalgamation of the processes of social integration of culture. Though he has written two books on the issues related to civilization, these could not be known or popular internationally as these were written in Polish. Of these two, the first book-The Fall of Western Civilization was published in 1921-and the latter, The Contemporary People and the Civilization of the Future appeared in 1934. In these books he included the concept of spatiality to examine the relations between different groups. In Cultural Reality he wrote 'each group with its total civilization becomes geographically localized' (Znaneicki, 1919: 293). Regarding his views on civilization, the noted historian Huntington has observed that Znaneicki, unlike Toynbee, was not eager to determine any specific number of civilization, rather he believed that there is an unspecified multitude of them. He has observed that the vitality of western civilization is more visible in the field of knowledge, where the ideal of acquiring total and ready knowledge has been replaced by the ideal of progress

For Znaneicki, the question of integration is of foremost importance and the idea of cultural order permeates the horizon of all his works. As Halas has observed, like Weber Znaneicki has also seen the possibility of a rational investigation into the infinitely varied and thus chaotic world of human societies and cultures through the idealization of its segments from a chosen point of view. Unlike Weber he depends more on the basic principle of free creation and not rationality. This principle unfolds progressively in a historical process owing to the liberation of man from the direct external control of social and political institutions. In Znaneicki's opinion, the vitality of western civilization is more visible in the field of knowledge, where the ideal of acquiring total and ready knowledge has been replaced by the ideal of progress by transforming science with the help of continuous creative thinking. He has also counted religious ideal as an essential component of western civilization, not in a particular doctrine but in the active faith affirming the highest spiritual values and impelling the believer to action. His political ideals have acknowledged that in the political sphere the greatest achievement of western civilization is democratic nationalism. For him, nationality would be a cultural group determined by common language, custom, literary tradition, religion, art and philosophy. As the nation subordinates the state as its tool, it (state) ceases to be the highest form of a social being. In due course of time all the constraints and the centralizing tendencies of the state may disappear altogether with cooperation and help from federation of social associations. This kind of understanding regarding the nation-state relationship originated in him out of the influence of Polish social thinking, because in the former Polish Republic the political life was subordinated to the social life.

Znaneicki is of the opinion that neither the conservative tendencies, nor revolution can resolve the vast crisis of civilization; it can be eased only with a state of stable equilibrium connected with 'folk civilizations' that aim at homogeneity, unchangeability and sameness of cognitive, religious, moral, political, economic and other patterns. Stable or static equilibrium allows transformation of the system with the introduction of new elements only when it becomes absolutely necessary. He has also argued that harmonious coexistence of significant and relevant systems of values of particular groups and nations with the supranational, Pan-human civilizations can be possible on the basis of cultural and social integration of humanity. This Pan-human civilization is different from the ideals of cosmopolitanism and internationalism. He hopes that a future civilization should be a humanistic one, dominated by spiritual culture, social harmony, freedom from strong antagonism; it should be based on 'dynamic equilibrium' that is, creativity and innovation in all cultural systems (religious, political, economic, aesthetic, etc.)

## 13.4.2 The Polish Peasant:

The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (1919-20), a five volume magnum opus covering 2,244 closely printed pages, co-authored by Znaniecki and William Isaac Thomas, an American scholar, is considered to be one of the classics of Sociology. It is a study of Polish immigrants to America and their families based on personal documents like letters, brochures, newspaper articles, parish and court documents, etc. The use of such documents introduced a new method in sociological research based on human documents and gave emphasis on four basic human wishes-(a) the wish for new experience, (b) the wish for recognition, (c) the wish for response and (d) the wish for security. This joint sociological study was conducted during the authors' stint at the University of Chicago. The book analyses the socio-economic circumstances of Polish countryside during the late 19th century and the reasons behind the immigration of the Polish peasant community; it has also assessed the process of the community's transformation as not American but as Polish-American, a new ethnic group, by the end of the nineteenth century. The part of the book's introduction titled the Methodological Note was written by Znaniecki where he discussed the history and structure of the Polish countryside as well as the methodology adopted in the study. Damuta Mostwin in a review of the book has commented that the book ''altered the course of American sociology and assumed a leading place among human documents of monumental value.''(Damanta Mostwinjstor.org/stable/20148405?seq=1). Critics believe, this book is the first introspective scientific study of the process of becoming in a person transplanted to a new socio-economic and cultural environment. It also speaks about changes by describing the conditions of Polish villages that no longer exist in reality any more but whose memory lingers in the minds of the Polish-American immigrants. It speaks about how the Polish peasant immigrants in America applied their norms and values for adjusting in a new country; their efforts were not smooth always as occasions of maladjustment were there too. The whole process reveals how the attitudes of thousands of Polish peasants in America get changed. The subject matter of the book, the Polish peasant culture was selected because of the accessibility of the materials and also because the Polish immigrants posed a question of assimilation in America. The choice of the Polish peasant society proved to be exceptionally fortunate as the materials collected by the two investigators revealed a picture of the changing culture of the Polish people in America when they were transplanted to a new country, especially in to its industrialized cities from far off rural settings. This study gives not a total view of the European culture in America, but one of a culture group in transition.

The source materials both in Europe and in America were gathered by collaborators over a period of many years. The raw data consist, first of all, of various series of peasant letters written largely by members of families, some of whom were in the United States, others in Europe. For compiling data on Polish immigrants' experiences in a new land the authors collected letters, diaries, memoirs, personal notes, newspaper files, autobiographical data, public documents, institutional records, historical materials, data collected over interviews and other documents received from the settlers. They also collected they posted advertisements in local newspapers for purchasing such personal documents.

There are twenty eight series of family letters with interpretative comments to indicate the place of a particular family in a total social situation; other series of letters follow, showing evidences of the dissolution of family solidarity; followed in turn, by eleven series of letters between husbands and wives and lastly, eleven series of letters revealing personal relations outside the marriage group and the family. (Kimball Young, 1963)

In 1920 Znaniecki returned to Poland from the US and started teaching at Poznan University where he introduced the new discipline of sociology there. Gradually, his contribution to The Polish Peasant became less noticed in America despite the bold and active role he played in persuading Thomas to turn the book into a scientific opus based on letters and documents. In due course it became a subject of study for generations of sociology and social science students; for Polish Americans it tells them the tales of their heritage and their ancestors' struggle for survival in a new world.

### 13.4.3 Cultural Reality, Znaniecki's Sociology of Culture:

Another impressive scholarly work by Znaniecki is Cultural Reality (1919). Sociologists around the world consider it a path-breaking work in the field of sociology to explore the concept of cultural reality which refers to the way in which individuals and groups perceive the world around them and understand it. For Znaniecki cultural reality, being shaped by social and cultural factors like language, history and tradition, is something more than a simple reflection of objective reality. In four sections of the book a different aspect of cultural reality has been explored with great detail. The first section of the book explores the relationship between culture and reality and argues how culture plays a significant role in shaping our perceptions and experiences of the world. In the second section the role of language in shaping cultural reality has been highlighted; while the third section explores the role of history and tradition in the making of cultural reality. In the fourth or the last section there is an examination of the relationship between cultural reality

and social change. In this book Znaniecki has also examined the significance of the role of cultural factors in shaping social and cultural movements; on the whole this book is counted as a pioneering work in the field of sociology that impresses scholars even today. Here Znaniecki has provided a rich and nuanced exposition of the complex relationship between culture, reality and social change and has also offered insights into the ways in which cultural factors shape people's understanding of the world around them. In fact, he has attached so much importance to culture that he considers sociology should be known as the study of culture and not as the study of society; at the same time, he is also aware that sociology is not the only social science discipline to study culture. He has defined sociology as the investigation of organized, interdependent interaction among human beings and it focuses on the expression of culture through social relations.

Znaniecki has found that the world is examined with two contrary modes of reflection, namely, idealism and realism; he has suggested a third way-the way of culturalism. For him the cultural order is 'axionormative' and it encompasses relationships among all kinds of human actions and their corresponding values. (Wikipedia)

### 13.4.4 Method to Study Sociology:

In 1934 Znaniecki's The Method of Sociology was published. In this book he has observed that the subject-matter of sociology can be divided into the study of four distinct and dynamic social systems like social action theory, social relation theory, social actors theory and social groups theory. For him, social actions constitute the foundation of a society giving rise to more complex social relations and thus becoming the foundation of all the others. The four major form of cooperative interaction or four social systems in growing complexity perceived by him may be described as Social actions or the most basic type of social fact; social relations, the second form, requires at least two persons and a mutual obligation. The third form is composed of the study of social personalities representing a combination of a number of different social roles that an individual fulfills. The fourth type of cooperative interaction or social; system involves social group any group recognized as a separate entity. For Znaniecki society is a group of groups but not with primacy for a sociologist to focus on it. However, by 1958 he changed his opinion regarding the forms of social systems and started to speak of social relations, social roles, social groups and societies instead. Though he has spoken of the importance of social action, his views regarding this is quite different from that of Max Weber; unlike Weber he does not conclude that everything can be reduced to social action. He has low esteem for the science of psychology so opines that insights from the

psychology should not be encouraged in sociology; but he believes that sociologists need to study reality by trying to understand how others see the world as an independent observer. He actually means that the scientist needs to understand the subject's world. Defying his critics who see this as subjectivism, he himself sees it as anti-subjectivist because social facts like cultural systems can exist even when nobody can see them.

For data analysis as a method of social research, Znaniecki coined the term 'humanistic coefficient'; with this he intends to describe the participants' perception of the experience to be analyzed because he feels the need to understand the subject's world. He advocates in favour of keeping personal, subjective observations value-free with the argument that value may be added only when the observations can be objectively described. Here he argues in defense of sociology as a value-free discipline.

## 13.4.5 Znaniecki's Sociology of knowledge:

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## 13.5 Critical Appraisal of Znaniecki's Contributions:

The contribution made by Znaniecki in the field of empirical sociology has been highly acclaimed by many sociologists of his time and after. Jerry Szacki, a Polish sociologist and historian of ideas, assesses that Znaniecki has made multiple important contributions like founding of sociology in Poland, enrichment of the field of sociological theory, bridging gaps between empirical sociology and more theoretical approaches, between objectivity and subjectivity, between humanistic and naturalistic methodologies and viewpoints and between American and European intellectual traditions. Though his theoretical contributions were later pushed behind by Talcott Parsons' functionalist approach, he actually presented the most ambitious sociological theory in America much before Parsons. (Wikipedia, https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Florian_Znaniecki#)

Znaniecki's most celebrated contribution to empirical sociology is the book that he co-authored with W.I. Thomas, namely, The Polish Peasant in Europe and America; this five volume work is regarded as a classic of empirical sociology,

most of his other works are concerned with theory. His theories form a major part of sociology's action theory and a major part of his work builds the foundation of humanistic sociology. His theories are also known as "systematic sociology" The principal objective of his theory was to bridge the gap between empirical sociology and theoretical approaches.

Halas has remarked that Znaniecki's emphasis on culturalism alias humanism and values, to some extent, reduced his importance in American sociology as for American scholars his approach is typically European and not quite suitable for an analysis of culture in America. (Wikipedia). L. A. Coser has observed that not all of Znaniecki's writings has stood the test of time. He finds Cultural Reality is more philosophical than sociological in character; regarding his The Laws of Social Psychology Coser has observed that many of its ideas were later abandoned by the author himself.

## 13.6 Conclusion

Znaniecki's academic journey had many shades as his initial leanings towards philosophy gradually turned towards sociology. Critics have pointed out that his Cultural Reality (1919) was nothing short of a synthesis of his philosophical thought; however, the more popular and better known five volume The Polish Peasant in Europe and America (1918-1920) linked his name in academic circles primarily with sociology and not with philosophy. His early works focused on culture and countered the principles of sociological naturalism. One very interesting aspect of Znaniecki's thought, as Szacki has mentioned, was his aversion for some of the prominent sociologists of his time such as Max Weber, Vilfredo Pareto and Talcott Parsons; at the same time, his preference for William I. Thomas, Georg Simmel, Robert E. Park and Durkheim was quite evident.

## 13.7 Summary

As a founding father of Polish philosophy and sociology and an architect of Polish sociological institutional life, Znaniecki had a great impact on shaping the course of sociology in Poland. Not only that, his neo-Kantian ideas in conceiving the cultural sciences that are quite evident in his works, lectures and scientific activities, have also influenced American sociology tyo a great extent. Through his multiple scholarly activities he strived to bridge the gap between objectivity and subjectivity between humanistic and naturalistic methodologies and viewpoints and between American and European intellectual traditions.

## 13.8 Model Questions

**A. Answer in brief:**                                               **6 Marks each**

1. Write a brief note on Znaniecki's concept of civilization.
2. Discuss, in brief, the importance of The Polish Peasant as an empirical sociological work.
3. Examine Znaniecki's views on sociology of culture.
4. Discuss, in brief, Znaniecki's stand on methods to be followed in sociological research.
5. Make a brief assessment of the intellectual influences that shaped Znaniecki's sociological ideas.

**B. Answer in detail:**                                              **10 Marks each**

1. Make a critical assessment of Znaniecki's contributions in sociology.
2. Evaluate the importance of The Polish Peasant in Europe and America in sociology.

## 13.9 References and Suggested Readings

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# Unit-14 □ Louis Althusser (1918-1990)

**Structure**

## 14.1 Learning Objectives

- To familiarize oneself with the life and works of Louis Althusser
- To get a basic idea about Althusser as a structuralist Marxist
- To learn about Althusser's theory of Ideology and Ideological State Apparatus
- To understand Althusser's contribution to Marxism from a critical point of view

## 14.2 Introduction

This unit discusses the life and works of Louis Althusser along with a special reference to his theory on Ideology. The unit tries to look at the works and

philosophy of Althusser with a critical overview. One of his most famous works was "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" published in his book Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays (1971). He is also well known for his works, For Marx (1965) and Reading Capital (1965). Louis Pierre Althusser (1918-1990) was a French Marxist philosopher of the 20th century who developed critical ideas of the Marxism. His ideas gained momentum in the 1960s. He was a student of the prestigious Ecole Normale Superieure. He joined the French army in 1939 and went to prison in Germany. In 1948 he joined the French Communist Party. In 1948 he joined the Ecole Normale Superieure and taught for three decades. Through his works, Althusser tried to break the most significant and orthodox Marxist concepts like economic determinism, historicism and humanism. Althusser saw a huge hiatus between the theory of early Marx under the influence of Hegelian philosophy and the later more mature Marx. In his famous work "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1969), Althusser argued against the traditional economic determinism of Marxism.

## 14.3 Althusser: Life and Works

Althusser was born on October 16, 1918 in Birmandreis, French Algeria. His father was named Charles Althusser and his mother Lucienne Berger. Initially Althusser's father worked with the French army but later returned to Algeria to work as a banker. The family moved to Marsellies in 1930 and later to Lyon in 1936 where Althusser joined the prestigious Lycee du Parc. Althusser was deeply influenced by Catholicism and even joined the Catholic Youth Group while in Lycee in 1937. Althusser wanted to join the prestigious Ecole Normale Superieur in Paris and even qualified the entrance test for the same in 1939. He soon joined the army for the war and was also taken prisoner at a camp in Northern Germany. His days in prison shaped his ideas about politics, solidarity as well as communism. After his release from prison Althusser joined the *Ecole Normale Superieur* for a teaching position and aimed for higher education. Even though a practicing Catholic Althusser soon got involved in after war movements which were essentially leftist. Althusser wanted to establish a link between Christianity and Marxism after getting deeply influenced by the German Idealist philosophy of Hegel and Marx. At the *Ecole Normale Superieur*, Althusser took the job of helping students with their aggregation and offered courses and tutorials on French philosophy and history. During his time at the Ecole Normale, Althusser came in touch with scholars like Alan Badiou, *Pierre Bourdieu* and *Michel Foucault*. He became a member of the French Communist Party and became close to *Helene Ryntmann Legotien* who was

also a member of FCP and who soon became his companion and wife later. His long stay in concentration camp during the war affected his mental health deeply. He suffered from physical and mental disorders as well as from depression which made him spend the later part of his life in mental hospitals in France. Althusser's mental health aggravated to such an extent that he even killed his own wife.

Althusser was known as a structuralist along with names like Barthes, Foucault, Lacan, Levi Strauss, Merleau-Ponty and Piaget. Althusser was influenced not only by Hegel and Marx but also Freud and Lacan. His depression and mental illnesses also brought him close to the practice of psychoanalysis under the influence of Jacques Lacan. Althusser's philosophy is based on some major concepts surrounding Marxism like the 'crisis of Marxism', 'epistemological break', 'overdetermination of a conjuncture' and 'interpellation'. All these concepts were related to his re-reading of Marxism and his efforts to break the popular notions of classical Marxism. Althusser is known for his famous works namely-*Reading Capital* (1965), *For Marx* (1965), *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (1971).

## 14.4 Althusser and Marxism

Marxism was dominated by the ideas of German philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). While Hegel's philosophy was idealistic, Marx's ideas were more materialistic which tried to understand the development of the social world through the relationship of human beings to that of nature. Ludwig Feuerbach also had a deep influence on Marx. Feuerbach believed that humans are more significant than the divine. Feuerbach's humanism can be found in Marx's understanding of alienation. Marx was also influenced by British economists like Adam Smith and John Locke and this was reflected in his economic theories in *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) and *Das Capital* (1867).

Althusser's philosophical ideas gained momentum at a time when Marxism was undergoing a transformation from its traditional theoretical phase to a more scientific and revolutionary phase. His objective was to portray historical materialism of Marx as scientific and also to project dialectical materialism as a new revolutionary force. Althusser did not want Marxism to remain confined to the old Hegelian tradition which confined Marxism to the realm of theories and without practical application to real situations of war and crisis. To him Marxism in its later phase was to become more revolutionary in nature. In his famous work "*Reading Capital*", Althusser tried to provide a symptomatic reading of the texts which meant looking beyond the established ideas of economic determinism, humanism and historicism that are ingrained in Marxian philosophy. Reducing Marxism to

economic determinism would only limit it to the Hegelian philosophy of economic relations. Economic determinism ensured that the mode of production was always ruled by the economic base while the other elements at the superstructural level were dependent on the economic base. Neither did Althusser have faith in the humanism of Feuerbach. Althusser believed that there is a difference between the pre scientific theory of Marxism and its actual practice. He wanted Marxism to develop into a more revolutionary and political force. Althusser's contribution can be found in the areas of historical materialism and also in areas of ideology and theories of the State.

Since the late 1920s Marxism remained a theoretical idea which failed to theorize the present status-quo. It was mainly due to Stalin's overtaking of full state ownership in U.S.S.R that saw the reduction of Marxism to a dogma with not much connection between the theory and political practice [Basu, P: 2010]. This period till the 1950s was seen as a 'crisis of Marxism'. It became the onus of existentialists, structuralists and psychoanalysis to bring about a reform in Marxism. In 1968 Althusser did not support the cause of the mass student's uprising due to his commitment to the French Communist Party. Althusser also wrote '*On the Reproduction of Capitalism*' during this time. His conservative attitude towards the events of 1968 made him lose his reputation among many of his fellow students and the leftists. Besides situating his views in several theoretical studies and publications, Althusser also wanted to develop a broad study circle which will also become a political force in the Left party [Eriksen, N, 1982:14].

# 14.5 Althusser and Structuralism

Modern western philosophy originated since the time of European Renaissance through the works like Descartes, Kant, Hegel and later Marx. Modern philosophers believed in liberal-humanist, rationalist historical progress of human society [Basu, P: 2010]. Since the 1960s post structuralism and post modernism emerged as a critique of Enlightenment modernity and challenged the liberal-humanist and rationalist tradition [ibid: 32]. Studies like existentialist theory. Hermeneutics and structuralism emerged in different fields like language, literature, anthropology, psychoanalysis etc. In order to understand structuralism and the contribution of Althusser to structural Marxism one must first understand the liberal-humanist and rationalist tradition that was so critiqued by Althusser himself and other structuralists and post structuralists of the time. According to the rational liberal and humanist tradition of modernity, the human world is an objective entity similar to the natural world and hence can be studied through reason. They believed in objective scientific

knowledge and the absolute truth [ibid: 32-34]. The humanists believe that it is the individuals who create meanings and is the creator of the texts.

Structuralism developed in France in the 1950s and 1960s. The structuralists believed that individuals succumb to the laws of the structures of the social world where signs and symbols combine to develop meanings. Such structures are found in Marxism (economic base) and even in psychoanalysis (the unconscious in the psyche of man). Structuralism did not believe in humanism. Rather they believed that individuals are controlled by the structures of the social world which already exists.

# 14.6 Althusser: Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses

Two strands of critical philosophical thought directly influenced Marx and Engles concept of ideology. On the one hand critique of religion developed by French materialism and Feuerbach and on the other hand the critique of traditional epistemology and revaluation of the subject's activity carried out by German philosophy of consciousness and Hegel. There is a necessary link between inverted forms of consciousness and men's material existence. Althusser took up from the Marxian theory of ideology and tried to develop a general theory of Ideology.

## 14.6.1 Reproduction of the means of production and labour power:

Marxist theory is dominated by the mode of production. The mode of production or modes of production exists in every social formation. This mode of production which occupies a central aspect in Marxian theory is formed out of productive forces on the one hand and relations of production on the other. "On the basis of existing productive forces and within the limits they set, the relations of production play the determinant role" [ Althusser, 1971, 2014: 21]. The unity of the productive forces and the relations of production form the economic base or the infrastructure. The superstructure on the other hand constitutes of the politico-legal (law and the State) and Ideology (the different ideologies, religious, ethical, legal and political etc.) [Althusser, 1970, 2010: 206]. It is the economic base upon which rests the superstructure and the economic base is the 'determinant in the last instance' of any mode of production. The productive forces in a mode of production are formed out of means of production and labour power. The relations of production are special relations between the agents of production or the labourers and the non-agents of production. These non-agents of production are also owners of the means of production and also appropriate a share of the product of labour as surplus. This capitalist relation of production is highly exploitative in nature and

is nothing but capitalist relations of exploitation. This is because the labourer is only paid his wage against the labour power that he spends which is only a part of the value of the product produced where as the capitalist who are the owners of means of production keep the surplus production as well as the profit made out of it to themselves.

## 14.6.2 Reproduction of the conditions of production:

According to Marx, ultimate condition for production is the reproduction of the conditions of production. To put it clearly, every social formation which has a dominant mode of production most reproduce the same conditions of production along with the existing relations of production. It is not just the means of production or the conditions of production that needs to be reproduced but also the labour power needs to be reproduced for the social formation to survive. The question is how does the labour power reproduce itself? As the productive forces develop, the labour power also needs to grow its skills. Unlike the other modes of production, in a capitalist system the labour power acquires its skill outside the production process through the formal school system. The capitalist schooling system not only teach the different techniques for production but also manners and behaviour and other rules of conduct. These rules are the rules of dominant ideology or those established by the dominant class in society. "...reproduction of labour-power requires not only that its qualifications be reproduced, but that its submission to the rules of respect for the established order be reproduced at the same time" [Althusser,1971,2014:51]. "It is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that the reproduction of the qualification of labour-power is ensured" [ibid: 52].

## 14.6.3 Base and Superstructure:

Althusser states that Marx's theory is based upon the levels of society which he distinguishes into the base and superstructure model. The economic base is the '*infrastructure*' of society constituting of the unity of productive forces and relations of production. The *superstructure* on the other hand constitutes of two levels, the politico-legal (law and the State) and the ideological level (religious, moral, legal, political etc.). Classical Marxist theory observes that the economic base is the '*determinant in the last instance*' and the upper two levels of the superstructure are '*determined by the effectivity of the base*'. Classical Marxist tradition also notes that the superstructure is '*relatively autonomous*' with respect to the base and the superstructure also '*reacts back on*' the base.

### 14.6.4 Law, State and Ideology:

Althusser observed that the difference in the levels of the superstructure also shows the difference between their indices of effectivity [Althusser, 1971, 2014: 55]. It also shows that the legal-political superstructure is more effective than the ideological superstructure. In this context one needs to draw a relationship between law, state and ideology. Law is found to be repressive in nature and imposes certain constraints. The constraints also imply sanctions which are *apparatus of repression* and exists as the Repressive State Apparatus [ibid: 65]. Such repression is implemented through courts, fine, prisons and other detachments of the police [ibid: 66]. Law cannot exist in isolation and is dependent on the Repressive State Apparatus and also on the legal and moral ideology. The definition of the State in classical Marxist theory is also 'descriptive' in nature as is the theory of economic determinism. The state is viewed as the repressive state apparatus. However, there is a difference between the state apparatus for repression and state power. During class struggle the proletariat must take possession of state power and overthrow the bourgeois state apparatus holding the state power. The possession of state power becomes the main objective of political class struggle.

### 14.6.5 Ideological State Apparatus:

Althusser believed that the Marxist theory of the state is not enough to understand the revolutionary movement and something more needs to be added to theorize it. Althusser distinguished between the state power and the state apparatus and renamed Repressive State Apparatus with Ideological State Apparatus. Unlike the original repressive state apparatus (RSA) comprising of the courts, prison, police army and government, Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) comprise of the following:

- the Scholastic Apparatus (educational institutions like public and private schools)
- the Familial Apparatus (Family which also reproduces the labour power and can be units of production and consumption in different modes of production).
- The Religious Apparatus (Church/religious institutions)
- the Political Apparatus (the political system comprising of political parties)
- the Associative Apparatus (Different associations like Trade Unions)
- the Information and News Apparatus (Mass media)
- the Publishing and Distributive Apparatus (The press)
- the Cultural Apparatus (literature/arts/sports etc.) [ibid: 75].

The ISAs have their own corresponding institutions and organizations. These various institutions and organizations of each ISAs form a system. The institutions of ISAs are not only based upon ideology but also is supported by material functions. Althusser provides a definition of ISA: "*An Ideological State Apparatus is a system of defined institutions, organizations, and the corresponding practices. Realized in the institutions, organizations, and practices of this system is all or part (generally speaking, a typical combination of certain elements) of the State Ideology. The Ideology realized in an ISA ensures its systemic unity on the basis of 'anchoring' in material functions specific to each ISA; these functions are not reducible to that ideology but serve it as a 'support'"*. The Ideological State Apparatus do not use any form of physical violence and hence cannot be called repressive in nature. This differentiates them from the Repressive State Apparatus. The Ideological State Apparatuses can be both public or privately owned. What is most important is that they are State Ideologies. An institution in itself do not form the ISA but it is a set of institutions and organizations and their practices. One should also keep in mind that it is not the institutions that produce the corresponding ideologies but 'rather certain elements of an ideology (State Ideology) are 'realized in' or 'exist in' the corresponding institutions and their practices' [Althusser, 1971, 2014: 82]. State ideology always holds the interest of the class in power. All ideological State apparatuses contribute to the reproduction of relations of production which is the capitalist relations of exploitation [Althusser. 1970, 2010: 210]. Out of all the State apparatuses, the educational state apparatus is the most dominant. The schooling system is one of the major instruments of the ruling bourgeoisie ideology.

## 14.6.6 Ideology has no history:

Marx's German Ideology failed to theorize Ideology. Althusser stated that in the German Ideology, Ideology is conceived as a pure illusion, like an imaginary construction. 'Ideology is for Marx an imaginary assemblage (bricolage), a pure dream, empty and vain, constituted by the 'day's residues' from the only full and positive reality, that of a concrete history of concrete material individuals materially producing their existence [ibid: 212]. Althusser however believes that ideology does have a history of its own and can be equated with Freud's conception of the unconscious mind. Ideology is omnipresent throughout different social formations in class societies.

Althusser presented two theses on Ideology-

● Ideology is a 'representation' of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence

● Materiality of Ideology

In the first thesis on Ideology as representation of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions, Althusser stressed that ideology is an illusion (as stated by Marx) or an allusion to reality and can be interpreted to discover the reality of the world behind their imaginary representation of that world [ibid:213]. This goes on to say that in ideology 'men represent their real conditions of existence to themselves in an imaginary form'. The imaginary representation of the world in ideology is the actual conditions of existence in the real world.

The second thesis which states the Materiality of Ideology is based on the premise that ideology always exist in ISAs like religious, ethical, legal, political and cultural and also in their practices. So, it is material in existence.

The central point in Althusser's Ideology thesis is that '*Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects*. This signifies that the individual in an ideology becomes the subject. Ideology is formed by the subjects and for the subjects. Through its functions ideology transforms the individual into subjects through interpellation or hailing. He gives the example of an individual hailed by a policeman on the road to which the individuals turn back and reacts to the hailing. The individual then transforms into the subject. This is because he recognized that the hailing was for him. Althusser shows that the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpretation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing [Althusser 1970, 2010: 218]. Individuals interpellated by ideology as subjects also makes individuals always-already subjects. Althusser gives the example of an unborn child who through the forms of family ideology and expectations of family members becomes always-already a subject. The individuals transform into subjects in the name of an Absolute Subject and so the subjects are subjected to the Subject. This Subject is the supreme Subject or Supreme Being.

Therefore, ideology ensures that:

● The interpellation of individuals as subjects

● Their subjection to the Subject

● Mutual recognition of subjects and Subject, the subjects' recognition of each other and finally the subjects' recognition of himself

● The subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly and this ensures that everything will be alright [ibid: 219].

Subjects function or work because they are governed by rituals that are there in the ISAs. Human beings as subjects are interpellated as free subjects. This means that he or she shall submit to the will or commandments of the Subject and shall freely accept his subjection [ibid].

## 14.7 Conclusion

Althusser through his theory of the state and ideology tries to reinvent Marxism by establishing the superstructure's existence through reproduction of the conditions of economic base. Through his indispensable contribution Althusser revamped revolutionary Marxism. He took up real life situations and the current political practices and tried to theorize them. His major objective was to portray Marxism as a revolutionary theory. His concepts help one to get a comprehensive understanding of capitalist society and the revolutionary changes that one can bring about. Althusser's theory was acknowledged by many of his students among whom Michel Foucault holds significant. Foucault's theory on power and discourse and sexuality holds a lot of vitality. There have been others who pursued further into the field of revolutionary Marxism. Althusser's ideas found its place in the British journal Theoretical Practice. This journal first published in 1971 had the works of Althusser and also one of his students Ranciere. Althusser's work also influenced other revolutionary Marxists like Ben Brewster, Antony Cutler, Michael Gane, Paul Hirst and Barry Hindess and even Nicos Poulantzas [Eriksen, N 1982]. 'Althusser's work on state and political power influenced Poulantzas book Political Power and Social Classes and many more. Ernesto Laclau also used Althusser's concept of interpellation in his works on Marxist theory of politics and ideology. Althusser was also responsible for influencing Juliet Mitchel to understand the situation of women in Marxism and contemporary capitalism [Eriksen, N 1982:23-25]. This is the reason why Althusser remains significant for neo-Marxist, structural Marxist and Feminist scholars.

## 14.8 Summary

This unit discussed the life and works of Louis Althusser. We have learnt Althusser's contribution to Marxism and Structuralism. Althusser's life helped to understand the context in which he tried to theorize revolutionary Marxism. His main objective was to draw a critique of classical Marxism which was premised upon the notion of significance of economic base over the superstructure. Althusser's theory on state, law and ideology is based upon Marxian theory of reproduction of relations of production, reproduction of labour power and base-superstructure model. The unit also tried to look at Althusser's theory of ideology and the Ideological State Apparatus. We also tried to differentiate between Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus with examples while stressing the need and significance of ISAs in a mode of production.

# 14.9 Questions

**Answer in detail.**

1. Discuss Althusser's theory of Ideology.

2. Differentiate between Repressive State Apparatus and Ideological State Apparatus.

3. Why is Althusser considered a structural Marxist?

4. Answer in moderation.

5. Why was Althusser against the ideology of classical Marxism?

6. Write a note on Althusser's Ideological State Apparatus.

7. How does the scholastic apparatus reproduce the relations of production?

**Answer in short.**

1. What is meant economic determinism of Karl Marx?

2. What is meant by materiality of ideology?

3. How does ideology interpellates individuals as subjects?

# 14.10 References

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## 14.11 Suggested Readings

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**NOTES**

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