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BLOCK 3
THEORIES OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND
FUNCTION

THE PEOPLE'S
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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, the learners should be able to:

- define social integration;
- understand the roots of the concept of social integration;
- discuss the Durkheimian theory of social integration;
- locate and appreciate the theory of social integration in social anthropology; and
- understand the concepts of social disintegration and anomie.

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Social integration as a theoretical idea became established in Anthropology around twentieth century. For a very long time before that, evolution was the general theoretical framework that guided anthropological knowledge. Marvin Harris writes that anthropology began as a study of human history. Anthropologists in the mid nineteenth century were much concerned with the stages through which human societies have passed and reached its present form in the modern European societies. They were more concerned with the idea of change in human society and culture. How human society changed over a period of time and what were the characteristics of each stage through which societies passed, was their main concern. However, anthropologists had little evidence to prove the claims they were making. Most of the anthropologists during the mid-nineteenth century were arm-chair anthropologists as they based their arguments and illustrations of each stage of human society on the works of various missionaries, soldiers, and travelers' accounts. They themselves did not go to the field. Their arguments were thus conjectural in nature. It was due to this that the theory of evolutionism in social anthropology came under sharp criticism. Reaction to evolutionism in Britain led to the formation of two camps- one led by diffusionists and the other

***Contributor:** Dr. Prashant Khattri, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Allahabad State University, Prayagraj. UP.

led by functionalists. The idea of social integration is clearly visible, took shape and became established in the second camp. Functionalism in social anthropology is a broad term and has been further sub-divided into two groups viz- psychological functionalism and structural functionalism. Psychological functionalism is associated with the works of Malinowski and the structural or sociological functionalism (as sometimes it is also called by this name) is associated with the works of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. He, in-turn, was influenced by the ideas of Emile Durkheim, a sociologist. Social integration as a perspective and as a theoretical framework, although can be located in both forms of functionalism, but it is the sociological functionalism where it is more firmly rooted.

The theory of functionalism in anthropology is associated with several shifts in the discipline. With the emergence of functionalism, anthropology shunned its diachronic character and became a synchronic science. It became interested in the study of the present and abandoned the idea of studying the past in the absence of clear evidence. The idea of in-depth ethnographic fieldwork became established in anthropology. All these changes had important contributions to make towards the idea of social integration (Barnard 2000).

7.1 WHAT IS SOCIAL INTEGRATION?

In our everyday usage, the word social is used as a word to depict our relationships with people. How many times people might have told you to become 'social'? What they mean by this is to go out and socialise with friends and relatives. When we spend our time alone and do not meet with people for a long time we are labeled as 'not being social.' Because of the corona pandemic we all are now familiar with the term 'social distancing.' For a very long time we all were confined to our houses due to lockdown and there were restrictions on our gatherings and movements. Although we met with people online but social gatherings like marriage functions, birthday parties and other such gatherings were prohibited. Thus, we can get a sense of the term social through this experience. It is a term that denotes our ability and need to be associated with others. It denotes a sense of collectivity and cohesiveness. We also use the word anti-social for those activities that go against the collective consciousness and collective nature of human existence.

The word integration on the other hand has been defined by the Cambridge dictionary as an action or a process of successfully joining or mixing with a different group of people. If we can extend this definition then we can also say that integration is a process of joining different units together. These different units can be conceptualised or seen as different aspects or institutions of the society. Society being a heterogeneous unit, in order to stay in equilibrium, different units of the society must have a functional unity between them. Now, clubbing both the words together to reach a meaning of the composite word 'social integration' we may say that it is a process where different units of society or the collectivity that we call as a society is in a state of equilibrium. Different units of a society are so joined or mixed together that we get society as a functioning unit fulfilling various needs of the individual and the collectivity.

Further we may say that individual is a very important unit of the society. It is also true that individual is inseparable from the collectivity and collective identity

of the social groups to which he/she belongs. Keeping individual at the center of attention, social integration has been defined as “strength of social ties connecting individuals to society (Stolley 2005: 250).” Therefore, social integration can be seen as relationships between social groups and also between the individual and society.” In social anthropology, the concept and idea of social integration came up during the twentieth century. As already mentioned, when evolutionism as a theory to understand society, fell out of currency, the idea of looking at the past in order to understand the present came under attack. Instead, it was now believed and thought that in order to understand the society, we need to examine the present only. This was a shift from a diachronic understanding to a synchronic view of society where society was seen as it is ‘here and now.’ Major theme within this thought process was to understand that how society maintains itself and perpetuates. A particular society came to be studied in its totality, that is to say, that various institutions that made-up a society were studied. Society was viewed as a totality with a boundary, with interrelated parts. Scholars tried to understand that how different parts of the society, that is, different institutions like religion, polity, economics etc. function and how they are related to each other to maintain the society as a whole. Although it is true that in social anthropology, this idea gained currency only during the twentieth century, but seeds of this idea were present even before that in social sciences (Stolley 2005).

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Define social integration.

7.2 THE THEORY OF SOCIAL CONTRACT: THE BEGINNING OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION IDEA

Before we move on to understand the theory of social integration as put forward by social anthropologists and sociologists, a more philosophical way of looking at social integration is much warranted. This all begins with philosophical questions like when and why societies were formed? What was the need to live in a social arrangement? How human beings lived before the existence of societies? Was there a stage in human existence when there was no society or social relationship, in other words, had humans ever lived in a state of nature? If yes, then what was the characteristic of the state of nature? Answers to these questions were attempted by Thomas Hobbes who is associated with the theory of social contract.

Hobbes was of the view that before human beings entered into a social contract they were in a state of nature. This natural state according to him was full of human-human conflict. This was so because everyone was free to do things based on their own will. Human beings only thought about their individual profit and interest. This natural state of human existence was actually a condition of war. If

any dispute arose between individuals then there was no authority that resolved it. Disputes were resolved based on people's own will and ways. Thus, without any overall controlling power, human beings were in a perpetual condition of war. This natural state of human existence therefore, according to Hobbes, was tyrannical. In the natural state, since human beings remained ungoverned, they would terrorise each other as they would only be governed by rules of self-preservation and self-promotion. Thus, in order to bring peace, equilibrium, resolve conflict, and have a peaceful collective existence, human beings entered into a social contract.

Thus, according to Hobbes, the best way of social integration is to enter into a social contract. In this contract, human beings submit to an authority which is sovereign and an absolute ruler having indivisible powers. This prevents conflict and chaos. By investing all powers with the third party, human beings establish the rule of law. Thus, the basic function of the government according to Hobbes was to bring about social integration and social order (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001).

Check Your Progress 2

- 2) The idea of social integration can be traced back to the theory of social contract. Discuss.

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- 3) What is the theory of social contract and how is it linked to social integration?

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7.3 AUGUSTE COMTE AND THE IDEA OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Auguste Comte, who gave the term, 'sociology' to a body of knowledge that was theorising about society, and who is also regarded as the founding figure of the discipline, was of the view that the nineteenth century would be the century of biology because the idea of evolution in biology was the most powerful idea during that time. He further said that biology will provide the metaphor for the study of society. As biology was regarded as the study of natural organisms, sociology could be regarded as the study of social organisms. Society, according to Comte was more complex than the natural organism and therefore he regarded society as a complex organism. He was of the view that as human organism is made up of cells, the social organism is constituted by families which are the

building blocks comparable to the cells. All other parts in society are just elaborations of the family that is the fundamental unit of society.

He further went on to say that as there are several needs of the human organism, similarly there are needs of the society. If a society wants to persist then series of needs must be met. However, there is one basic need that must be met for the smooth functioning of the society and that is the need for social integration. This need is actually about coordination, regulation and control of different parts of a society. Societies where this basic need of social integration cannot be met are likely to develop social 'pathologies' that may be detrimental for the society. According to Comte social integration can be achieved in the following three ways:

- 1) by building a mechanism for mutual interdependence among various parts of the society,
- 2) by creating strong centers of power for political control and regulation of various systems and parts in the society. This is similar to what we have already seen in the social contact theory and
- 3) by ensuring common cultural codes for different units of the society.

This gave rise to Comte's model of social statics. This means that if the needs for social integration are met then society will be in a state of equilibrium. The model states that when the level of social differentiation increases in the society it gives rise to integrative problems in society. This in turn gives rise to an increasing pressure on the society to come-up with some new mechanisms for integration. With the emergence of new integrative mechanisms in the form of centralization of power, common culture and structural interdependencies, social integration is achieved. Comte's model however also talks about the situation in which new mechanisms fail to emerge, for example a lack of centralised control over different parts of the society that may lead to non-equitable distribution of resources among different sections of the population. In such a scenario, integrative problems of coordination and control increase, that may lead to social pathologies (Turner 2014).

Check Your Progress 3

- 4) Discuss Comte's idea of social integration.

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- 5) What is Comte's idea of social statics and how is it relevant to the theory of social integration?

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7.4 HERBERT SPENCER AND THE ORGANISMIC ANALOGY

The ideas on social integration are very well entrenched into the works of Herbert Spencer. Following the footsteps of Comte, although he denied it, Spencer also put forward the 'natural science view' of the society. He developed Comte's ideas further. Spencer compared human organism with society and talked about various similarities and differences between the two. This is known as the organismic analogy.

While talking about the similarities he said the following:

- 1) That both organism and society can be distinguished from the inorganic matter as both grow and develop.
- 2) As they grow, they increase in complexity and their structures differentiate. When organisms grow, their organs become more complex and get differentiated by assuming special functions. Same is true for the society.
- 3) As the structure grows and differentiates, functions of different parts also become different.
- 4) In both, organism and society, different parts are interdependent on each other and both cannot function without this interdependence. This interdependence of parts is necessary to maintain both, the organism and the society.

Spencer also came-up with certain differences between the two which are as follows:

- 1) Degree of connectedness and proximity of parts is greater in organism than it is in the society.
- 2) Communication between various parts takes place through different means. In organism, parts communicate through molecular waves but in society, parts communicate through cultural symbols like language.
- 3) In society or the superorganism, as Spencer called it, all the units or parts are capable of decision making but in case of an organism, it is only the brain that is endowed with this capacity.

Spencer further says that as there are certain needs of the organism that should be met in order to maintain the organism, or sustain life, similarly, there are needs of superorganism that should be met in order to achieve social integration or in order to maintain the society as a whole. These could be understood as certain functional requisites that are essential to maintain the superorganism. These functional requisites are:

- 1) Production- this involves accumulation of resources and conversion of raw materials into usable resources that can sustain a population.
- 2) Reproduction- this involves creating structures that can ensure new members are added to the population. It also involves learning the ways of life or ways of living in a group or structure in order to maintain the whole.
- 3) Regulation- this involves the use and consolidation of power and authority in order to control the individuals. This also helps in maintaining the whole as a corporate unit.

- 4) Distribution- this involves creation of infrastructures in order to move people, information and resources in a geographical space.

Thus, the organismic analogy compares the society with the human organism. As in the case of human organism, different organs function in order to maintain the whole, similarly, in society different parts of society function and are integrated and interdependent on each other in such a way that the society is maintained as a whole (Turner 2014).

Check Your Progress 4

- 6) What is organismic analogy in social sciences?

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- 7) How organismic analogy is central to the understanding of theory of social integration?

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7.5 EMILE DURKHEIM AND THE THEORY OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Durkheim, a functionalist, was concerned with how social order is maintained in the society. He uses the term 'social solidarity' in order to talk about social order. For him, institutions in the society function in order to maintain the social solidarity. While writing on the division of labour in society, he put forth the idea that the function of the division of labour is to maintain the social order or social solidarity. Durkheim gave primacy to social facts, and looked for sociological explanations of social phenomenon. There can be several other ways in which we may describe phenomenon, for example, division of labour can be described in economic terms. It can be said and economists have tried to focus on this particular description that division of labour serves economic functions as it increases productivity. Durkheim however gave primacy to the social explanation. For him, division of labour serves a very social function. It helps in maintaining social solidarity as because of the division of labour different units are interdependent and therefore promote social solidarity (Pope 1975).

Durkheim's work on religion is one of the cornerstones in the sociology and anthropology of religion. In his book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, he talked about an Australian aboriginal group named Arunta. The Aruntas

practiced totemism that involves the collective worship of the totemic ancestor that is often a natural being, like a bird or animal. The Arunta believe that they are descendants of these natural beings and each clan has its particular non-human ancestor. Durkheim asked the question that what religion does for the individual and the society. In other words what is the function of religion? He focused on the functional aspects of the institutions rather than the substantive aspects. He further said that among the Aruntas, whenever there is a religious performance or a festival, they all gather together to sing and dance. This act of gathering together and performing rituals together promoted collective behaviour. This helps in generating collective consciousness. This in-turn promotes social solidarity. Therefore, the main function of religion according to Durkheim is that it promotes social solidarity. In his definition on religion, he writes that religion binds people into a moral community called Church. A Church comprises of all who share the same beliefs and related practices. Thus, religion has an integrative function. It integrates the individual to the society. Religion also helps the individual to imbibe society or internalize the society. According to Durkheim, the moral values imbibed through religion are the ones that contribute towards social integration (Moore 2009).

As already mentioned in this unit, social integration stresses the linkage or relationship between the individual and the society. Social integration is made possible by more conforming individuals who abide by the rules of the society and more integrated the society, the better is the mode of enforcement of rules, for example where family ties are strong, children grow up to be more obedient and conforming. This theory is also an important explanatory device in criminology. According to this view, in a better integrated society crime will be less as people will be sensitive to the needs and demands of the others. The consciousness of the other and the social control exerted by wanting to appear good in the eyes of the others, or the collectivity is the hallmark of the theory of social integration. Individuals that are more conforming to the social norms and rules will be less directed and motivated to commit crime. Higher the level of conformity to social norms more is the level of social integration. People tend to focus their interest within the structure of the society and do not dare to think beyond the societal interests. Children growing up in more traditional families are always tending to please their elders and are also conforming to moral pressures. Thus, Durkheim says that in those societies where social integration is weak, individualism becomes strong and collective rules, norms and values take a backseat. On the other hand, in those societies where social integration is strong, individualism becomes weak and collective rules and norms take the center stage.

Another remarkable work of Durkheim was 'Suicide'. He wrote a book with the same title. In this book, he tried to understand the social conditions that could lead to suicide. Again, in this work he gave primacy to the social factors over individual and psychological factors. Suicide could be viewed as a product of individual and psychological factors, however, for Durkheim, it was more a product of social factors and lack of integration of the individual to the society. He compared suicide rates in European countries and based on statistical data he said that there is a marked difference in suicide rates in protestant and catholic countries. Suicide rates were higher in protestant countries as opposed to catholic countries. He gave sociological explanation for this differential rate. According to Durkheim, catholic countries have a strong foundation of Church as compared

to the protestant countries. Church played a significant role in integrating the individual to the society. He writes: “What constitutes this society is the existence of a certain number of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful, traditional and thus obligatory. The more numerous and stronger these collective states of mind are, the stronger the integration of the religious community, and also the greater its preservative value. The details of dogmas and rites are secondary. The essential thing is that they be capable of supporting a sufficiently intense collective life. And because the Protestant church has less consistency than the others it has less moderating effect upon suicide” (referred from Gupta 2005: 73).

In *Suicide*, Durkheim discussed three kinds of integrations viz- religious, familial and political. Religion, according to him provides an important social context that helps individuals integrate with social norms and values. It provides a background for building strong emotional, psychological and social bonds. At the level of the family, he was of the view that family provides an important context for integration of individual family members with the rules and norms of the family. It also provides a context for social control and order in the society. As far as political integration is concerned, he was of the view that political conflicts and upheavals are functional in a sense that they lead to better integration in the society as they generate collective consciousness and sentiments. Political crisis forces people to recognise common goals. Such crisis also emphasises the role played by political institutions. This leads to stronger ties between the individual and the society.

According to Durkheim, a certain kind of suicide is the result of lack of social integration in the society. He talked about three kinds of suicides- egoistic, altruistic and anomic suicide. The egoistic suicide is a result of excessive individualism in the society and a person believes that he or she has full control over his or her life and is therefore entitled to eliminate it. Such a person is likely to be an agnostic as he or she will not believe that life is a gift of God and any other such beliefs. He labelled a suicide as altruistic when a person kills himself for the sake of honour, for example, committing *Sati* in India or *Hara-Kiri* in Japan or in a war or for an ideology like in the case of the suicide bombers. The third kind of suicide is called as the anomic suicide and according to Durkheim, such suicides occur as a result of social disintegration. It is the last kind of suicide that is directly related to the notion of social integration. Thus, alongside the theory of social integration, he also talked about social disintegration, its causes and consequences (Thorlindsson and Bernburg 2004).

Check Your Progress 5

8) Discuss Durkheim’s view on social integration.

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7.6 ANOMIE AND THE IDEA OF SOCIAL DISINTEGRATION

Anomie refers to lack of control or normlessness in the society that may lead to social disintegration, such as break down of family, increasing rates of divorce, lack of faith and excessive individualism. Anomie is a condition in society wherein there is a breakdown of standards and values in the society. In a state of anomie, common values and norms are no longer accepted in the society and new norms and values are still not formed. This is a condition of normlessness. This results into psychological state in individuals, which is characterised by emptiness, lack of purpose and despair. The society loses common definitions of what is desirable in the society and therefore people tend to lose interest in striving to achieve something. There is a sense of alienation from the society and its norms (Turner 2014).

Anomic suicides are a result of this social disintegration as it leads to alienation of the individual from the society. Scholars studying rapid urbanisation had discussed the concept of alienation, where humans lose touch with each other and the collective becomes shadowy. When humans no longer look towards the other for approval, they may take recourse to any action, good or bad. The solution therefore for Durkheim was to bring social solidarity or work towards it for averting anomie and anomic suicides. But a too rigid society may inhibit the full flowering of individual potential, for example if children only conform to what their parents wish them to be, they can never become inventors or try out different things. Durkheim was of the view that in order to completely realise the potentials of a human being we need a social configuration that helps in such realisations, or that society must be both controlling and liberal. The nature of society therefore becomes a very important part for the realisation of human values. He was against the idea of excessive individualism as promoted in the industrial world. He said that those social circumstances that produce excessive individualism will lack social control and regulation and thus may lead to social disintegration or anomie.

Check Your Progress 6

- 9) What is anomie and how it can lead to social disintegration?

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7.7 DURKHEIM AND HIS INFLUENCE IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

As already mentioned in the introduction of this unit, it was A.R. Radcliffe-Brown who was influenced by Durkheim to a very large extent. Radcliffe-Brown visualised a kind of anthropology that is capable of generating general laws governing the society. He was of the view that, just like natural sciences, social anthropology should be a law-generating science. He was influenced by the idea of positivism in sociology, of which Comte was the torch bearer. According to

positivism, society should be studied in the same way as natural science research is done that is in objective terms. Whatever is observable is amenable to scientific enquiry. Sociologists and social scientists should be able to generate laws that govern society just like the laws that govern the functioning of living organisms. Organismic analogy therefore became the cornerstone of studies in social sciences. In order to carry out scientific enquiry of society, it was assumed that society is an integrated whole. It is made-up of parts that are interrelated and work together to maintain the society as a whole. Brown considered social anthropology as a branch of comparative sociology where the main aim is to attempt acceptable generalizations (Moore 2009). By comparing the institutions of various societies, one can generate laws that could be applied to all societies, for example, Radcliffe-Brown posited the laws of kinship behaviour.

The idea of society as an integrated whole was so central to the twentieth century anthropology that they overlooked an important dimension of social existence and that is, conflict. Scholars viewed society as made-up of parts that are in harmonious relationship with each other. Each part in a society functions either to fulfill basic needs of the individual or to maintain the society as a whole. Even Malinowski in his early days was influenced by Durkheim. His earliest publication was about family in Australia. The sub-title of this work was ‘a sociological study’. In conclusion to this work, Malinowski writes that social institutions like family have social functions. That is to say that their main function is for the collectivity. They help to maintain the collectivity or society as a whole. It was only later that Malinowski moved away from Durkheim and focused on individual needs (Moore 2009 and Gordon et.al. 2011).

Check Your Progress 7

10) Discuss the idea of social integration is social anthropology.

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7.8 SUMMARY

In this unit we have learnt the meaning of the term social integration. We have seen that there are at least two ways in which social integration has been defined in social sciences. On one hand it means a harmonious social system where different parts in the society, that are different institutions, function to maintain the whole. In anthropology this came to be known as sociological functionalism or structural functionalism that came-up and flourished under the influence of Durkheim and spearheaded in anthropology by Radcliffe Brown. Brown based his understanding of the society in terms of organismic analogy. He was of the view that as there are different systems in the organism like reproductive, circulatory, digestive and nervous system, in the same way there are different systems in a society like kinship, religion, economic and political systems. As in the case of organism, these systems work in tandem and maintain the whole, similarly in a society, different systems work together and maintain the society as a whole.

At another level or on the other hand social integration has been seen as attachment of the individual to the social norms, values and rules. We have seen that Durkheim elaborated on this aspect of integration and talked about the consequences of it both, for the individual and for the society. Through his works on division of labour in society, religion and suicide, he talked about a society in equilibrium and various institutions promoting this harmony. Later, he also talked about the consequences of rapid changes in the society that may lead to anomie and social disintegration. We have also seen in this unit that the idea of social integration can be traced to philosophers like Thomas Hobbes. August Comte and Herbert Spencer contributed significantly to the concept and theory of social integration.

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7.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to section 7.1
- 2) Refer to section 7.2
- 3) Refer to section 7.2
- 4) Refer to section 7.3
- 5) Refer to third paragraph of section 7.3
- 6) Refer to first paragraph of section 7.4
- 7) Refer to section 7.4
- 8) Refer to section 7.5
- 9) Refer to section 7.6
- 10) Refer to section 7.7

UNIT 8 FUNCTIONALISM AND STRUCTURAL-FUNCTIONALISM*

Contents

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- 8.6 References
- 8.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

Objectives

After reading this unit, the learners would be able to:

- trace the origins of the functional theory;
- analyse the structural-functional theory of Radcliffe-Brown;
- comprehend the functional theory of Malinowski;
- outline the impact of these on later development of social anthropology; and
- critically evaluate Functionalism.

8.0 INTRODUCTION

Functionalism in anthropology began in Britain and among those anthropologists, in Africa, Australia and America, who were under influence of British anthropology. However, its intellectual roots can be traced to France, especially to the work of Emile Durkheim and others of the Annales sociology school, including Marcel Mauss, Hubert among several scholars associated with Durkheim, who can be seen as an evolutionist converted to functionalism. Durkheim (1915) began working on the Australian Aborigines, looking for the origin of religion in their totemic beliefs and rituals. He soon realised the role played by religion and ritual in regulating their lives and promoting social solidarity. He specifically pointed out the function of rituals in the maintenance of social relationships like clan identity and solidarity.

Functionalism, the general term is more commonly used to include also structural-functionalism. The term arose out of the scholars' emphasis on the understanding of the function of a particular system, institution, rituals, morals, values etc. within the context of the particular society and culture. The functionalist through their intense fieldwork, that comprised of living among the people to know their way of life, dismantled many of the assumptions that were innate to evolutionism. In this unit we shall look into the origin of the functional theory how it emerged

***Contributor:** Professor Subhadra Mitra Channa, Former Professor, Department of Anthropology, University of Delhi. New Delhi.

in anthropological discourses. We would also comprehend how Radcliffe-Brown's structural- functional theory differs from Malinowski's functionalism. We would analysis the point of departure of these two approaches and critically evaluate both of them.

8.1 STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONAL APPROACH OF RADCLIFFE-BROWN

Radcliffe-Brown (1922, 1940), began as a positivist, trying to establish a science of society, in the form of social anthropology. He was convinced that society as defined by him: as organised social relationships was the core and culture, only supported and provided content to the relationships. Like all positivist, or objectively scientific endeavours, he also began with certain premises, like, to begin with he conceptualised society as a closed system of interrelated parts. Secondly, he believed that it was best to keep one's analysis to the present as the past was very difficult to reconstruct realistically. He was critical of the speculative reconstruction done by the evolutionists. Thirdly, he believed in the comparative method and accepted that it was possible to build up some generalised principles about the working of human societies, using the comparative method. In other words, he had faith that the social sciences could successfully duplicate the methodology of the hard sciences like physics and chemistry and his ultimate aim was to have a comparative science of society in the same way as there is a science of comparative biology.

Towards this end, Radcliffe-Brown drew upon the organic analogy, or he compared society to a living organism, with different parts which all contribute to the functioning of the whole. To understand society, he gave the concept of the social structure. To Radcliffe-Brown, a social structure is what is observed by the scholar in the field. The way in which people on the ground actually interact with each other, the norms and principles of such interaction. He considered only the recurrent and regular interactions as part of the social structure, leaving aside the occasional or accidental interactions. All generalisations formed from the observation of regularities of both norms and principles of all interaction can be compiled into a structural form. This has been confusing for scholars following him, as most of them consider what he refers to as social structure as data, and what he refers to as structural form as social structure. Anyway, the main character of structural form/social structure is that it is the generalised representation of the most frequently occurring way of behaving in a particular relationship. Secondly, the different parts of this structure are not independent of each other, in that they affect each other, in a positive, mutually supportive way. For example, the marriage rules of a society will be supported by its legal laws, which in turn will be complementary to the economy and religion. Treating structural form as a system of interrelated parts means that all parts reinforce the working of the other parts.

It is here that the organic analogy comes in. The society is like an organism and the various institutions of the society are like the various organs of the organism, like family, economy, legal and political institutions are like the digestive, respiratory, circulatory and nervous system of an organism, working in tandem and all having the common goal of preserving the health in the case of a living organism, and social equilibrium, in the case of a society. The important methodological issue here is that this equilibrium or health is measured only at

one point in time. Structural-functionalism is a synchronic method, focusing only on the present. As a result of this approach, we have a series of ethnographies that seem to be frozen in space and time. These have become known as ‘The Nuer’ by E.E Evans Pritchard, ‘Andaman Islanders’ by Radcliffe-Brown, ‘The Naked Nagas’ by Fürer-Haimendorf and so on. It seems that these societies have been captured on a canvass to be preserved for posterity. It is this ahistoricity that came in for criticism at a later stage.

In tune with his positivist approach and his search for universal laws that should apply to most societies, Radcliffe-Brown made a comparative study of some societies and their institutions to bring out his major works on kinship and religion. His study of the Andaman Islanders (1922), follows Durkheim closely as he explains rituals, such as the initiation rituals of the young people, as functional for the social solidarity of the island people. He explained how by the use of taboos on certain food items, the young people, who were going to become adult members of society, learnt to be responsible users of valued food items. In a subsistence-based society dependent on natural supply of food, careful use of food is critical to survival of the entire group. According to Radcliffe-Brown, anything that is of great social significance assumes symbolic significance in terms of ritual value. He borrowed the term taboo from Polynesia. He explained the social value of several instances of taboos. Like the strict taboos on the father of an unborn child, as something that instils the responsibilities of fatherhood on a man and makes him share the physical pregnancy of his wife. When Radcliffe-Brown is referring to people he is actually talking about the abstracted category of a social person, or a social status, as it was called later. Like husband and wife refer to the collective ideal of a husband or a wife as distilled from the data on real persons and situations. Therefore, in every case his explanation is directed towards social solidarity and the needs of the total social structure or structural form as he calls it. Overall, it is an objectification of the real situations and devoid of any personal content like emotions. If sentiments are mentioned they are also in an abstracted sense.

One of the most significant contributions of Radcliffe-Brown (1950) is to kinship theory as condensed in his classic introduction to *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*. In this he has tried to put forward three rules of kinship that can be taken as applicable to a large number of societies. These are:

- 1) The Unity of the Sibling Group
- 2) The Opposition of Adjacent generations
- 3) Merging of alternate generations

These condense some principles, norms and etiquettes (his three elements of kinship behaviour) of descent-based kinship systems. He also analysed kinship terms as reflecting these principles. For example, in many parts of India, like in Bengal, grandfather and grandson call each other by reciprocal terms (merging of alternate generations), like *dadubhai* (*dadu*- grandfather, *bhai*- brother), unity of sibling groups is expressed in the substitutability of a person by his sibling, usually the younger sibling as he or she is the natural successor in the lineal order of kinship. This is reflected in practices of sororate and levirate. While expressing the principle of unity of the sibling groups, these practices also help in reproduction of lineages and keep the society going.

Reflection

Sororate and Levirate: In the former, a younger sister can replace her elder sister as a wife and in the latter, a younger brother can replace his elder brother as a husband. Levirate is practiced in many parts of north-west India and sororate is common in almost all regions of India.

Radcliffe-Brown also put forward the practices such as avoidance rules and joking relationships. Although very different in content these serve the same function. They protect relationships in a situation where they are liable to be stressed because of the existence of related principles and practices. Let us take avoidance that is practised in Indian families between father-in-law and daughter-in-law and between a son-in-law and his mother-in-law. Given the reality of early age marriage in India, which still persists to a large extent, it is possible that a man may still be relatively young even when his son gets married. As a human being there is possibility of the father-in-law as well as the elder brother-in-law, getting sexually attracted to the bride, given the close family living conditions. To avoid the stress on the social system if this happens, there is strict prohibition of interaction between them, to the extent of the woman observing veiling (*purdah*) of her face in front of them. The same goes for the son-in-law and mother-in-law relationship. A woman may be just in her mid-youth when her daughter gets married and to avoid any untoward incidence strict adherence to avoidance is practised.

The joking relationships perform the same functions but in a opposite way. In India the joking relationship between a woman and her husband's younger brother is legendary and so is that between a man and his wife's younger sister. By the rules of marriage commonly practiced, these are both marriageable relations. But most of the time they remain only potentially so. Thus, to avoid the development of any serious relationship, the sexual tensions are dissipated through joking. The descriptions of kinship behaviour as given by Radcliffe-Brown, are still very much applicable to many parts of the world, and the value of his analysis is realised when readers, say in India, can apply these rules to their day to day lives so easily.

Criticisms of Structural-functionalism

Structural-functionalism, apart from being ahistorical and synchronic, is also based upon a holistic view of society. According to it, all the various aspects of society are not independent of each other, but interdependent, just like the body of a living organism. While considering society as a system, it follows that like a system society is also a bounded unit. Anything that takes place inside a society is affected by other parts of the society, but not from its exterior. Like for example, the religious and economic aspects of a society are interdependent on each other, but not on the outside.

Thus, in addition to ahistoricity and boundedness, structural functionalism carries an element of isolation. At the time when this theory was popular, the British social anthropology was a part of the British colonial system. It was thus, extending its rule over many regions, that then became the objects of study for the anthropologists. They assumed isolation of societies like the Andaman Islanders, that was already deeply impacted by colonial rule. Later anthropologists like Eric Wolf have criticised the assumption of ahistoricity of societies that were part of a global system of trade and travel for several centuries before colonisation.

Structural-functionalism follows Durkheim (1938) who said that a social fact can be explained only by another social fact. Therefore structural -functional explanations are limited to other social variables interior to the society. In this way, they remain isolated from psychological and historical variables in their explanations, although not quite from the environment, that is incorporated by the indigenous people into their cosmologies. For example, in the Andaman Islanders, we find that natural elements like the winds and rain are deified as supernatural beings and included within their pantheon. In the next section we examine the functional theory of Malinowski that although similar in basic principle to that of Radcliffe-Brown, deviates in important aspect of methodology.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Functionalism in anthropology began in which country?

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- 2) To which country can we trace the intellectual roots of functionalism and to which sociologist?

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- 3) How did Radcliffe-Brown define 'social structure'?

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- 4) What is organic analogy?

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8.2 FUNCTIONALISM OF MALINOWSKI

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. When he talks of something being functional, it is functional to the individual as a member of society and not to the society directly, ignoring the individual. To Malinowski (1939), functionalism is marked by its emphasis on the individual and it is this what sets it apart from other theories. Here he was probably referring to theories like evolutionism and diffusionism that predate functionalism that are grand theories dealing with universal processes. In functionalism, he prefers to focus on the individual in relation to his or her environment, to which the individual responds as a member of a culture. He situates the individual in a culture. To him the relationships are manifestations of feelings and sense of cooperation or duty, or even repulsion. The web of relationships thus, formed is a secondary feature, of the mutuality of emotions that forms the group. In other words, in a diametric opposition to Radcliffe-Brown, he begins his analysis from culture, keeping the social relationships as secondary. Methodologically, in his own words, "Empirically speaking, the fieldworker has to collect texts, statements, and opinions, side by side with the observation of behaviour and the study of material culture"(2014:91). He was emphatic about the importance of language as it is the prime media of understanding a culture. He believed that symbolism was the bed rock of human life as it enabled them to have a language for communication, which in turn led to the emergence of culture.

The individual to him is a compound of the biological and the cultural. As a biological being, every individual has what he referred to as primary/basic needs. The need for nourishment, for fulfilment of sexual desires and the need for protection from the environment. The individual also needs oxygen for breathing, rest and relaxation and recreation for mental stability. Humans also need to be nurtured into adults from infancy, the human period of dependency being longer than that of most animals and they need to be trained to become successful adult members of a culture. The primary needs are not satisfied by direct engagement with the environment, but are mediated through culture and the manner in which they are satisfied, is a process that creates more needs, that he labels as instrumental needs. Finally, as a sign of being human, they have symbolic or integrative needs, that are represented by the capacity for abstract thinking and imagination.

Beginning with the basic needs, we know that humans do not eat anything or at any time, or in any manner. In other words, the very basic satisfaction of hunger, that for any other species is an uncontrolled response to food, is a controlled and highly systematised activity for humans. Each culture for example has its own definition of what stands for food, what is edible and what is not edible. There are also clear cultural prescriptions and labels for when to eat food, like breakfast, lunch and dinner. Field anthropologists know that meal times and their nature vary considerably from culture to culture. Some people eat twice a day, some eat four times a day. The British culture of an elaborate 'tea time' for example has been transmitted to many parts of the world in the colonial period, as has the concept of a breakfast to be eaten as a special meal. Therefore, each group has its own norms about what to eat, when to eat and how to eat? The last aspect is also

very important as eating etiquettes are a very important part of all cultures. Like in a traditional upper caste Hindu family there are many norms and rules for eating a meal. If anything leads to the upsetting of a rule, the meal may be abandoned. Therefore, we see that for humans there is not a direct correlation between hunger and food and everything is mediated by culture.

Reproduction and satisfaction of sexual urge are similarly, possible only under cultural constraints, that are sometimes very strongly imposed, like the universal incest taboo. There is no human society, present or in the past, that did not impose strong sanctions against incest, again culturally defined.

The same goes for shelter, recreation and all other human primary drives. Malinowski, unlike the British structural-functionalists did not evade the psychological dimensions, rather he emphasised upon it, referring to the basic needs as those drives, emotions and desires that strongly motivate the humans to seek for their fulfilment through various cultural means.

The manner of fulfilling these basic needs then give rise to other related needs as the raw needs are shaped by the cultural dictates developed in a social milieu. For example, the entire process of basic sexual desires is regulated by a highly complex set of rules, legal requirements, social norms, values, ethics and principles, embodied in family and marriage. Marriage involves many rules and norms, that are enforced through the legal processes and derived from larger and more abstract systems of thought and cosmological principles like religion, morality and values. Notions of what is right, what is wrong, what is a sin, what is a virtue inform the rules and regulations of marriage in any society. In some societies for example marriages are seen as fulfilment of a divine relationship, like among Hindus and Catholics. In others like in Islam, it is only a social contract. Rules of incest also vary from society to society and are in turn informed by larger historical processes.

Although marriage takes place between individuals, they represent their social groups, social hierarchy and many other aspects. Therefore, according to Malinowski, marriage is a secondary need that is linked to the primary need of sexual satisfaction, but marriage goes way beyond this primary purpose and fulfils many other needs like that of sustenance, economic cooperation, social status and so on. Related to marriage is the family, that helps to convert the human raw material into a cultural being. Humans do not operate as biological beings, and as we have discussed, even the most basic biological requirements are culturally conditioned. For all these conditions to be reproduced, there are a set of derived needs. Like if humans consume food that is not picked raw from the environment, they need an entire economic system to produce it. Which means there have to be other related institutions like productive units like farms and factories, to produce which we need other kinds of raw material and so on. Therefore, as Malinowski puts it, even the simplest need has to go through a very complicated process to be fulfilled and in the process creates many more needs and many more institutions for their fulfilment. This is how human culture becomes more and more complex and so does the group embodying that culture. These are the instrumental aspects of cultures and to fulfil them there are a set of organised activities called institutions, which consist of a set of personnel, who are organised in a set of rights and duties towards each other, following a set pattern of norms and obeying an overall charter that is specific to that institution. For example, if we take the family as an institution, then, the family must live together as a

household, have a home, behave like a production and consumption unit, or if production is located outside, the household is a consumption unit. It must have resources for fulfilling the subsistence and other needs of its members. The family also acts as an educational institution, caring for and also educating its new members, who are born in it, to become successful members of the culture. It is also located within a larger culture and group which provides it with the legal norms that it must follow and the wider society that provides it with a charter that must be its goal, namely to reproduce not only physical members of that culture, but also properly trained and educated ones to become successful members for reproducing the culture.

Lastly, as humans our needs go beyond our primary bodily needs, often even superseding them. For example, individuals may give up on their primary needs of sexuality in order to fulfil their need for spiritual satisfaction. Humans take to asceticism and become monks and nuns to fulfil their higher, symbolic desire for the quest for divinity and inner peace. Individuals as members of a culture also learn self-control, deferment of pleasure and many other ways of controlling their instinctual desires and needs. These higher, esoteric ends are the integrative needs of individuals that include aesthetic needs for art, literature and music. Even in the earliest stage of human evolution we find cave paintings and remnants of culture that indicates that humans were not just concerned with fulfilment of their basic and instrumental needs, but always had expressive and creative needs that they fulfilled by making drawings and scratched lines on the most primitive of stone tools.

At this stage of needs, Malinowski has introduced the notion of values, that is inherent in the concept of symbolisation. As humans we value things, acts and events, not for their instrumental need fulfilling objectives, but for their symbolic value, like keeping a fast has symbolic value although it does not fulfil our basic need for hunger. As humans therefore we fulfil all levels of needs as cultured beings.

Like Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski also gave a lot of attention to rituals, and their functions for a group of people bound by a common culture. He too took the holistic method, approaching all cultures as systemic wholes, but he did not use the organic analogy and put all social relationships at the back of his analysis, treating them as by products of the individual's engagement with the group.

His explanation of the role of rituals in economic activities was that rituals play an important role whenever there is the chance of failure, danger and uncertainty (Malinowski 1948). Like when a person goes on a long sea voyage, there will be elaborate rituals as the journey is fraught with uncertainties about the weather, the unpredictable changes in the sea and unknown dangers. According to him, rituals are not substituted for skills, for example the Kiriwinians (the people of the Trobriand Islands) are expert seafaring people with great navigation skills. But there are always the grey zones of uncertainty, the sea is always full of dangers, as we know even from our recent experiences, when science and technology are so much more advanced. Rituals provide the sense of security and provide psychological support in order to create a positive frame of mind, that also ensures a higher rate of success. His work on the rituals of the coral garden horticulture in the Trobriand is well known, where he has highlighted the role of the *towosi* (garden magician). Rituals are performed for every step of the gardening activities and he notes that the people are very deferential to the

commands of the magician. As with his entire theory of functionalism, the role of ritual is towards the psychological state of the individual, that in turn helps maintain the group and its culture.

Check Your Progress 2

- 5) According to Malinowski what is the emphasis that makes functionalism stand apart from other theories?

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- 6) What are the needs of individuals in a group, as identified by Malinowski?

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- 7) How does culture function to fulfil the needs of individuals?

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- 8) What is the relationship between human needs and culture?

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8.3 FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS OF THE FUNCTIONAL AND STRUCTURAL- FUNCTIONAL METHOD

British social anthropology followed up the work of Radcliffe-Brown with that of Edmund Leach, Raymond Firth, E.E. Evans-Pritchard and Meyer Fortes among others. Each one of them tried to modify the static structural-functional method

with some innovations from their own field experiences. Leach (1970) went on to understand social structure at a level of abstraction, where it can be considered as a 'model'. In his study of the Kachin of highland Burma, he identified three such model structures, and the individuals making choices between them. At the level of the entire society, the sum of individual choices makes possible three models of Kachin society that oscillate between, a highly centralised Shan kingdom at one end, a completely anarchic, democratic Gumlao, system at the other end and an intermediate system known as Gumsa, in between. Most scholars who describe the Kachin, define the intermediate stable Gumsa system as the reality, but if one observes the system over a time period, it is clear that the Gumsa is either tending towards the autocratic Shan system or dissolving into the anarchic Gumlao system. Therefore, what appears static is actually a system that is tending towards one or the other extreme. Leach has termed this as an oscillating equilibrium, a concept that he further explored when he became more of a structuralist of the school of Lévi-Strauss.

Firth also found that the concept of social structure was too static and could not identify any change. His restudy of Tikopia (1960), led him to discover that societies do not remain static in time, they do change. He identified two kinds of change, Organisational and Structural (1961). By organisational change he meant the kind of change that does not affect the overall character of the system, like if a different political party wins an election, there is likely to be much change in society, yet the overall democratic nature will not change. But if a society converts from a democracy into an autocracy, it will be a structural change. By his restudy of Tikopia he developed a dual synchronic model of change, that while confirming to the equilibrium model of the functional school, also accepted that change is possible. He was of the opinion that societies move from one state of equilibrium to another state of equilibrium.

E.E. Evans Pritchard (1940), made his study of the Nuer of Sudan, East Africa, in the classical functional mode, but he analysed the Nuer social structure in relation to the environment, using for the first time the term ecology (spelled as oecology). He described in great details the way the Nuer society adapts to changes in the environment and looked upon it as a cyclical process of change that the society goes through every seasonal cycle.

Meyer Fortes (1949), introduced the concept of structural time, to show that any static description of the kinship structure is bound to be erroneous as changes such as life cycle changes, changes in the normal course of the family due to existing rules of residence and biological life span of the individuals, makes changes that if studied only in one time frame is bound to produce a description of society that may not be true to reality. In his book *Time and Social Structure* (1970), he has shown that time needs to be an essential component of the understanding of social structure in the true sense.

Check Your Progress 3

- 9) Name some of the scholars who worked from within the Structural-Functional School and modified it.

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8.4 CRITICISM OF FUNCTIONALISM

The major criticism of functionalism was it ignored the historical realities not only of the past but also of the present. Most of the classical ethnographies were done in the hey day of colonialism and the societies studied in Africa, Australia and other colonies had been severely impacted by colonial rule (Asad 1973). It is noted that the Andaman Islanders about whom Radcliffe-Brown gave such a tranquil picture were practically depopulated even at the time he did his fieldwork. Most of his work is written from the memory reconstructs of the few informants that were left. In their attempts to prove the theory of equilibrium and social solidarity, they overlooked the conflicts and internal dissensions as well.

Moreover, the entire perspective of objectivity in doing analysis also underwent great criticism as restudies revealed the subjective bias of the earlier anthropologists, even those of great repute like Malinowski. By the end of the twentieth century, the entire discipline of anthropology was undergoing great changes in methodology and perspective with reflexivity taking the place of objectivity and the ethnographies being more centred on narratives from the informants and the intersubjective experience of fieldwork (Clifford and Marcus 1986).

The concept of a system also broke down with intensification of communication across the globe and globalisation. But as Wolf (1982) had shown, the non-western world was never isolated, there was active trade and migration going on among them. It was European ethnocentrism that had made them begin to think about history only when the first white men stepped in to these societies. Overall, the criticism of Functionalism was directed towards its Eurocentric biases, its ignoring of history especially of the effects of colonisation itself, and its subjectivity in dealing with the native populations. This subjectivity was also white, male centric and later criticised by women and non-white anthropologists. Methodologically the very notion of function was seen as tautological, putting the effect as the cause of an event.

Check Your Progress4

10) What are the major points of criticism of Functional theory?

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8.5 SUMMARY

Theory of Functionalism arose as a criticism of what was termed as ‘speculative history’ of evolutionism, as well as the judgemental nature of the theory that classified groups as high and low making a politically objectionable use of the concept of the ‘primitive’. The word primitive denotes the past, yet the evolutionists used it for contemporary communities, implying they were stuck in the past, or being socially and culturally inferior to the more evolved people.

Direct implication of the evolutionary theory was the justification of colonisation on moral grounds. The white Europeans, having been put on the highest scale of civilization by the intellectuals of their own breed, justified their plunder of the colonies in the name of 'civilising' them. Functionalism, which was an outcome of the scholar's direct involvement with the community through fieldwork, emphasised the concept of 'cultural ethnocentrism'; indicating that the natural tendency to appreciate one's own culture above all others, was not morally justified. The political implication of functionalism was that it directed itself towards equalising all cultures, by saying that all societies are in equilibrium and all cultural elements and social institutions are relevant in their own context. While recognising that some cultures are simple and some are more complex, it demolished the value that was associated with some cultures, calling them superior. In fact, it defended all kinds of customs and practices by saying everything had a relevance in its own context. We see here a paradigm shift from evolutionism; rejection of speculative reconstructions, a focus on the present and conceptualising societies as systems. The evolutionists had treated social institutions such as religion, economy and political as forming separate strands, comparing them individually across cultures. Functionalists treated all institutions and cultural elements as interrelated to other elements in that same society. They compared entire societies and cultures and not individual traits across societies.

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8.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to section 8.0
- 2) Refer to section 8.0
- 3) Refer to section 8.1
- 4) Refer to section 8.1.
- 5) Refer to section 8.2
- 6) Refer to section 8.2
- 7) Refer to section 8.2
- 8) Refer to section 8.2
- 9) Refer to section 8.3
- 10) Refer to section 8.4

UNIT 9 STRUCTURALISM*

Contents

- 9.0 Introduction
- 9.1 Moving Towards Structuralism
- 9.2 Assumptions in Structuralism
- 9.3 Structural Ideas in Marx and Freud
- 9.4 Ferdinand de Saussure and his Influence on Anthropological Structuralism
- 9.5 Claude Lévi-Strauss
- 9.6 Edmund Leach (Neo) Structuralism
- 9.7 Summary
- 9.8 References
- 9.9 Answers to Check Your Progress

Learning Objectives:

After reading this unit, the learner should be able to:

- understand the shifts in anthropological thoughts;
- identify the basic assumptions in structuralism;
- delineate the emergence of structuralism;
- link structural ideas in linguistics to that in anthropology;
- comprehend the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss's; and
- evaluate Leach and his critique of Lévi-Strauss's.

9.0 INTRODUCTION

Till now we have been discussing about the early phases in the rise of anthropological theories that looked at society and culture mainly from the viewpoint of evolution, moving on to diffusionism and trying to understand the relevance of the historical aspects in studying a society. This unit shall focus on the works of the anthropologists who looked beyond evolution and tried to understand the structures within a society for its emergence. The focal point was a synchronic approach to study what was happening in the society at that particular point of time (here and now) to understand its relevance. The unit thus, would look at the works of Lévi-Strauss's and Edmund Leach whose contribution to structuralism is immense.

9.1 MOVING TOWARDS STRUCTURALISM

The discipline of anthropology and particularly socio-cultural anthropology has shifted its agenda of research from time to time. This agenda hopping can broadly be categorised into three domains. In the beginning, that is in the nineteenth century, the dominant agenda of the discipline revolved around the establishment of various stages that humans crossed in order to reach their present form. The agenda of

***Contributor:** Dr. Prashant Khattri, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Allahabad State University, Prayagraj. UP.

social evolution occupied the centre stage in the discipline. This was reflected in the theoretical premise of evolutionism that aimed at categorising various societies and cultures into distinct stages according to their level of development and evolution. This led to the study of the *tribal* societies that were considered to be the *relics* from the human past. However, over a period of time it was realised that in the presence of enormous field data it was becoming rather impossible to arrange different societies into some clear-cut scheme. The methodology related with this paradigm was also criticised for being conjectural in nature. Again, on the methodological front, increased emphasis on positivism and empiricism led to the emergence of synchronic study of the society which was more concerned with studying the society as they are in the present ('here and now') rather than a historical account which was aimed previously. This led to the emergence of functional and structural-functional paradigms in anthropology.

These theoretical paradigms generated a huge amount of data on specific cultural entities called communities or tribes that were presented in the form of ethnographies. The major emphasis was on the functioning of different institutions for the fulfilment of individual and societal needs and on the structure of institutions themselves. The data from the field comprised of detailed account of different aspects of the society like their kinship, family, political organisation, economic organisation etc. that was later analysed in accordance with the functional or structural-functional tradition to understand the basic structure and laws that govern society. The basic assumption in the functional paradigm relates to the collective understanding that there are certain laws that govern human societies world over and the basic task of the anthropologists is to establish those laws scientifically. Studying the observable was the basic aim of such a paradigm. It was for this reason that Radcliff Brown named anthropology as 'natural science of society', he even preferred the term 'comparative sociology' for what was called anthropology (D'Andrade 1995). The more individually oriented functional approach, based on human needs, as proposed by Malinowski, took a different tangent, focussing more the contribution of institutions and practices to individual needs and only indirectly contributing to social cohesion and stability. This school did not focus on structure at all.

Another paradigm was taking shape in anthropology in the French tradition. This was spearheaded by Claude Lévi-Strauss. The shift was from looking outwards to looking inwards. In order to understand society and culture, the aim was not to study it directly rather the aim shifted to understand how human mind functions. It was assumed that the basic principles on which societies are established are actually the principles on which human mind functions. The agenda in anthropology now became to understand the functioning of human mind. Principles that govern human ideas and thought process came at the centre of investigation. Structuralism as a theory to understand culture and society comes under this third paradigm. Therefore, when we talk about structuralism, or any theoretical paradigm, we have to talk in terms of the shift in anthropological thinking and analysis (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001).

The third anthropological agenda within which structuralism needs to be located is the agenda of studying the 'idea systems.' More than being a theory, structuralism is actually a philosophy. This philosophy has influenced not only anthropology but also disciplines like linguistics, literature, art, psychology and several others. Structural anthropology owes a lot to structural linguistics as it

has borrowed the ideas and applied those to understand culture. Ideas that were applied by linguists to understand language through the relationship of words in a spoken frame were applied by anthropologists to understand cultures. Thus, structuralism is a broad philosophy that needs to be understood in all its dimensions. We need to understand what this philosophy offers and tries to tell us about cultures and above all our existence on this planet (D'Andrade 1995).

9.2 ASSUMPTIONS IN STRUCTURALISM

Structuralism in anthropology is a shift towards the inside or the inner logic or grammar that defines our activities, behaviours and lot more. It was believed that once we understand those principles on which human mind functions then we will be able to understand the society and culture. Thus, the structure of thought process became central for anthropologists. Pattern is given primacy over the substance in structuralism. A particular phenomenon can be understood not by looking at its different parts in isolation to one another but how they fit together to form a pattern.

Another important assumption in structuralism is that, since human brain is biologically similar therefore the principles governing human thought process will also be similar. This is an important idea in structuralism that assumes that there is an underlying similarity in all the cultures. Cultures may appear different only at a superficial level but when we try to go deeper then we may find similarities between all the cultures. This is a central idea in this theory. It aims at projecting a common and shared existence of human beings on this planet. The way human beings organise their thoughts is based on the principle on which human mind functions and this is same everywhere since biologically human brains are similar. Structuralism therefore is also talking about some innate qualities in human beings. Structures are in-born, they are present right from our birth and are a result of the way human brains are structured and programmed to function. Structuralists are talking about an underlying similarity in all cultures. Fundamental belief in structuralism is that whatever we observe is actually just the surface and may not tell a great deal about the culture. In order to understand it more clearly, we need to go beneath that surface. Reality according to structuralism is not directly observable but it is something that needs to be discovered. Reality for them is not visible but hidden. Thus, the aim is to reach to this hidden reality. It is not through any empirical understanding or direct observation that we are going to reach the reality. The question arises then how we are supposed to reach or know about this hidden, underlying reality? The answer is, through rationale or reason. Through the faculty of human reasoning, we are able to reach the reality that is not visible to human senses. It is only through reasoning that we are able to know what is really real. Human mind again occupies a central place in this thought process as all the reasoning will be done in the mind itself. It is through the faculty of human mind that we will be able to reach reality through reasoning (Palmer 1997).

This can be seen as a shift in anthropology from empiricism to rationalism. The British anthropology in particular was influenced more by empiricism. Anthropologists in the structural-functional tradition were influenced by Durkheim. The epistemology of positivism and idea of discovering rules that govern social systems just like natural systems was at the core of this thought process. For them, direct observation was the key to understand social reality.

On the other hand, the French tradition was influenced by the ideas of rationalism and rationality. Rationalists were of the opinion that we have to train our minds to reason as for them reality can be deciphered or reached only through reasoning and not just by observing as realities are hidden and they lie underneath the surface. Another way of understanding structural idea is through the route of culture. The conception of the term culture is very different in structuralism when compared with functionalism. Whereas, in functionalism, culture is seen as a vast instrument that fulfils the needs of individuals, in structuralism, culture is seen as a language. Like a language, culture has its own grammar. While speaking or writing a language we are not always aware of the grammar but it lies beneath the surface. Similarly, while practicing culture, we are not always aware of the rules that govern it as they lie beneath our conscious thought and guide our behaviour.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) What are the basic assumptions in structuralism?

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- 2) Why French structural thought is considered to be based on rationalism and not empiricism?

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9.3 STRUCTURAL IDEAS IN MARX AND FREUD

Now before we move on to understand the ideas and works of Claude Lévi-Strauss, we must discuss two very important figures in structural thought viz- Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. Both these figures have structural streak in their thought. Although, both Marx and Freud, considered themselves and their ideas within the fold of empiricism, but still, they have streaks of structural thought that becomes very important to understand the idea of structuralism. Both these scholars were interested in knowing what lies beneath the surface? Let us see what Marx has to say. Marx is saying that whatever superstructures that we have built up like law, polity, religion, etc. are actually built on an infrastructure of economy. In other words, superstructures in the form of law, polity, religion etc. have economy or economic relationships at their base, for example, means of production, modes of production, relations of production etc.

In this sense when we see structuralism or a structural understanding then we realise that it is a kind of a reductionist understanding. It tries to reduce the social and cultural phenomena into few infrastructures or dimensions. The entire social and cultural reality is reduced into few understandable terms or concepts. With this understanding emerges the Marxian analysis of class. When we believe that the social and cultural realities are guided by and influenced by or are based on economic infrastructure then we also realise that superstructures in the form of institutions like law, religion, polity, etc. are found to be guided by the bourgeois interest. So, according to Karl Marx, there is an economic base that guides all other superstructures. Marx said that social reality is not caused by the projects of consciousness and the truth about social reality is not grasped by immediate consciousness. According to Marx there are underlying structures that determine social realities. And this underlying structure is an economic one and everything else is built upon that foundation.

Now coming to Sigmund Freud, when we read psychoanalysis then we find that Freud was of the view that in order to understand human behaviour we need to understand the unconscious mind. This unconscious mind is hidden. All the desires, disturbing thoughts, form part of this unconscious mind and play an important role in influencing human behaviour. Therefore, Freud was also of the view that whatever is visible in the form of human behaviour is actually guided by or is generated by the unconscious thought that lies beneath the conscious mind. As human beings we are unaware of these unconscious thoughts but they still guide and influence our behaviour. This is an structuralist idea that we are concerned with here in this unit. However structuralist ideas of both Marx and Freud differ from that of Claude Levi Strauss. The basic difference lies in the fact that in Marx and Freud there is an emphasis on history. However, for Claude Lévi-Strauss history is not important. His ideas are more synchronic in nature. His ideas are governed largely by the Prague School of structural linguistics (Palmer 1997).

Prague School of Structural Linguistics- This is a school of linguistic thought that was established in Prague in 1920s. Prominent figures of this school includes Russian linguist Nikolay Trubetskoy and a Russian-born American linguist Roman Jakobson. They gave emphasis on the elements within the language that is the sounds of words and how human beings differentiate between the sounds based on the system of contrast.

Check Your Progress 2

- 3) What are structural ideas in Marx?

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- 4) What are structural ideas in Freud?

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9.4 FERDINAND DE SAUSSURE AND HIS INFLUENCE ON ANTHROPOLOGICAL STRUCTURALISM

As already stated above that anthropological structuralism is influenced by structural linguistics, it is important to understand the ideas of Saussure and see how they were applied to study culture by Lévi-Strauss's. According to Saussure, words in a language do not name things but concepts and ideas. This idea was similar to the one put forward by Plato. For Plato, words have essence. For example, the word triangle denotes what all triangles have in common. There can be different kinds of triangles but all have three sides. Therefore, triangle has an essence or the underlying property that is common to all triangles. This idea when applied to culture means that all cultures may look different but they all have something in common. There is an underlying essence that is common to all cultures. However, Saussure's views were a bit different from that of Plato. Saussure was of the view that the meaning of the word does not lie in the word itself but in its relation to other words. This relationship is based on a system of opposition. It means that a word means what the other word is not. He says, in language, there are only differences. For example, the word 'bat' means what it is by not being the words 'bet', 'bit', or 'bot.' For Saussure, an important thing in a word is the phonic difference it has with other words. Similarly, culture can be broken down into its components and they stand in difference to each other, which is in opposition to each other. For example, the system of caste can be broken down into its components of purity and pollution and they stand in opposition to each other.

Saussure further distinguishes between LA LANGUE (language) and PAROLE (speech). Language denotes the entire linguistic system and the speech is the acted-out part of language. Speech is based upon the language. Language can be compared to a social structure into which individuals are born and speech can be compared to their actual behavior. The actual behaviour is guided by the overall structure. Saussure gives an analogy of the game of chess. He says that in chess individual moves can be compared to the speech and the rules of the game can be compared to the language. Individual moves are based on the general rules of the game. Further he says that the basic rule or the underlying structure is based on the principle of opposition or difference. For example, in a game of chess, the pawn is not the queen, the queen is not the bishop and so on. When applied to the study of culture, individual traits and behaviours are similar to individual moves in chess that are based on the rules on which cultures are based. Further, the underlying principle that governs culture and cultural systems is that of opposition (Palmer 1997, Moore 2009).

Check Your Progress 3

5) How ideas from linguistics are applied to the study of culture?

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9.5 CLAUDE LÉVI-STRAUSS

Now, we move on to understand Lévi-Strauss's in a very specific context of growth of anthropological thoughts. We can very broadly and roughly divide the anthropological thought process into two traditions viz- speculative and empirical. The speculative tradition is associated with the classical evolutionists who categorized various societies and cultures into stages of human evolution. Their categorizations were based not on their own studies of various communities but on the travel records, testimonies of the soldiers, missionaries and other such documents. They were therefore labeled as armchair anthropologists as they just speculated about human conditions. For example, if you see James Frazer then he can be rightly called as a synthesizer. While sitting in his office or study he would read report, documents about 'primitive' people and based on such study he would produce theories about culture. However, by the beginning of the 20th century, such armchair anthropology was criticised and a new form of anthropology took shape. This was based on the fieldwork tradition and was spearheaded by Malinowski. This is labeled as the empirical tradition in anthropology. Within this tradition large number of monographs were generated that described in detail the life and works of human populations at various places on the globe. With such in-depth study of one particular culture or society, broad generalizations were resisted within this tradition. However, Malinowski later in his career attempted to come out with some theory on the functions of various institutions (Barnard 2000).

Lévi-Strauss's however wanted to attempt broad generalizations about human conditions. He was opposed to the 'sterile empiricism.' He attempted generalisations much like Frazer. He never did fieldwork in the way Malinowski did. He looked for universal principals that govern all human cultures. One of the central themes in his ideas is an underlying similarity among all human cultures as culture for him is a product of human brain and the human brain is similar all over. Lévi-Strauss's was interested in geology during his youth. For him, ideas of Freud and Marx are similar to the ideas in geology as all three talk about the need to go beneath the surface and excavate the hidden. He later came in contact with a Russian linguist Roman Jakobson who brought him closer to the ideas and works of Saussure. Therefore, in Lévi-Strauss's, we can visualise a synthesis of the ideas of Freud, Marx, Saussure and Geology.

According to Lévi-Strauss's, there are universal human truths, but they cannot be deciphered just by observing the fact as they are hidden and one needs to decode them or think rationally in order to reach the truth. Taking cue from the structural linguistics, he further asserted that the human mind works on the principle of binary opposition. This is the universal principle and all cultures in the world have an underlying binary. He was of the view that "Human societies, like individual human beings never create absolutely; all they can do is create certain combinations (Palmer 1997: 33)." These combinations are binary opposites of each other and are based on the principle of difference just like we saw it in the case of words in a language.

The ideas put forward in the theory of structuralism worked against a western prejudice about the 'primitive people.' When we start believing and establish it by argument that cultures all over the world have underlying similarities then the idea of 'primitive' takes a back-seat. In one of his books titled as 'The Savage

Mind' Lévi-Strauss argued that there is no such thing as the savage mind. Human mind works on a universal principle of binary opposition. Such an argument challenged those who propagated the image of primitive people as 'child-like' who are not capable of deciding for themselves.

Levi-Strauss was also inspired by the work of Marcel Mauss. More specifically he was influenced by Mauss's 'The Gift' (1924). Marcel Mauss argued that the maintenance of social system or society as a whole is dependent upon the act and the institution of gift giving. He said that there are three things that are involved in a reciprocal relation of gift giving, they are:

- a) the obligation to give;
- b) the obligation to receive; and
- c) the obligation to reciprocate.

In other words, Mauss argued that social relationships can be understood by looking at the underlying structure of exchange of gifts. Gift exchange for him was the underlying reality on which social relations or society was based. Later Claude Lévi-Strauss also wrote a book titled- "The Elementary Structures of Kinship" (1949) in which he extended Mauss's argument of gift exchange to the exchange of women. Like Mauss, Lévi-Strauss argued that the exchange of women is the underlying structure on which kinship is based. Women exchange is at the base of kinship systems as it defined social relations between groups. He gave the example of the universality of incest taboo that according to him was socially ridiculous and not morally outrageous (Palmer 1997).

Lévi-Strauss is known for applying his structural ideas for the study of myths. He wrote four volumes of *Mythologiques* between 1964 and 1972. He was of the view that in order to understand human mind, study of myths is inevitable. Myths reveal underlying structures of human thought process. He was also of the view that since human mind is part of the larger cosmos or the universe, it reflects the structure of the universe itself. Thus, products of mind like myths and languages reveal the structure of the world. For example, the notion of binary opposition that is central to Lévi-Strauss's understanding of principle governing human mind can be seen as the principle on which the universe is based in the form of binary opposites like life and death, day and night, surface and sky, etc. It is this structure of universe that informs and ultimately shapes the structure of human mind and therefore human mind is governed by the principle of binary opposition. This binary opposition is reflected in every aspect of culture since they are products of human mind. This kind of logic is known as the deductive logic where we assume that things are structured in a certain way and then our job remains to look for those ways in each cultural phenomenon. In other words, we move from general to specific. For example, in this case, we believe in the general principle that human mind is based on the principle of binary opposition and now we move to look for this structure in specific cases.

Binary Opposition- The concept of binary opposition is central to understanding structuralism. The theory says that human mind works on the principle of binary opposition. It means that our thought process is in binaries for example, day and night, old and young, male and female, etc. This is the underlying principle of human mind and since society and culture are creations of human mind, this fundamental binary can be seen in every aspect of society and culture.

Check Your Progress 4

- 6) How theory of structuralism worked against western prejudice about ‘primitive people?’

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- 7) Which ideas in Marcel Mauss influenced Lévi-Strauss’s?

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- 8) What are Myths?

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9.6 EDMUND LEACH AND (NEO) STRUCTURALISM

Leach was one of the leading advocates of French structuralism in Britain. He was influenced by the ideas of Lévi-Strauss’s and wrote a lot on French structuralism and Lévi-Strauss’s to popularise his ideas in Britain and elsewhere. However, later, he also became one of the greatest critiques of Lévi-Strauss’s’s structuralism. Leach is sometimes also labeled as Neo-Structuralist for making changes in the ideas of structuralism and giving it a new form. Leach developed a grounded and empirical idea of structuralism. He is best known for his work among the *Kachins* of Burma (now Myanmar). He wrote a book based on this work titled- ‘Political Systems of Highland Burma’ published in 1954. In this book, he tried to understand the political system of Burma in terms of two opposite poles or models and an intermediary model between the two, namely –an egalitarian and democratic model called *Gumlao*, a hierarchical and autocratic model called *Shan* and an intermediary model called *Gumsa*. When compared to the Lévi-Strauss’s structuralism, there is an addition of an intermediary model of political system. Further, these models were based on empirical data and not based on rational thought process that was the case in structuralism (Gordon et.al., 2011; Leach 1970, 1973).

Leach was of the view that the political system of Burma has been changing over a period of time. Sometimes this political system is governed by and dominated by the egalitarian gumlao model and on other occasions this was governed by the hierarchical shan model. However, he further said that it will be a mistake to think about the political system of Burma only in terms of these two opposite poles as a third model also exists and that is a mixture of both the gumlao and shan models. This understanding according to Leach was only possible in the light of empirical field data. He gave importance to history that was absent from the Lévi-Strauss's structuralism. According to Leach, historical data ranging between 100 to 150 years can give us important insights in developing models to understand society. It was only due to the analysis of the historical data of the Burmese political system that we could reach an understanding of an existence of a third model in the form of gumlao. Thus, we can see that Leach is talking in terms of underlying structures or models but these are generated on the basis of empirical ground data. He also introduced the idea of dynamic structure. This means that the structure is not static as it was supposed by Lev-Strauss but it changes over a period of time. Leach has dealt with change within the notion of structure. Lévi-Strauss's talked about universal structures but Leach used his idea to talk about local structures as explained in the example of Burmese political system above.

Check Your Progress 5

- 9) What are the similarities between the ideas of Leach and Lévi-Strauss?

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- 10) What are the differences between the ideas of Leach and Lévi-Strauss?

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9.7 SUMMARY

The above discussion can be summarised by saying that structuralism in anthropology has to be seen as a paradigm shift in anthropological thought. This shift was from understanding society as a natural system towards understanding it as an idea system. Claude Lévi-Strauss was a pioneer in structuralism and his ideas in turn were influenced by structural linguistics. Structuralism owes a lot to the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure. Structuralism is based on deductive logic as it moves from general to specific. It generalises about all the cultures in the world and then tries to find out those general principles in specific cultural contexts

and cases. It is a grand theory that is based on the premise that human cultures throughout the world are similar because they all are products of human mind that is biologically similar and works on the principle of binary opposition. Anthropologists like Louis Dumont and Sherry Ortner used the ideas of structuralism to study caste and gender respectively. According to Dumont, the underlying principle that governs caste is the principle of binary opposition of purity and pollution. Similarly, Sherry Ortner while working on the universal subjugation of women was of the view that everywhere in the world women are equated to nature and men are equated to culture. This nature-culture opposition is at the base of universal subjugation of women because culture is considered superior to nature as it is capable of taming the nature according to its will. Thus, we see that the principle of binary opposition and excavation of underlying meaning in terms of binaries are at the core of structuralism.

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9.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to first and second paragraph in section 9.1
- 2) Refer to third paragraph in section 9.1
- 3) Refer to first and second paragraph in section 9.2
- 4) Refer to third paragraph in section 9.2
- 5) Refer to section 9.3
- 6) Refer to fourth paragraph in section 9.4
- 7) Refer to fifth paragraph in section 9.4
- 8) Refer to sixth paragraph in section 9.4
- 9) Refer to first paragraph in section 9.5
- 10) Refer to first and second paragraph in section 9.5

UNIT 10 CONFLICT THEORIES*

Contents

- 10.0 Introduction
- 10.1 Conflict: A Fundamental Social Process
- 10.2 The Manchester School: Background
 - 10.2.1 The Manchester School: Major Ideas
 - 10.2.2 Impact of the Manchester School
 - 10.2.2.1 Victor Turner
 - 10.2.2.2 F. G. Bailey
 - 10.2.2.3 Edmund Leach
 - 10.2.2.4 Fredrik Barth
- 10.3 Marxian Theory and Social Anthropology
- 10.4 Summary
- 10.5 References
- 10.6 Answers to Check Your Progress

Learning Objectives

After reading this Unit, you will be able to:

- understand the significance of conflict in social life; and
- discuss the major anthropological theories which explain conflict, namely, the Manchester School and Marxian Theory.

10.0 INTRODUCTION

This Unit will introduce you to the way conflict has been addressed in anthropological theory, with specific reference to the 'Manchester School' of Anthropology and Marxist theory. The 'Manchester School' refers to the work of scholars associated with the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, England, during the late 1940s and 1950s. The 'founding father' of the Manchester School of anthropological theory, as it came to be called, was Professor Max Gluckman (1911-1975). We will begin with locating the Manchester School against the background of structure-functionalism, the dominant theoretical framework in British social anthropology, under the influence of B. Malinowski and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. We will then discuss the contributions of the Rhodes Livingstone Institute (RLI) towards anthropological studies of African societies under situations of profound change. We will also explore some of the important concepts and ideas regarding social conflict and social change that emerged from the work of Gluckman and others, and mention the work of some leading anthropologists who were directly or indirectly influenced by the Manchester School. This will be followed by a discussion on the Marxist theory and its impact on anthropology. The work of important Marxist anthropologists will also be talked about.

***Contributor:** Dr Shubhangi Vaidya, Associate Professor, School of Inter-disciplinary and Trans-disciplinary Studies SOITS, Indira Gandhi National Open University IGNOU, New Delhi.

10.1 CONFLICT: A FUNDAMENTAL SOCIAL PROCESS

The two major processes in society that have been discussed, debated and theorised upon by social scientists, are cooperation and conflict. While cooperation and consensus are essential for the diverse actors in any society to come together and carry out the work of society and ensure its continuity, conflict is also bound to arise as different people may have different interests and ideas. Let us look at a simple example. The members of a family have to cooperate with each other in order to keep the different activities of the household going and needs of the family fulfilled. At the same time, there are members of the family that may feel oppressed or exploited by the prevailing arrangements. They may feel that their views or ideas are not given due regard or that they have to sacrifice more than other members to keep the family functioning. There may be inter-personal conflict between spouses, inter-generational conflict between elders and the younger generation or conflicts between males and females. These differences may disrupt or disturb the 'normal' or usual functioning of the family, causing tensions and upheavals. As a result, the unhappy members move away, or they may be punished for expressing their dissent. It may also happen that their grievances are resolved and the family changes its way of doing things, and creates a new form of cooperation or consensus.

Conflict is a universal feature of human existence. It may be at the level of inter-personal conflict, and it may also take place within or between groups, societies and nations. It may take various forms, ranging from two people not talking to each other, or having an angry debate, to violence and aggression between groups and even organised warfare. Even though conflict has largely been regarded in negative terms, it has been a focus of study in the social sciences, including anthropology. Social science theories can be classified on the basis of their understanding of conflict and consensus. While 'consensus' theories focus upon the factors that hold societies together, such as shared values, beliefs and ideas, 'conflict' theories highlight the different interests, ideals and power relationships that characterize social life. Marxist theories of class and class conflict are a good example. However, as we have seen in the example above, conflict and consensus are not mutually exclusive, and all societies have elements of both. There can be no social life without consensus, and at the same time, conflict is also very much a part of social life and is often the trigger of social change.

In this Unit, we shall discuss how social conflict was conceptualised and studied by the anthropologists of the 'Manchester School', and Marxist theorists. Their perspectives on conflict and consensus provided an important point of departure from the tradition of structure-functionalism that dominated British social anthropology, which emphasised integration and consensus. You have read about the work of the structural-functional school of anthropology earlier. Simple societies were studied in detail by anthropologists who attempted to understand how different customs, beliefs and institutions worked to keep the equilibrium of society and maintain social order. Social order was viewed as the most desirable state of affairs, and anything that disturbed or challenged the social order was seen as dysfunctional. Just as all the organs and organ systems in the body have to be in harmony for the overall health of the body, it was also extrapolated that for social health and order, all the institutions had to function in coordination with each.

However, over a period of time, the limitations in this way of understanding societies and cultures became more and more apparent to anthropologists. Many scholars had started to feel that the ‘social consensus’ frameworks did not do justice to the social realities and that it was time to focus on how individuals coped in a system full of contradictions and inconsistencies. Gluckman and his associates, played an important role in placing ‘conflict’ at the front and centre of their studies of societies in Africa, which were undergoing tremendous social change due to the impact of colonialism in the late 1940s. They attempted to understand how societies and cultures managed to deal with the tremendous contradictions and tensions that were present in them. As Nielsen and Eriksen (2013: 112) put it, the Manchester school “was important in reorienting British anthropology – from integration to process, from continuity to change”.

10.2 THE MANCHESTER SCHOOL: BACKGROUND

The Manchester school was associated with the Rhodes Livingstone Institute, which funded research on communities in Africa. The Institute was established in the late 1930s in Northern Rhodesia, and was the first local anthropological research institute to be set up in an African colony. Britain ruled over Rhodesia during that time, and it was only in 1964 that Northern Rhodesia was liberated from British rule and became ‘Zambia’. The first Director of the Institute was the anthropologist, Godfrey Wilson. Along with his wife, Monica Hunter Wilson, he examined the impact of the rapid economic, political and cultural change in the British colonies in the region. After his departure from the Institute, Max Gluckman, who had carried out important studies amongst African communities, took over as its Director.

Reflection

Gluckman did field research in Zululand in the late 1930s and joined the Rhodes Livingstone Institute. His work focused on political and legal anthropology and his training in law can be seen in the meticulous use of the case study method that became his trademark. His major works include *Rituals of Rebellion in South-East Africa* (1954), *Politics, Law, and Ritual in Tribal Society* (1965), and *The Ideas in Barotse Jurisprudence* (1965).

In 1947, Gluckman joined the University of Oxford, and then, a couple of years later, the University of Manchester, where he gathered around him a group of like-minded scholars who came to be collectively referred to as the ‘Manchester School’ that focussed on the interplay between traditional social structures and relationships and the changes brought about by colonialism. Colonialism subjugated huge areas of the world and exploited native populations, destroyed traditional livelihoods, customs, political and legal systems. The researchers of the Manchester School grappled with new material and realities that had not been under the purview of the discipline earlier. Let us try and understand some of their preoccupations and concerns.

Check Your Progress 1.

Fill in the blanks with suitable words:

- 1) The founding father of the ‘Manchester School’ of Anthropology was

- 2) The Manchester School was preoccupied with understanding change in societies that had experienced
- 3) The Manchester School reoriented Social Anthropology which was earlier dominated by the theory known as ————.

10.2.1 The Manchester School: Major Ideas

The distinctive approach of the Manchester school was to try and understand the role of conflict in society. They focused on the impacts of urbanisation, labour migration and the rapid growth of population in Africa. Many pioneering studies in the area of social change were undertaken. Through their studies of rural and urban communities, they tried to understand the emergence of multiple identities and negotiations, against the backdrop of the colonial encounter. They tried to understand how different mechanisms came into play to balance out these tensions and conflicts, and restore equilibrium in society. The copper mining region in Northern Rhodesia was the site of many of these studies.

Godfrey Wilson, the first Director of the RIL had predicted that colonialism would lead to profound cultural change and ‘de-tribalisation’ of the indigenous communities that left their native villages and came to the mining towns to eke out their livelihood. However, over the years, anthropologists showed that this was not the case. In fact, they demonstrated how migrants in the new urban environment were constantly reminded of their group identities, leading to ‘re-tribalisation’, or reclaiming their tribal identity. We can compare this to how migrant labourers in India also retain a strong sense of their cultural roots and connections with their regions and villages, even as they travel across the length and breadth of the country to find work.

Their research showed how even under conditions of rapid social change, traditional social bonds like kinship were maintained and sometimes assumed new significance and importance. Some of the innovations they undertook, which were quite new in British social anthropology, were the study of race relations in the mining towns and applied research. Gluckman’s paper, ‘Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand’ (1940) also known as the ‘Bridge’ paper, is a classic example of detailed ethnographic observations based around a single day’s events, the inauguration of a bridge in a tribal Zulu area. By minutely detailing the events and interactions that he observed and participated in on that day, Gluckman was able to theorise about the race relations between the natives and the colonial rulers, the local elites and the ordinary folk, and paint a vivid picture of social structure in a colonial set-up.

Manchester anthropologists also made many innovative contributions to methodology. Nielsen and Eriksen (2013) argue that the methodological contribution of the Manchester School was as important as Malinowski’s contribution to fieldwork methods. The methods required to understand and capture the social realities in such disorganised and conflict-ridden settings were quite different from established anthropological methods used to study small, isolated communities. Some of these include ‘Network analysis’ (tracing the networks of changing formal and informal relationships between people); and the idea of ‘scale’ through which data was sorted as per the relevance to the levels of social organisation (local, regional, national, global). Social Network analysis was deployed by Gluckman’s colleagues, John Barnes, Elizabeth Bott

and J. Clyde Mitchell. It is concerned with analysing the structure of whole social entities as well as explaining the patterns observed in these structures. One of the most important contributions to anthropological method was Gluckman's 'situational analysis', which came to be known as the 'extended case method'. This became the trademark of the Manchester school's work. This method emphasises rich and detailed accounts of the actions and choices of real people so that social processes and everyday life may be understood. Gluckman was also in favour of extending case studies over time, so that the social scientist could understand how specific incidents affecting the same persons or groups over a long period of time would show changes in social relations within their social framework.

Gluckman also emphasised the role of 'ritual' as an important mechanism which helped to resolve conflict and bring about equilibrium. Gluckman's ideas on conflict drew upon the theories of both, Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, the psycho-analyst. Like Freud and Marx he agreed that conflict occurs within the individual, as well as within groups of people. Gluckman further argued that as individuals and groups struggle against each other to achieve their own private interests, conflict is bound to happen. However, unlike Marx who predicted that this would lead to revolution, Gluckman held that conflict would eventually be resolved, and that rituals and traditions would help to bring about this resolution. Marx believed that the existing system would be overthrown and replaced; Gluckman indicated that only the person in power would change. He paid due attention to the wider historical context, and the influence of colonialism and European settlement on the local level social dynamics. As mentioned above, works like *Analysis of a Social Situation in Modern Zululand* (1940) clearly demonstrated the interplay between communities and races and the power dynamics and subtle assertions of power and privilege.

One of his most famous studies was on "rituals of rebellion" in southern African societies (1954). In these rituals, various groups who challenged the authority of the king, openly express their disagreement and opposition. Gluckman explained that these controlled and ritualized forms of hostility actually are beneficial to society and ultimately help to preserve the social order. In other words, they act as a safety valve through which individuals can vent out their conflict in a socially approved way. He argued that "whatever the ostensible purpose of the ceremonies, a most striking feature of their organisation is the way in which they openly express social tensions" (Gluckman 1963: 112).

One of the ceremonies he described took place in Swaziland, where the major tension was between the king and his subjects. During the ritual, the king's subjects were given the opportunity to express their hatred towards him. "This ceremony is... a stressing of conflict, a statement of rebellion and rivalry against the king, with periodical affirmations of unity with the king" (Gluckman 1963, 125). However, it is important to note that these voices of rebellion were raised against the king, and not on the idea or institution of 'kingship'. While the subjects are acting out their rebellion against the king, they are also bound within the social order which is not challenged or opposed. In other words, the social divisions or cleavages that produce conflict, are contained and managed such that the system itself remains intact. The established social order thus remains unchallenged, and is reaffirmed by this ritual.

Gluckman also put forth the concept of "cross-cutting" ties or alliances, based

upon the understanding that conflicts are unavoidable and actually help in the maintenance of social systems. He noted that groups often break apart and then come together again as a result of new alliances. Thus conflicts in one set of relationships are offset by alliances elsewhere. This is a dynamic process, as alliances are made, broken and remade; however, the unity of the society as a whole is maintained throughout.

Gluckman's studies viewed conflict in terms of how mediating mechanisms such as rituals ultimately helped to maintain rather than overthrow the social order. This was helpful in understanding conflicts in small-scale communities. He also introduced the notion of the 'critical event', which he derived from the work of Freud. The critical event referred to the 'crisis' or turning point in a conflict situation, which would either be resolved or resist resolution and lead to an irreversible change. To study this critical event, Gluckman and other scholars of the Manchester school used the method of 'situational analysis' or 'extended case study method', as mentioned earlier. The critical event was isolated and examined in great detail, from the bottom-up, and in widening scales of context, which accounted for both micro interactions and macro-social processes (Nielsen and Eriksen 2013).

As we have seen earlier, the Manchester school anthropologists carried out most of their work in Central and South Africa, under British colonial rule, and were keenly interested in studying the impact of colonialism and capitalism in these societies. The role of the 'headman' was very important in this regard. The position of headman, institutionalised by the British, was the 'point of articulation' between the native and the imperial (colonial) cultures. He was an 'intercalary figure', who had to please and obey the imperial state as well as look after his own people. Thus, when the people showed their anger against their rulers, it was often the native representatives of the rulers who were attacked. A. L. Epstein's study, *Politics in an Urban African Community*, first published in 1958, showed how Africans, rioting against the British when taxes were increased in 1935, also attacked the community elders who were seen as agents of the colonial masters. The social problems and social cleavages caused by the colonial system were thus highlighted, probably for the first time in anthropological studies.

The Manchester school also studied urban communities. They showed how urbanisation in colonial Africa lead to multiple identities and how people associated with or used various identities depending upon the situation. Thus, they could come together as one ethnic community against another, or as one category of workers against another, or as oppressed people as a whole, against colonial authority. 'Situational selection' of identities based upon the social situation in which people find themselves, was an important idea contributed by the Manchester school. J. C. Mitchell in his work *The Kalela Dance* (1956) argues that the same group of people can have very different relationships, depending upon whether they are in the urban or tribal setting. Ethnic identity is thus constantly being negotiated and re-defined by the people.

We have noted some of the important insights regarding conflict, continuity and change that had a major impact on British anthropology, forcing it to contend with the complex issues of colonialism, capitalism and their impact upon the societies of Africa, Asia, the Pacific and other regions of the world that had come under the clutches of colonial rule. In the next section, we shall look at some of the select anthropologists and their work which also emphasized the role of

conflict and contradiction as fundamental social processes. While Victor Turner and Frederick Bailey were students of Gluckman and were directly associated with the Manchester department, Edmund Leach and Fredrik Barth were not associated formally with it, however, their contributions towards understanding the dynamics of social and cultural change and political power are very significant.

Check Your Progress 2

4) What is meant by 'situational analysis'?

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5) What was the feature of urbanisation and identity in Africa that Manchester anthropologists described?

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6) Describe the situation of the 'headman' in colonial African society.

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10.2.2 Impact of the Manchester School

As mentioned earlier, the Manchester School profoundly changed contemporary anthropology and brought in new perspectives and field realities. Some important anthropologists and their ethnographic works that captured the shift from structure to process are briefly discussed below.

10.2.2.1 Victor Turner

(1920-1983) was a student of Gluckman and worked for a while at the RIL. It was here that he started his study of the Ndembu people of Zambia. He completed his PhD at the University of Manchester in 1955. He too was deeply interested in conflict and developed the concept of the 'social drama' to describe the symbolic dimensions of conflict and crisis resolution amongst the Ndembu. His monograph, *Schism and Continuity in An African Society* (1957) is regarded as an anthropological classic. He demonstrated how certain principles of social

organisation and dominant values are seen to operate through both conflicts and their resolution. Individuals and groups involved in these 'social dramas' try to manipulate these values and principles for their own benefit.

10.2.2.2 F. G. Bailey (1924-) was a student of Gluckman, however, unlike most of the Manchester School anthropologists whose work was in Africa, Bailey's work was in India, specifically in the highlands of Orissa. Bailey did his doctoral fieldwork in the Kondmals in Orissa, which was subsequently published as a monograph, *Caste and the Economic Frontier* (1957). He discussed social mobility and change, and showed how through law, changing tax structures and education, certain communities became prosperous and influential, while the wealth of others declined, and how the new wealth led to mobility within the caste hierarchy. His second book, *Tribe, Caste and Nation* (1960), focussed on the struggle for political power and land between 'tribal' Kond and caste, Hindus, against the backdrop of the changing political structures in Odisha in the post-colonial era. However, his book, *Stratagems and Spoils* (1969), is his best-known work, and is more of a general discussion on politics and power. Bailey shows how, across cultures and societies, individuals manipulate and use similar strategies to reinforce their power. Its sequel, *Treasons, Strategems, and Spoils* (2001), additionally discusses how morality and the idea of 'duty' is also a factor in the struggle for power. He gives the example of Gandhi's use of morality to gain the upper hand over the British colonial rule.

10.2.2.3 Edmund Leach (1910-1989) was not formally associated with Gluckman or the University of Manchester, however, there are many strong commonalities between his work and that of the Manchester anthropologists. Leach did fieldwork in Burma, and his major work, *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (1952), studied the social organisation amongst the Kachin community. He highlighted the two models of Kachin social organization, 'gumlao', which was more democratic and 'gumsa' which was more rigid and hierarchical, and the way the community would move between one or the other. Leach's analysis of social structure and cultural change, conflicting ideologies and unstable political environment, were very similar to the ideas of the Manchester School anthropologists.

10.2.2.4 Fredrik Barth (1928-), a Norwegian anthropologist and a student of Edmund Leach, is best known for his study in the remote, isolated area of Swat in the North-West Frontier province of Pakistan presented in his book, *Political Leadership among Swat Pathans* (1959). Barth focussed upon individual choices and decisions as being the prime movers in shaping the political system in Swat. He studied how the local 'Khans' garnered political clout and influence and built up a base of followers, and the tensions, rivalries and manipulations between groups. He emphasised the role of individuals as agents taking actions as per their self interest, rather than as mere cogs in the social structure.

As we can see from the above discussion, the Manchester school played an important role in re-looking at society in a less static and more dynamic way, and also at the role and agency of individual actors who both shape and are shaped by the social realities in which they are situated. The next part of the Unit will be devoted to Marxian theory.

10.3 MARXIAN THEORY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Karl Marx (1818-1883) is regarded as one of the greatest intellectuals of the 19th century, who profoundly influenced every branch of the social sciences. The impact of Marxian theory is most prominently seen in the disciplines of Sociology, Economics and Political Science, and it entered Anthropology as a theory much later. As Marxian theory dealt with the contradictions of capitalism and the class struggle, it was not thought very relevant to anthropology which mainly studied pre-capitalist simple societies where the class system was absent.

Marx's general idea about society is based upon the notion that society evolves as the material or economic basis changes. His theory is known as 'historical materialism'. The base or 'infrastructure' of society is the economic basis of production and consumption, and the 'superstructure' or the other institutions of society such as kinship, political system, social system, etc. are shaped by the infrastructure or economic base. As the economic base changes and evolves, there are changes in the superstructure as well. Marxian theory discusses the various stages of society based upon their material conditions and the social organisation that results.

These are:

Primitive Communism-a hunter-gatherer society where all are equal, and there is no social hierarchy.

Slavery-Here, a section of society is able to make use of various techniques to control nature and gain control over lands. Society is divided hierarchically into 'Masters' and 'Slaves'.

Feudalism- Here too, a section of the society, the feudal lords exert control over agriculture, which is the dominant economic activity, and the serfs or vassals are subordinate to their lords.

Capitalism-The growth of the factory system and industrialisation leads to a new type of society, and the emergence of two classes; the capitalists or bourgeoisie who control the means of production, and the proletariat or labouring class, who sell their labour to the capitalist for a wage. The struggle between the two classes would intensify and lead to the 'revolution of the proletariat' and the next stage, namely Socialism.

Socialism- this is the stage when ownership of the means of production passes from the private ownership of the capitalists to the collective ownership of the workers, the 'dictatorship of the proletariat'.

Communism- The ideal society of the future in which the contradictions and class struggles of the previous stages would finally resolve and give way to a 'classless society' where private property would cease to exist the state would wither away. The guiding principle of such a society would be 'From each according to their ability to each according to their needs'.

Marxian theory is anchored in the idea of 'class' and 'class struggle'. *The Communist Manifesto*, the famous document authored by Marx and Engels in 1848 states, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class

struggle”. Due to their ownership and control over the economic resources of society, a certain class becomes extremely powerful and exerts great control over the working class. It is the labour of the working class that produces wealth and profits for the upper classes, but they themselves cannot access the products of their labour. To give a simple example, a labourer in an automobile factory may be working to produce expensive cars, but he can never dream of owning one. The owner will make huge profits by selling the cars, but the one whose labour has been poured into making the car, will get a wage and not partake of the profits. This is a highly unequal system, which according to Marxist thinking, is bound to result in social conflict and social unrest. Marx’s notion of the ‘revolution of the proletariat’ was an activist agenda and was very influential in political movements of the time.

Anthropological theory engaged with Marxism in the late 1960s and early 1970s through the work of structuralists. The social realities of the period demonstrated that functionalism was inadequate to understanding them. The work of French structuralists such as Maurice Godelier and Claude Meillasoux is significant in this context. The ‘New Economic Anthropology’ was based on Marxist interpretations. Maurice Godelier tried to resolve the issue of applying Marxist theory to non-capitalist societies. He showed that in these societies, the existing institutions like kinship and religion actually provided the economic infrastructure of the society, as well as the superstructure. For instance, the caste system in India has an economic dimension as it is related with distribution of resources, division of labour, property relations, etc. All of these are the infrastructure of the society. At the same time, caste also has ritual and mythical dimensions that act as the superstructure. Thus, the same institution has the structural possibility of acting as both infrastructure and superstructure.

Claude Meillasoux in his classic work, *Maidens, Meal and Money* (1981), gives a Marxist interpretation to hunting, food gathering and shifting cultivation, showing how they differ from agricultural societies. He shows that kinship ties in such societies are weak because kinship really does not play an economic role.

Another important contribution of Marxism in anthropology was in bringing a historical perspective into anthropology. Functional theory had not paid much heed to the role of colonialism, imperialism, wars and conflict. Classical anthropology depicted these societies as static and stateless, whereas in reality it was the experience of colonialism that disrupted and dispersed them, thus making them appear as though they had no political structure or organisation. Thus, Marxist theory provided a corrective to the earlier understandings of societies and cultures.

Check Your Progress 3

7) According to Marxist theory, how does a society change?

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8) What is 'revolution of the proletariat'?

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9) Why did Marxist theory make a late entry in Anthropology?

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10.4 SUMMARY

This Unit acquainted you with some of the major ideas of Conflict Theory, with special reference to the contributions of the Manchester School and Marxist theory. Specifically, it highlighted the changing concerns of social anthropology at a very critical period in world history, when colonialism and capitalism had taken a heavy toll on many parts of the world and profoundly altered them. Manchester School anthropologists expanded their field from small isolated tribal communities to the mining towns of the African copperbelt, where urbanisation, labour migration and displacement created new situations and social problems. At the same time, the role played by social actors in negotiating and selecting identities for their own benefit and interests, and the new structures of authority and shifting loyalties that emerged, were analysed. The role of ritual as a mediating factor in resolving conflict and restoring equilibrium were also studied by the Manchester School. They also pioneered new methods of study to understand these complex phenomena, and attempted to decode the structural patterns of the society through their study of 'critical events', by mapping social networks and understanding the relevance of scale.

Marxism, a grand theory that has influenced all the social sciences, especially sociology, economics and political science, entered anthropological theory rather late. The core of this theory lies in the idea that the history of all societies is the history of class struggles. It is a historical materialist theory which believes that the economic infrastructure of the society lays the foundation for the other social and political institutions of the society. Marx studied capitalist society in Europe and wrote extensively on its contradictions and the class divisions between the workers (proletariat) and capitalists (bourgeoisie). Marxism has a strong activist agenda and is committed to the overthrow of exploitative social systems and the emergence of a classless, stateless society where there would be perfect equality of all human beings. Marxian analysis was adopted by the New Economic Anthropology of the French structuralist school which posed a challenge to the highly empirical tradition of functionalism. The work of scholars like Godelier and Meillasoux attempted to understand non-capitalist societies with a Marxist

lens. Marxian theory also helped to historicise the discipline of anthropology by looking at societies devastated by colonialism and imperialism in a more nuanced way. Conflict theories thus helped to bring in a much needed change and rigour into anthropological thought.

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Conflict Theories

10.6 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Max Gluckman
- 2) Colonialism
- 3) Structure-Functionalism
- 4) Refer to section 10.2.
- 5) Refer to section 10.2.
- 6) Refer to section 10.2.
- 7) Refer to section 10.3.
- 8) Refer to section 10.3.
- 9) Refer to section 10.3.



