



SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS -II

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BLOCK 1	Function, System and Structure	
Unit 1	Radcliffe-Brown: Structural Functionalism	Adopted from IGNOU Course Material: Unit 25 of ESO 13 with modifications by Prof. Kiranmayi Bhushi
Unit 2	Talcott Parsons: Social Action	Dr. Debabrata Baral
Unit 3	Levi- Straus: Structure as a Model	Dr. Gitanjali Atri
BLOCK 2	Self and Social Reality	
Unit 4	Mead: Interactional Self	Dr. Pravati Dalua
Unit 5	Erving Goffman: Presentation of Self	Dr. Pravati Dalua
Unit 6	Luckman and Berger: Social Construction of Reality	Dr. Pravati Dalua
BLOCK 3	Critical Thinkers of Mass Culture	
Unit 7	Mass Culture and its Critiques	Dr. Gitanjali Atri
Unit 8	Theodore W. Adorno: Culture Industry	Dr. Gayatri Nair and Prof. Kiranmayi Bhushi
Unit 9	Herbert Marcuse: One Dimensional Man	Prof. Shubhangi Vaidya
BLOCK 4	Power, Discourse and Reproduction	
Unit 10	Pierre Bourdieu: Habitus and Embodiement	Dr. Gargi Gayan
Unit 11	Michael Foucault: Power and Knowledge	Dr. Tarushikha Sarvesh

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

This course aims to introduce Students to Post-classical sociological thinking through some original texts. The course is divided into different themes. The titles of the blocks reflect these themes. **Block 1** of this course is titled: Function, System and Structure which discusses three seminal scholars. *Unit 1: Radcliffe-Brown: Structural Functionalism:* The theme of this unit is the concept of social structure, as described by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. We begin with a brief look at the intellectual influences, which helped shape his distinctive brand of social anthropology. We focus on the impact on Radcliffe-Brown of the fieldwork and Durkheimian traditions. In order to make these new ideas clear, we move onto a structural description of some Western Australian tribes studied by Radcliffe-Brown, where we get to see some of the bases of structural arrangements like territory, tribes, moiety, and totem.

Unit 2 is Talcott Parson: Social Action: In the theory of social action, Parsons had outlined and stressed the psychological and the behavioral aspect of an individual personality. But at the same time he highlighted the dominance of the socio-cultural elements on the action of individual. For Parsons, order in the social system is dependent on the personality and the cultural system. This is the context through which one should understand why Parsons gave so much importance to the role of socialisation and social control in governing the ‘motivation’ of an individual.

Unit 3: Levi-Strauss: Structure as a Model: According to Levi Strauss, human culture is just an expression of the underlying structures of the human mind. Humans act as we do, not because of where we live or other social factors, but because of the actual structure of the human mind. He pointed out that such structures are actually the models that emerge from the empirical realities. The model should be constructed so as to make intelligible all the observed facts. Models refer to an unconscious and hidden reality which he believed to be the actual social structure of the society. To construct a model, Levi-Strauss suggests that an anthropologist needs to conceptually articulate it through a process of abstraction. A model, even though reached through a process of abstraction, reflects the actual structure of any given society. However, Levi-Strauss further cautions that even though a model is a ‘true description’ of a society, it does not represent the entire society, but just its structure. In simpler terms, a model is an expression of how a society works and what determines the underlying principles of its operation.

Our next block discusses the relationship between micro subjective aspects of self and the larger social structures and reality.

Block 2: Self and Social Reality begins with a discussion on Mead. *Unit 4: Mead: Interactional Self.* The self-occupies a central place in Mead's theory. In this section we have tried to understand the social origin of human self through the process of interaction referring to

his most widely read work *Mind, Self and Society* where he gives priority to society over the mind and highlights the idea that the social leads to the development of mental states.

Unit 5: Erving Goffman: Presentation of Self. Erving Goffman in his book *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* uses the metaphor of theater in order to portray the nuances and significance of interaction in everyday life of individuals. Goffman theory of social interaction presents to us a dramaturgical model of social life having an imagery of stage where actors are playing roles using various props in their everyday life situations. Here the audience consists of other individuals who observe the role-playing and react to the performances of the actor. Like in theatrical performances there too exists a setting in social interaction that consists of a front stage and a back stage. The front region is that part of the physical setting where the actors are on stage before an audience. Individuals while playing a role at this imaginary region are extra conscious of their audience and constantly monitor their behaviors vis-à-vis their audience.

Unit 6: Luckmann and Berger: Social Construction of Reality. According to Luckmann and Berger social construction of reality is a process of meaning making that involves symbols and symbolic interactions to create our lived reality. This then guides our thinking and actions in accordance with norms and values. These constructions become concrete overtime and we see them as objective and normal and part of our commonsense. The process of reality construction is a reciprocal process. It means that humans simultaneously shape and are shaped by the worlds they create.

Block 3: Critical Thinkers of Mass Culture in this block we largely discuss various thinkers who critiqued mass culture, especially from the Frankfurt School. **Unit 7: Mass Culture and its Critiques:** After the emergence of mass media followed by rapid industrialisation and advancement in science and technology, high culture debunked the confines of the elites and was disseminated amongst the masses through the tools of media like radio, TV, films, newspaper and advertising. The cultural homogenisation, which was thus initiated could be seen as intensifying around us with the arrival of internet and at an exasperating pace with the ever-expanding reach of the social media. The culture, as produced by mass media, was seen by the critiques as mass culture, who felt uncomfortable when the high culture was infiltrated by the populism of the masses. Thinkers from across the array of disciplines started critiquing the process. They looked at mass culture as culture produced with a capitalist logic of profit maximisation without any consideration of the quality of the set of values being produced. Thus, they were in turn critiquing the capitalist basis of the modern societies using mass culture as their unit of analysis. **Unit 8: Theodore W. Adorno: Culture Industry:** The unit discusses Adorno's critique of mass culture which he calls "Culture Industry". Adorno is influenced by Karl Marx's ideas which he extends to the contemporary culture. It was important therefore to have a brief

discussion on commodity fetishism. Unlike many traditional Marxist who believed in the possibilities offered by science and enlightenment, Adorno questioned and critiqued the enlightenment project of freedom in the light of how technology has become means of subjugation of society, whether willingly through deception or through coercion. The culture industry, according to him, is the new form of deception or false consciousness that people willingly engage in. **Unit 9: Herbert Marcuse: *One Dimensional Man*** discusses some of the key ideas of the philosopher and sociologist Herbert Marcuse, with special reference to his influential work *One Dimensional Man* first published in 1964. The book launched an intense critique against modern industrial society, both capitalist and communist, and proclaimed that Western capitalist society was no less oppressive than totalitarian ones. The form of social control it exercised on the populace was not one of force and repression. It was through technology and by encouraging and promoting consumerism, it made the working class conform and become integrated within the capitalist system and to keep working in order to fulfill the ‘false needs’ created by consumerism

Block 4: *Power, Discourse and Reproduction* this block has two units devoted two very influential scholars who offer a battery of concepts and deep insights into how power and privileges are reproduced. **Unit 10: Pierre Bourdieu: *Habitus and Embodiemen***: In this unit we have tried to discuss Pierre Bourdieu’s analysis of power dynamics in society. We have also discussed how power is retained by a small section of people by transferring it to the successive generations in various subtle ways. According to Bourdieu power is derived from the possession of economic, cultural and social capital. These three forms of capital are interrelated to one another and the possession of one kind of capital helps in attaining other kinds of capital. Further, the powerful groups in a society reproduce the conditions and criteria which would enable them to maintain their position **Unit 11: Michael Foucault: *Power and Knowledge***: In this unit we have comprehensively discussed Foucault’s major concepts and works. This unit tries understand Foucault’s discourse on power, which he asserts is inherent in all social relations; All social relations are considered relations of power – be it in family or other social institutions. Power relations formed within the hierarchical order of government institutions are also included in the discourse of power. In the course of this unit, we have familiarised you with the underlying structures of power, which are revealed in the way rules-regulations are made and also in the processes of knowledge production and its acceptance. We also learn how power is revealed in various classifications and categories created in society. We understand through this unit that “Power-knowledge” discourse in no way means “knowledge is power”. We rather realise that it is a relationship that reveals how certain knowledge and practices are suppressed to establish other forms of knowledge and practices.



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BLOCK 1

FUNCTION, SYSTEM AND STRUCTURE

BLOCK 1 FUNCTION, SYSTEM AND STRUCTURE

Unit 1 Radcliffe-Brown: Structural Functionalism

Unit 2 Talcott Parsons: Social Action

Unit 3 Levi-Straus: Structure as a Model

UNIT 1 RADCLIFFE-BROWN: STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM*

Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Intellectual Climate and Influences
 - 1.2.1 The Field-work Tradition
 - 1.2.2 The Durkheimian Tradition : Radcliffe-Brown's 'Conversion'
- 1.3 The Concept of Social Structure in Radcliffe-Brown's Work
 - 1.3.1 Social Structure and Social Organisation
 - 1.3.2 Social Structure and Institutions
 - 1.3.3 Structural Continuity and Structural Form
- 1.4 The Structural System in Western Australia
 - 1.4.1 The Territorial Basis
 - 1.4.2 The Tribe
 - 1.4.3 The Moieties
 - 1.4.4 The Totemic Group
- 1.5 Let Us Sum Up
- 1.6 References
- 1.7 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

1.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Mention the major intellectual influences which helped shape Radcliffe-Brown's brand of social anthropology;
- Describe the concept of social structure and related concepts elaborated by Radcliffe-Brown
- See how these abstract concepts assume concrete shape through a case study presented by Radcliffe-Brown.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Block one of our course on Sociological Thinkers II looks at some of the early sociologist who have contributed significantly in conceptualising and theorising on the concepts of structure, function and their interrelations in studying society.

*Adopted from IGNOU Course Material: Unit 25 of ESO 13 with modifications by Prof. Kiranmayi Bhushi, IGNOU

In this unit we discuss in detail the work of Radcliffe-Brown and his exposition of structural functionalism. Radcliffe-Brown according to Adam Kuper (1973:51) “..... brought a more rigorous battery of concepts to the aid of the new fieldworkers.” It is precisely one of these rigorous concepts that we will study in this unit, namely, the concept of social structure.

To make our task easier, we will first briefly trace the intellectual climate influences, which contributed to shaping Radcliffe Brown’s brand of social anthropology. This will be the first section. In the second section, the major theme of this unit will be described, namely, Radcliffe-Brown’s understanding of social structure. The third and final section will focus on a case study. We will briefly describe some structural features of tribes in Western Australia which were studied by Radcliffe-Brown. This will help clarify abstract ideas through concrete examples.

1.2 INTELLECTUAL CLIMATE AND INFLUENCES

Modern social anthropology, as Jain (1989: 1) puts it, is woven from the twin strands of the fact-finding, empirical ethnographic tradition, on the one hand and the ‘holistic’, analytical tradition on the other. The former is represented by British and American anthropology, the latter by French social anthropology which was profoundly influenced by Emile Durkheim. Let’s look briefly at the intellectual climate of British Social Anthropology where fieldwork tradition began to inform the study of societies.

In the early twentieth century, detailed studies of particular societies resulted in the publication of several ethnographic monographs (A detailed Elective course BSOE 144 is dedicated to the Ethnographic Tradition in Sociology and Social Anthropology, you may want to check the course on Egyankosh if you have not opted for it). These studies created the space for a new discipline - Social Anthropology - in Britain. Social anthropology and sociology are closely related subjects. The findings of social anthropology, largely derived from the studies of non-Western societies, are of general relevance to the study of all types of societies. This is the reason why the growth of social anthropology in the 1920s and 1930s contributed to significant advances in sociological thought. Social anthropology’s emphasis, under the leadership of Bronislaw Malinowski, on studying societies on the basis of first hand observation became a turning point in the development of sociological theory. It was so because social anthropologists insisted that ethnographic account must be based on the study of a chosen society through personal visits, lasting a year or more. In addition, they claimed that societies ought to be studied for their own sake and they criticised those who studied primitive cultures only to reconstruct the history of humankind.

Dominant among the ethnographers during the early twentieth century were those who followed the Malinowskian tradition of collecting first-hand information about primitive societies. Malinowski, as their leader, opposed both the evolutionists and the diffusionists and went ahead with the task of establishing

social anthropology as an alternative way of studying human societies. Let us now discuss how the new found interest in collecting data based on first-hand observation paved the way for the development of new ways of studying human societies. Later the method of data collection came to be known as participant observation by living among the people to be studied. Early practitioners of this method chose to study primitive societies by focussing on all aspects of a particular tribe.

Social anthropology as practised by Radcliffe-Brown bears the stamp of both these traditions. Let us first consider the impact of the fieldwork tradition on Radcliffe-Brown's work.

1.2.1 The Field-work Tradition

Cambridge University, England, where Radcliffe-Brown studied, was going through, during his time, an extremely creative and productive intellectual phase. Teachers and students freely shared and challenged each other's views. Radcliffe-Brown became the first student of Anthropology under the mentorship of W.H.R. Rivers in 1904. Rivers and Haddon had participated in the famous 'Torres Straits' expedition. Under the guidance of Rivers and Haddon, Radcliffe-Brown was initiated into fieldwork. His first field studies (1906-08) dealt with the Andaman Islanders. He thus became a part of the new, empiricist tradition of British scientific anthropology. This was a major formative influence, which was to persist throughout his career.

Emile Durkheim's path-breaking work, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912), had a profound impact on some British scholars. Radcliffe-Brown was one of them. Let us now go on to see why he was so attracted to the Durkheimian perspective.

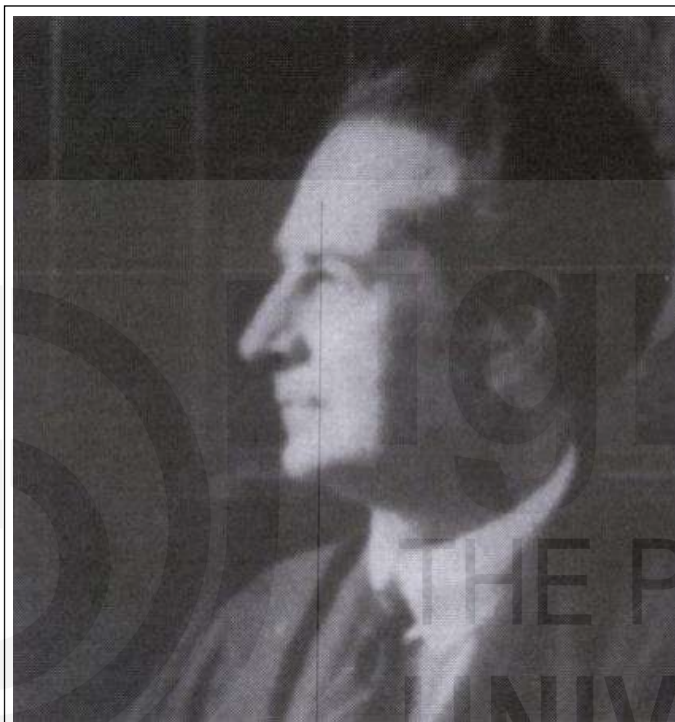
1.2.2 The Durkheimian Tradition: Radcliffe-Brown's 'Conversion'

The contributions of Emile Durkheim have been systematically described to you in our Sociological Thinkers 1 course. The Durkheimian tradition, in the words of Adam Kuper (1975: 54), offered "...scientific method, the conviction that social life was orderly and susceptible to rigorous analysis, a certain detachment from individual passions..." Durkheim was optimistic that human beings would be able to lead a life that was both individual and social, in a properly organised society, i.e. a society based on 'organic solidarity' (see Glossary).

As you know, Durkheim advocated the study of 'social facts' in a sociological manner. He spoke of studying these facts objectively, without preconceived notions. In his view, society was basically a moral order. The concept of the 'collective conscience' was an important part of his work. Durkheim wanted to develop sociology on the lines of the natural sciences i.e. as an 'objective', rigorous science. All these ideas attracted Radcliffe-Brown. Durkheimian sociology combined with Radcliffe-Brown's admiration for the natural sciences resulted in his ideas about the ideal society of the future.

In a nutshell, the impact of the Durkheimian tradition marked a shift in emphasis in Radcliffe-Brown’s work. The ‘ethnographer’ became a ‘sociologist’. From mere gathering of descriptive, ethnographic information, an attempt was made by Radcliffe-Brown to analyse this information using sociological concepts. He tried to organise his data on comprehensive, theoretical lines. We will now go on to examine an important concept developed by Radcliffe- Brown, namely, the concept of social structure. In the meanwhile, let’s have a brief look at his biographical sketch, following which we will attempt the check your progress exercise.

Box 1.1 Radcliffe Brown



(pic credit: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4303425>)

Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (17 January 1881 – 24 October 1955) was an English social anthropologist who developed the theory of structural functionalism. He was educated at King Edward's School, Birmingham, and Trinity College, Cambridge (B.A., 1905; M.A., 1909) He studied psychology under W. H. R. Rivers who, with A. C. Haddon, led him toward social

anthropology. Under the latter's influence, he travelled to the Andaman Islands (1906–1908) and Western Australia (1910–1912, with biologist and writer E. L. Grant Watson and Australian writer Daisy Bates) to conduct fieldwork into the workings of the societies there.

His time in the Andaman Islands and Western Australia were the basis of his later books *The Andaman Islanders* (1922) and *The Social Organization of Australian Tribes* (1930).

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answers.

ii) Check your progress with those answers given at the end of the unit.

- 1)and had participated in the famous ‘Torres Straits’ expedition.
- 2) Radcliffe-Brown’s first field study was in
- 3) Radcliffe-Brown was attracted to the rigorous conceptual contribution of

1.3 THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE IN RADCLIFFE-BROWN'S WORK

According to Radcliffe-Brown, the basic requirement of any science is a body of coherent concepts. These concepts are to be denoted by technical terms that are accepted and used in the same sense by all the students of the subject. For instance, physicists use terms like 'atom', 'molecule', 'combustion' etc.

The meanings and usages of these terms do not change from student to student. Can the same thing be said about sociology and social anthropology? Radcliffe-Brown points out that in anthropological literature, the same word is used in the same sense by different writers and many terms are used without precise definition. This shows the immaturity of the science.

He says that confused, unscientific thinking may be avoided by constantly keeping in mind a clear picture of the nature of the empirical reality to be studied. All concepts and theories must be linked to this reality. According to Radcliffe-Brown (1958: 167), "the empirical reality with which social anthropology has to deal, by description, by analysis and in comparative studies is the process of social life of a certain limited region during a certain period of time". What does this "process of social life" consist of? Well, it involves the various actions of human beings, particularly joint actions and interactions. For example, in rural Indian society, we could speak of agricultural activities as 'joint actions'. The activities of youth clubs, women's organisations, co-operative societies etc. also imply joint actions.

To provide a description of social life, the social anthropologist must identify certain general features. For example, when a sociologist studies agricultural activities in rural India, he/she will try to derive its general features. How, when and by whom are these activities performed? How do various persons co-operate and interact during the processes of sowing, transplanting, harvesting, threshing and marketing the produce? Some general features that the sociologist could identify could include the composition of agricultural labour, the role played by women and so on. It is these generalised descriptions which constitute the data of the science. These may be obtained through various methods – participant observation, historical records etc.

Do these general features remain the same over time? Well, different features may change at different rates. Taking the example given above, we can see that agricultural activities have exhibited a number of changes over the years. The availability of agricultural labour has declined to some extent. Unlike in the past, they resist brutal exploitation. Increasingly, machines, fertilizers, pesticides etc. are being used. Despite these changes, we can still say that in most parts of the country, women continue to do backbreaking work on the field without getting due recognition for it. Any anthropological description, which accounts for changes over a period of time, is termed a 'diachronic' description. A 'synchronic' description, on the other hand, refers to the features of social life at a particular period of time.

Rigorous, clear concepts will, according to Radcliffe-Brown, help social anthropology to develop as a distinctive science; it enables generalisations based on synchronic and diachronic explanations of social life. In this context, the concept of social structure becomes an important one, helping us to see the entire web of social relationships in a systematic way. Thus, we can gain insights into the way society works and stays integrated.

1.3.1 Social Structure and Social Organisation

As Radcliffe-Brown (1958: 168) puts it, “the concept of structure refers to an arrangement of parts or components related to one another in some sort of larger unity.” Thus, the structure of the human body at first appears as an arrangement of various tissues and organs. If we go deeper, it is ultimately an arrangement of cells and fluids.

In social structure, the basic elements are human beings or persons involved in social life. The arrangement of persons in relation to each other is the social structure. For instance, persons in our country are arranged into castes. This caste is a structural feature of Indian social life. The structure of a family is the relation of parents, children, grandparents etc. with each other. Hence, for Radcliffe-Brown, structure is not an abstraction but empirical reality itself. It must be noted that Radcliffe-Brown’s conception of social structure differs from that of other social anthropologists. You may read more about the diverse uses of this concept in Box 1.2.

How does one seek out the structural features of social life? Radcliffe-Brown says we must look out for social groups of all kinds, and examine their structure. Within groups, people are arranged in terms of classes, categories, castes etc. A most important structural feature, in Radcliffe-Brown’s opinion, is the arrangement of people into dyadic relationships or person-to-person relationships, e.g. master-servant or mother’s brother or sister’s son. A social structure is fully apparent during inter-group interactions, and interpersonal interactions. Having had a preliminary look at the concept of social structure, let us see what Radcliffe-Brown meant by social organisation. Structure, as we have seen, refers to arrangements of persons. Organisation refers to arrangements of activities. For instance, whilst studying this Block you have organised your activities, i.e. reading a particular section, attempting the exercises, referring to Glossary whenever necessary etc. This is organisation at the individual level. Social organisation is for Radcliffe-Brown (1958: 169) “the arrangement of activities of two or more persons adjusted to give a united combined activity”. For instance, a cricket team consists of bowlers, bat-persons, field persons and a wicket-keeper whose combined activities make the game possible.

Box 1.2 The Concept of Social Structure

In the decade following World War II, the concept of social structure became very fashionable in social anthropology. The concept has a long history, though, and has been used by scholars in different senses.

- i) The original English meaning of the word structure refers to building constructions. The concept of structure in the sense of building or construction can be discerned in early Marxist literature. Marx spoke of the relations of production as constituting the economic 'structure'. Marx and Engels were profoundly influenced by the evolutionist Morgan whose book *Systems of Consanguinity and Affinity* (1871) may be described as the first anthropological study of social structure.
- ii) By the 16th century the word structure came to be used in anatomy. Herbert Spencer, who had an anatomical image of society in mind, brought the terms 'structure' and 'function' into sociology. This image is also to be found in the work of Durkheim from whom Radcliffe-Brown drew many of his ideas. Following Radcliffe-Brown a number of British scholars like Evans-Pritchard, Fortes and Forde concentrated on certain formal aspects of, society like the political structure and kinship structure.
- iii) Another dimension of the concept of structure can be seen in the work of the French structuralist Levi-Strauss. His view of structure has been drawn from linguistics and denotes an abstract, analytical model against which empirical systems are compared. Certain patterns or regularities are then discerned and explained.

Radcliffe-Brown illustrates the concepts of structure and organisation with reference to a modern army. To begin with, the structure consists of arrangement of persons into groups: divisions, regiments, companies etc. These groups have an internal arrangement of their own, namely ranks. Thus we have corporals, majors, colonels, brigadiers etc.

The organisation of the army or arrangement of activities can be seen in the allocation of various activities to various persons and groups. Manning the borders of the land, helping the Government during times of national calamity etc. are some of the activities of an army.

Complete Activity 1 and try to inter relate the concept of social structure.

Activity 1

Study any one of the following in terms of their social structure and social organization, (i) hospital, (ii) a village panchayat, (iii) a municipal corporation. Write a note of about two pages and compare it, if possible, with the notes of other students in your Study Centre.

1.3.2 Social Structure and Institutions

One of the basic premises underlying a social relationship (which, as we have seen, is the building block of social structure) is the expectation that persons will conform to certain norms or rules. An institution refers to an established, socially recognised system of norms and behaviour patterns concerned with some aspect of social life. A society's family-related institutions, for example, set down acceptable patterns of behaviour to which family members are expected to conform. In our society, a child is expected to show respect to the parents; the parents are expected to support and care for the child as well as aged members of the family and so on.

Institutions, in Radcliffe-Brown's (1958:175) words, "define for a person how he is expected to behave, and also how he may expect others to behave". Of course, individuals do violate these rules from time to time and various sanctions exist to cope with deviations. According to Radcliffe- Brown, social structure has to be described in terms of the institutions, which regulate the relationships between persons or groups. As he puts it, "the structural features of social life of a particular region consist of all those continuing arrangements of persons in institutional relationships, which are exhibited in the actions, and interactions that in their totality make up the social life." (1958: 175).

1.3.3 Structural Continuity and Structural Form

If, as Radcliffe-Brown describes it, social structure refers to an arrangement of persons, we could conclude that once the persons die or disappear, structure must also disappear. This, however, is not the case. Individuals may come and go, but structure persists or continues. For example, social groups, classes, castes, have an ever-changing membership. They lose members by death and gain new ones by birth. For example, the Lok Sabha may lose members who may die, resign, or lose the next election, but they will soon be replaced by new ones. A tribal chief may die, but soon a successor takes his place. At this stage, we must highlight the distinction made by Radcliffe-Brown between social structure and structural form.

As we have seen above, the social structure is always in a state of flux. Individuals are born and die, the composition of society is ever-changing. Radcliffe-Brown argues that although social structures are in flux, the structural form is comparatively stable. This structural form is reflected in the 'social usages' or norms widely observed. These social usages persist, even though persons come and go. The stability of this structural form depends on how well integrated its parts are (e.g. family, educational system, political system etc.) and the performance by these parts of the special tasks necessary to maintain it. For instance, the special task of the family is the rearing and socialisation of children. Educational institutions impart training, the political system is concerned with governance. These tasks refer to 'functions' of the parts of the system. As a word of caution it may be said that Radcliffe-Brown's distinction between social structure and social form is not made absolutely clear even in his own writings, where the latter comes out as synonymous with social organisation.

In a nutshell, ‘social structure’, an important social anthropological concept developed by Radcliffe-Brown, refers to empirically observable phenomena, namely, arrangements or relationships of the members of a society. There is an organisational aspect as well, which refers to a pattern of arranging the activities people engage in. Social structure involves institutions, which define socially acceptable rules and modes of inter personal behaviour. Social structure is constantly in a state of flux, but the structural form an abstract concept taking into account social usages is relatively stable. Its stability depends on how effectively its component parts carry out their ‘functions’.

Thus far, we have been talking about social structure in a rather abstract way. The best way to make these ideas crystal clear is through an example. Radcliffe-Brown’s field studies took him to various parts of the world from the Andaman Islands to Africa and to Australia. We will now focus upon the structural system of the tribes of the Western Australia as studied by Radcliffe-Brown. This will clearly demonstrate to you how social relationships help to build up the social structure.

Before going to the next section complete Check Your Progress 2.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Answer the following questions in two sentences each.

ii) Check your progress with those answers given at the end of the unit.

1) What did Radcliffe-brown mean by ‘Social Structure’ and ‘Social Organisation’?

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

2) What are social ‘institutions’? Give an example.

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

3) Mark whether the following statements are True (T) or False (F).

a) People never violate institutions. (T/F)

b) The social structure is extremely stable whilst structural form is in a permanent state of flux. (T/F)

c) According to Radcliffe-Brown, social anthropology can become a science only when it develops rigorous concepts. (T/F)

1.4 THE STRUCTURAL SYSTEM IN WESTERN AUSTRALIA

Let us look some of bases of the social structure of these tribes as systematically set down by Radcliffe-Brown.

1.4.1 The Territorial Basis

The essential basis of the structure of Western Australian tribal society, says Radcliffe-Brown, was the division of the country into numerous distinct territories. Each male belonged to his distinct territory from birth to death. His sons and their sons inherited this territorial identity. The men connected to a particular territory formed a “clan”, which was of basic importance in the social structure. Where did women fit in? Well, girls belonged to their fathers’ clans. Clan exogamy being a strict rule, they married men from other clans to which they then belonged.

The men of a clan, along with their wives and children formed a ‘horde’, which was identified by its distinct territory. The horde was an economically self-sufficient and politically autonomous unit. Elders held authority. Its total population was small, usually not more than 50 persons.

The horde was sub-divided into families, of the nuclear type. Each family had its own home, hearth and food supply and was dominated by the male. It dissolved upon his death. Even though the family was temporary, the clan was a permanent group. The horde, however, was in a state of flux. The male members were its nucleus, but females married out and new ones married into the horde. Briefly, the ‘clan’ consists of the men identified with a particular territory. The ‘horde’ refers to the men of a clan along with their wives and children, the wives having earlier been members of their fathers’ clans.

1.4.2 The Tribe

A number of clans having similar customs and language formed a linguistic community or tribe. Radcliffe-Brown points out that unlike some other regions, these tribes were not politically united, nor did they come together for collective action. Different hordes and tribes had an important link, namely, the kinship structure. As Radcliffe-Brown puts it, the kinship structure was “...a complex arrangement of dyadic, person-to-person, relationships. A particular man was closely connected through his mother with her clan and its members. He could always visit their territory and live with the horde though he was not and could not become a member of the clan. Different members of a single clan were connected in this way with different other clans”. Similarly, a man had relations with his grandmother’s clan, his wife’s clan and would probably keep in touch with the clans his sisters had married into. Thus, the kinship structure involved a large number and range of social relationships.

1.4.3 The Moieties

Read this sub-section very slowly and carefully because it may be unfamiliar and confusing. The society Radcliffe-Brown was speaking of, namely, western Australian tribes society was divided into two 'moieties'. Moieties are the two broad divisions into which society is divided. Each clan belongs to either one of them. These moieties may be referred to as I and II. Further, society is divided into two alternating generation divisions. Let us call them 'x' and 'y'. If your father belongs to generation 'x', then you will be part of 'y' and your children will be 'x' and so on. Therefore, a clan always consists of persons of both divisions. Society is thus divided into four "sections", namely, Ix, Iy, IIx and IIy. Radcliffe-Brown mentions some of the names given to these sections, e.g. Banaka, Burong, Karimera and Paldjeri.

In accordance with the tribal laws, a man must find a wife in the opposite moiety in the same generation division, thus a man of Iy must find a wife from IIy. For example, in the Kareira tribe, a man from Banaka section can only marry a Burong woman.

Activity 2

Select any five of your married relatives (e.g., mother, brother, sister, mother's brother's son/daughter, father's brother's son/daughter etc.) How were their mates selected? Is there any relationship between the families concerned? Write down your findings, and compare them, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

1.4.4 The Totemic Group

Another basis of social structure is the totem. The totemic object is regarded as the common ancestor of clan members.

Each clan has its own sacred totem-centres, myths, rites and ceremonies. The totem lends solidarity and persistence. Radcliffe-Brown shows how some totemic ceremonies (e.g. those for the initiation of boys) in fact lead to the co-operation of a number of clans. These meetings of friendly clans mark out the religious structure of society. Co-operation during ceremonies also implies some amount of political unity, as these clans have forgotten any existing differences and have co-operated on the basis of mutual trust and friendship.

What can we conclude from the above section? We can say that the structural description provided by Radcliffe-Brown reveals a number of important things. Structural description must take into consideration not just social groups (e.g. family, clan, horde) but also the entire gamut of socially fixed dyadic relationships, as has been done by Radcliffe-Brown in the description of the kinship system of the Australian aborigines which you have just read about.

Radcliffe-Brown's concept of social structure, though sometimes criticized as being too general has been ably used by him in his studies. By focusing on the formal aspects of social life, i.e., the way social life is built up or constructed, he provides a valuable corrective to the extremely personal kind of description given by Malinowski.

Indeed, the work of these two men who disliked each other intensely is in fact complementary. As Adam Kuper puts (1973: 51) it, “some saw Radcliffe-Brown as the classic to Malinowski’s romantic”.

It is now time to complete Check Your Progress 3.

Check Your Progress 3

Match the following items.

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| a) Burong | i) Linguistic community |
| b) Tribe | ii) Economic and political self-sufficiency |
| c) Clan | iii) Territorial identity |
| d) Horde | iv) Kaieira tribe |

1.5 LET US SUM UP

The theme of this unit was the concept of social structure, as described by A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. We began with a brief look at the intellectual influences, which helped shape his distinctive brand of social anthropology. We focused on the impact on Radcliffe-Brown of the fieldwork and Durkheimian traditions.

Moving to the main theme, i.e., social structure, we defined social structure and social organisation. We then spoke of social institutions, which are an important component of structural description. We then considered how social structure, though in a state of flux, has continuity. In this connection, we spoke of structural form as well.

In order to make these new ideas clear, we moved onto a structural description of some Western Australian tribes studied by Radcliffe-Brown. We saw some of the bases of structural arrangements like territory, tribes, moiety, and totem.

1.6 REFERENCES

Kuper, A. (1973). *Anthropology And Anthropologists: The Modern British School*. Routledge. Radcliffe-Brown, A.R., 1958. Social Structure. In M.N. Srinivas (ed.). *Method in Social Anthropology*. University of Chicago Press: Chicago.

1.7 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Rivers and Haddon
- 2) Andaman Islands
- 3) Durkheim

Check Your Progress 2

Radcliffe Brown:
Structural
Functionalism

- 1) By 'social structure', Radcliffe-Brown referred to patterns of social relationships entered into by individuals or persons in a society. By 'social organisation', he referred to the arrangements of the activities undertaken by a group.
- 2) Social institutions are socially prescribed ways and rules of behaviour involving the expectations of persons entering into an interaction, e.g. in a classroom, teacher is expected to give a lesson; students are expected to pay attention.
- 3) a) F
b) F
c) T

Check Your Progress 3

- a) iv)
- b) i)
- c) iii)
- d) ii)



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UNIT 2 TALCOTT PARSONS: SOCIAL ACTION*

Structure

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 The Concept of Social System
 - 2.2.1 Parsons' View of Social System
- 2.3 Parsons' Action Approach
- 2.4 Parsons' Action Frame of Reference
 - 2.4.1 Orientations and Situations
 - 2.4.2 The Role of Evaluation
- 2.5 Personality as a System
- 2.6 Cultural Aspects of Action Systems
- 2.7 Integrative Functions of the Social System
- 2.8 Behavioral System
- 2.9 Let Us Sum Up
- 2.10 References
- 2.11 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

2.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Discuss Parsons understanding of social action and the action frame of references;
- Narrate influence of personality, culture, and social system on the behaviour or action of an individuals or collective of individuals.

2.1 INTRODUCTION

In our previous unit of this course we looked Radcliffe-Brown's understanding of a system through his concept of structure. In this unit we look at Parson's writings to get sense of how Parsons views system and the individual within the social system. We focus, more specifically, on his concept of social action But before we do that we take small peek into how the concept of social system was viewed in social sciences and how Parsons wanted to argue for an understanding of social system which is comprehensive.

*Contributed by Dr. Debabrata Baral, Associate Professor, Bennet University, NOIDA, UP

2.2 THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL SYSTEM

Let us first understand in simple terms what is meant by a social system. A social system has been defined by Mitchell (1979: 203) as 'consisting of a plurality of actors interacting directly or indirectly with each other in a bounded situation. There may be physical or territorial boundaries but the main point of reference sociologically is that here individuals are oriented, in a wide sense, to a common focus or interrelated foci'. According to this definition such diverse sets of relationships as families, political parties, kinship groups and even whole societies can be regarded as social systems. Parsons' ideas on social systems and his theory of action or action approach are rooted in the thinking of his predecessors. In his monumental book *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) Parsons has reviewed the contributions of many social scientists, but gave special emphasis to Pareto, Durkheim and Max Weber. In this work Parsons attempts to highlight the underlying unity in the contributions of most of these thinkers by sorting out these unities. Parsons felt that his quest for a general theory of social system would be forwarded. In his opinion a notion of a theory of action was hidden or was present by implication in the works that he reviewed. In the case of Max Weber, however he found action theory more or less clearly formulated. Let us now examine the early approaches to the study of the concept of social system.

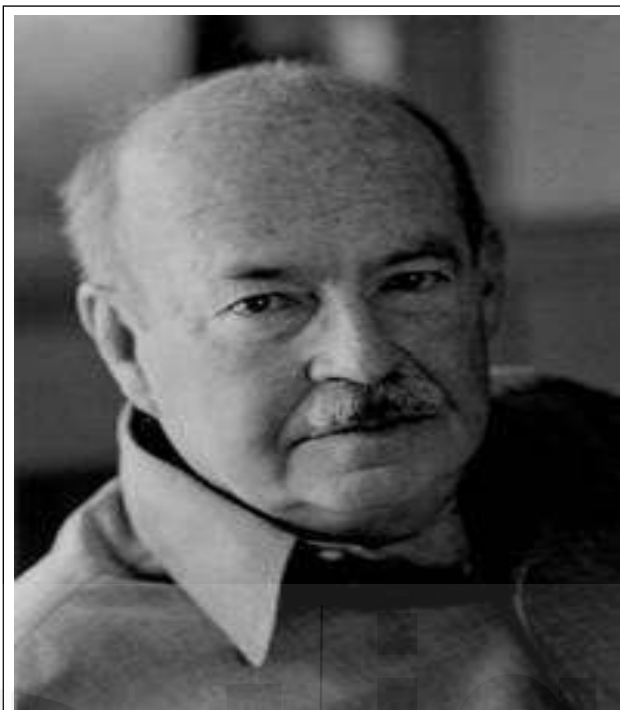
Parsons divides earlier contributions into three broad schools of thought, viz., the utilitarian, the positivist, and the idealist. The *utilitarians* see social action in a highly individualist fashion. They emphasise utilitarian rational calculation, but at the level of the individual. For this reason they are unable to accommodate the fact that social life is collectively cohesive and not a random effect

The *positivists* on the other hand believe that social actors have complete knowledge of their social situation. This leaves no room for error on the part of actors or variation among actors

The *idealist* posit that social action is the realisation of the social spirit and the ideas such as, of a nation or a people, and consequently pay scant attention to real everyday impediments on the ground that obstruct the free realisation of ideas. (See Glossary for an explanation on utilitarianism, positivism and idealism)

In the *Structure of Social Action* Parsons uses this classification to review the contributions of major thinkers like Durkheim, Pareto and Weber. He goes to great lengths to point out elements of the various schools of thought in their writings. While doing so, however, Parsons is also coaxing out of these authors elements crucial to his understanding of social action and for the development of his action frame of reference.

Box. 2.1 Talcott Parsons



(pic credit: Wikipedia, fair use)

Talcott Parsons (December 13, 1902 – May 8, 1979) was an American sociologist and was considered one of the most influential sociologists. He studied at Amherst College for his undergraduate. After Amherst, he went to London School of Economics for a year, where he was exposed to the work of Bronisław Malinowski, and developed a friendship with Evan-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes, and Raymond Firth. At the LSE he met Helen Bancroft

Walker, a young American, whom he married on April 30, 1927.

He received his PhD in sociology and economics from Heidelberg University in 1927. At Heidelberg, he worked with Alfred Weber the brother of Max Weber. Max Weber's work became very important for Parsons and he was highly influenced by his work. Parsons would eventually translate several of Weber's works into English.

2.2.1 Parsons' View of Social System

Parsons emphasised that both the utilitarian and idealist approaches to the study of social systems and social reality were one-sided. The utilitarian approach treated social systems as products of rational impulses of human beings (individuals) to integrate their needs and urges as orderly systems. These systems are based on compatibility of interests through contractual mutuality. An example of contractual mutuality is the system of polity (government and state) which represents organised system of power. The market system, which is based on contractual relationships of economic interests, is yet another such example of an orderly system. But the orderly systems as analysed by utilitarian social scientists, according to Parsons, neglect the role of values. Similarly, in the idealist treatment of social system, democracy is seen simply as the fulfillment of the spirit of a nation. Idealism places too much emphasis on values and ideas and not enough on social practice. Weber too, in a way, belonged to this tradition for he argued that capitalism was aided in its early stages by the Protestant ethic. The difference between Weber and the outright idealists is that Weber never said that the Protestant ethic caused capitalism. But it must be admitted that Weber elaborated at length certain values such as those of Max Weber 'rational asceticism' or 'inner worldly asceticism' but neglected the role of needs or search for utilities. According to Talcott Parsons both the idealist and the utilitarian

notions of the social system assume certain characteristics in human impulses in an apriori manner. By apriori we mean that which is already given or assumed. The idealists assume that human beings act only to fulfill a grand mental design. The positivists go to the other extreme and insist that true human action is born out of full information of the situation. There is thus a finality and inflexibility in their scheme for there is only one way to act: the correct way. Consequently there is no room for values, error and variations in social action. Thus, while each of these schools of thought, the utilitarian, the idealist and the positivist say something important, it is their exclusivism, which Parsons objects to. The utilitarians only emphasise the individual's rational choice and miss the collective. The idealists talk of values and miss out the pressures exerted on values by empirical reality. Finally, the positivists emphasise complete knowledge of the situation and overlook the role of values, or of error or of variations. Keeping the above in mind, Parsons offers another approach to the study of social systems termed as "action approach"

2.3 PARSONS' ACTION APPROACH

Talcott Parsons' co-edited book titled *Towards a General Theory of Action* published in 1951 had contributed immensely in propagating the structural-functional school of thought. Parsons wanted to provide a theory of action, which could suggest the situations around which rational actor (individual) choose one action over another. Parsons theory of social action is interdisciplinary in nature. It takes insights from sociology, anthropology, psychology and to a limited extent from biology and attempts to theorise the situations around which rational actor operate. Parsons wanted that his social action theory should contribute to social research. Max Weber and Emile Durkheim had earlier (you have read about them in your core course Sociological Thinkers 1) conceptualised and classified social action. Parsons theory of social action is influenced from Max Weber but deviates from the conceptualization from Emile Durkheim (see Box 2.2).

Box.2.2 Max Weber, Emile Durkheim Views on Social action

Max Weber suggested that "sociology is a science concerning itself with the interpretive understanding of social action and thereby with a causal explanation of its course and consequences" (1978:4). He had also categorised social action into four categories. First, rational action can be oriented towards a goal (Zweckrational). Second, the rational action can be value-oriented (Wertrational). Third rational action may be emotionally oriented. Forth, action can be traditional in nature.

Durkheim, in 'The Division of Labour in Society' (1983), suggested that social action was governed through the collective consciousness of the society. He suggested that collective consciousness is maintained through society norms. These norms influences and regulates individual action. If the actions do not confirm to these collective consciousness it is termed as pathological. Earlier in his explanation of 'suicide' (1897) Durkheim had challenged the psychological orientation of an action. He had argues that action are social in nature.

Parsons theory of social action takes into account the rational action of the individual or the collectives. Parsons own approach to the social system is integrative in nature since he not only brought out the significance of motivational factors, such as those present in the utilitarian perspective in the formation of the system, but also that of values. He formulates this approach through his theory of social action, which is an intrinsic element of the social system. Action, according to Parsons (1973), does not take place in isolation. It is not “empirically discrete but occurs in constellations” which constitute systems. We will discuss these systems later. Let us first understand the concept of action.

The concept of action, according to Parsons, is derived from behaviour of human beings as living organism. As living organisms they interact (orientate) with outside reality as well as within their own mind. Behaviour becomes action when four conditions are present.

- i) it is oriented to attainment of ends or goals or other anticipated affairs,
- ii) it occurs in situations,
- iii) it is regulated by norms and values of society,
- iv) it involves an investment of ‘energy’ or motivation or effort.

When all these factors are present, a behaviour becomes action. Take for example a lady driving an automobile to go to a temple. She is probably going to offer prayers. In which case then the offering of the prayer is her end or goal to which she is oriented. Her situation is the road on which she is driving and the car in which she is sitting. Moreover, her behaviour is regulated by social norms or values in which the offering of prayers is recognised as desirable. In addition, she is applying her intelligence in the skill of driving which is learnt from society. Finally, the very act of driving the car implies expenditure of energy, holding the wheel, regulating the accelerator and skillful negotiation through the traffic on the road. When behaviour is seen in this analytical context, it can be defined as action. Orientation of action can therefore be divided into two components: the motivational orientation and the value orientation.

- 1) Motivational orientation refers to a situation in which action takes place taking into account needs, external appearances and plans.
- 2) The second form of orientation is value orientation, which is based on considerations of standards of values, aesthetics, morality and of thinking.

As mentioned earlier, action according to Parsons does not occur in isolation but occurs in constellations. These constellations of action constitute systems. These systems of action have three modes of organisation, which Parsons describes as:

- 1) personality system; The personality system refers to those aspects of the human personality, which affect the individual’s social functioning
- 2) the cultural system; The cultural system encompasses instead, the actual beliefs, concrete systems of values and symbolic means of communication

- 3) the social system; The social system, in this context, refers to the forms and modes of interaction between individuals and its organisation. A social system, according to Parsons, has the following characteristics:
- i) It involves an interaction between two or more actors, and the interaction process is its main focus.
 - ii) Interaction takes place in a situation, which implies other actors or alters. These alters are objects of emotion and value judgment and through them goals and means of action are achieved.
 - iii) There exists in a social system collective goal orientation or common values and a consensus on expectations in normative and cognitive (intellectual) senses. To understand the concept of social system better, let us now examine the basic unit of organisation of the social system.

For him, the action of an individual is directed towards a goal. But the choice or selection of action is governed by the norms of society and values of the individual. Hence Parsons' theorisation on social action seeks departure from others, which stresses on the means-end relationship of the action. For Parsons, an individual is the point of reference. The individual is governed through different situations or values, which Parsons refers as the 'frame of references'. He further suggests that personalities, cultural and social are the systems that govern an individual or the collective action. Parsons theory of action places more emphasis on these systems and less on the individual. The section below will outline Parsons' 'action frame of reference'.

2.4 PARSONS' ACTION FRAME OF REFERENCES

Talcott Parsons wanted to develop a theory of action, which could address question like: How rational actors operate? How an individual views a situation? Why does he act in a certain way and not in any other way? What orients an actor in a situation? What are the motivations for actions? Hence, Parsons 'The Frame of reference' of the 'Theory of action' can be seen as an attempt in contributing to the theoretical and research insights of social sciences. According to Parsons, the individual (which Parsons refers to as actor) is a rational being. His actions are directed towards a certain goal. But in this process he is influenced by the societal norms and personal values. Parsons calls these influences as the 'frame' for the reference of an action. He identified a set of categories that could be included in the action frame of reference. The categories are as follows.

2.4.1 Orientations and Situations

Parsons suggested that 'action has an orientation when it is guided by the meaning which the actor attaches to it in its relationship to his goals and interests'. Here Parsons emphasises on the processes that influence the actor's interpreting a certain emotion, and acting in a particular way and not in any other

way. Parsons suggests that the orientation of an actor is influenced by situation, evaluation at a given moment.

Parsons suggests that 'situations' play an important role in the actor's orientation. A situation can either limit or provide alternatives to an action. Parsons classified the situations into two categories i.e. non-social and social. The role that the physical objects like education, occupation plays in orienting the actor is classified into non-social objects category. While the personality of an individual and others are classified into the category of social objects.

2.4.2 The Role of Evaluation

Parsons suggests that individual selections are influenced through cognitive, cathectic and evaluative methods. Cognitive discrimination relates to how much a particular action will lead to the satisfaction of drives. Cathectic mode of orientation means reacting positively or negatively to objects. Cathexis, means having attachment with objects that are satisfying and while rejecting the unpleasant or harmful ones.

Parsons further emphasised on the role of evaluation. He suggested that an actor evaluates in terms of standard, which are 'cognitive standards of truthfulness', 'appreciative standards of appropriateness' or 'moral standards of rightness'. In other words, Parsons is talking about the significance of the values that the individual have learnt through the different phases of life.

Parsons firmly suggests that the orientation of action is very contextual. He suggested that the action or behavior of an individual is influenced by the structure of the society. It is dependent on the particular setting and in a given time.

In short, through the 'action frame of references' Parsons suggested that both psychological and socio-cultural categories are used for selecting, sorting, testing and distinguishing action. He was labeled as a structural- functionalist as he was interested to outline; how structure of society worked? What are the basic components of the structure? What function they perform? And how these systems influence the action or behavior of the individuals? After having outlined the 'action frame of references' Parsons got very interested to know how it operates at the level of 'individual', 'plurality of actors' and as 'system of symbols', which Parsons refers to as personality, social and cultural system. With these three psychological and socio-cultural system Parsons also refers to 'behavioral organism' as a system. These four systems are inter-related as well as independent. It creates a structure, which governs the selection of an action. But before we go into that, why not Check Your Progress?

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Complete the following sentences

- a) Parsons suggests thatplay an important role in the actor's orientation. It can either limit or provide alternatives to an action.
- b) Parsons suggested that bothand are used for selecting, sorting, testing and distinguishing action.

2) Discuss Parsons Action Frame of References? Answer briefly

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2.5 PERSONALITY AS A SYSTEM

The personality system outlines the motivation and orientation that governs human behavior. In the personality system 'one' individual is the unit of analysis. Parsons was highly interested to understand how an individual selects his/her action. In the personality system, Parsons differentiates the biological drive from need-disposition. A biological drive tends to be automatic; apparently there is no selection or choice involved in the satisfaction of the drives. But, in need-disposition, it's the socio-cultural factors that develop these needs. Here, individual's actions are oriented to fulfill these socio-culturally created needs. Parsons emphasized that selection of action are influenced by socialization and social roles expected from the actor. And action can confirm or challenge the meaning gained during socialization and the social roles expected from the actor. Earlier Parsons had also suggested that the actor is driven towards goal attainment but his personality system is integrated with other subsystems. In other words the personality system is relatively independent. The succeeding paragraph elaborates on this.

For Parsons, the personality system is oriented to understand the motivation of one actor. This system is relatively independent. Socialisation plays an important role in influencing the behavior of an actor. For example, Parsons gave an example of a child who in the initial years generally gets influenced by the adult perception. The child learns from the pattern of reaction of the adults. These reactions later influence the pattern of the child's choice. The child develops sensitivity to the reaction and thus learns appropriate attitudes. Here, the child develops social attachments apart from the biological satisfaction of needs. The child gets oriented with the wishes of the adult. The process where the child gets orientation from the adult is termed as socialisation. Socialisation plays an

important role in directing and governing people's action. But at the same time the importance of instincts in influencing selection cannot be ignored. Parsons borrowed the category of 'Instinct' from the discipline of behavioral Psychology to suggest how instincts play an important role in the selection of an action. An instinct plays a major role in negotiating and adjusting with different perspectives that have been integrated within the personality. The personality system is relatively independent and at the same time it negotiates with other norms etc.

Parsons further suggests that personality as a system is derived from four set of variables. The first being behavior psychology (this part is elaborated in the succeeding section). Second, through conditioning, an individual learns that avenues for gratification (or satisfaction of needs) can be achieved through multiple objects or occasion. Hence, the chances of conflict and anxiety get reduced. But when this arrangement fails, defense and adjustment of personality comes into play. Third, through defense and adjustment, different avenues for 'need disposition are integrated internally into a personality'. Forth, there are various sub-systems, which are integrated into the personality. Hence the personality is seen as 'ongoing' relatively independent personality.

Parsons suggested that every actor has his or her drives. But when the drives are conditioned through norms it is called *need disposition*. He gives an example of the social system where role-playing takes place between two or more actors. He further uses the example of two actors called ego and alter. According to him the role expectation from and the role fulfillment by ego governs alter behavior. But at the same time ego can choose not to confirm to alter's role expectation, it can either rebel or withdraw from situations. In this context Parsons suggests that the personality is relatively autonomous as it negotiates, modifies and adds to its role expectation.

Through the analysis of the personality system, Parsons explains that there is an internalisation of norms through gradual transformation from physical drives to need disposition. In other words, both drives and culture influences and governs individual personality. But Parsons was against the theory of action governed through biological drives. He suggested that these drives are developed socially. This aspect brings us closer to the cultural system.

2.6 CULTURAL ASPECTS OF ACTION SYSTEMS

Parsons derived the aspects of cultural orientation from anthropology. The cultural system emphasises on the interaction between individuals within a particular culture setting. Parsons gives an example of the upbringing of a child. He suggests that it is through the process of socialisation that a child gets its orientation from the adults. Here, Parsons stresses the role of the cultural system in maintaining a stable social system. But, stable cultural patterns are those, which are shared and are in common. Parsons classified the cultural system into three components. (1) idea and beliefs. (2) the expressive symbols e.g. art forms

and styles. (3) the systems of value orientation. Parsons suggests that every cultural pattern is helpful in solving various orientation related problem. For example, the system of ideas addresses the cognitive problem. The system of expressive symbols address how appropriately to express feelings. While value orientation performs the function of evaluation, particularly but not exclusively in social integration. Value-orientation helps in performing reciprocity and obligations, which further help in the fulfillment of the role expectations and sanctions. In other words cultural system performs the role of maintaining the pattern. In other words, the cultural system helps to maintain the social order.

Parsons terms this cultural system as cultural patterns. These patterns are known and understood. An individual responds by either accepting or rejecting them. The individuals often internalises these cultural patterns. When the cultural pattern gets internalized it becomes part of the personality and the social system. Parsons emphasizes on those value orientation that has been internalized. Here Parsons suggests that all the action systems are interdependent as well as independent.

By referring to the cultural system, Parsons seeks departure from a micro or individual perspective and engages with the macro perspective or structural elements. Parsons elaborates on the structural elements through his outline of the social system. But before we proceed to analyse the social system, let us answer the questions below

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

1) In what way is personality relatively autonomous according to Parsons?

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

2) How does socialisation plays an important role in governing an individual's action according to Parsons?

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

3) What are the three components of cultural systems?

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

2.6 INTEGRATIVE FUNCTIONS OF THE SOCIAL SYSTEM

When multiple actors interact in a particular situation without the influence of any common culture is called social system. For Parsons a society is a social system that has its own self-subsistence systems. The most significant unit of social structure is the role and not the individual. The role defines the boundaries in an interaction. It further outlines the complementary expectations with whom the individual interacts. This system focuses on the role interaction between two or more people. The roles get institutionalised when they are in agreement or harmony with the cultural patterns and confirms with the moral norms shared by the members of society. Although role-expectations and sanctions may generate strain in the personality but an individual can deviate from the norms but within certain limits. This freedom makes space to accommodate different personalities without straining the system. There is role expectation in this system. Hence there is a shared reality.

Parsons suggested that different individuals have different value-orientations while a social system has common cultural orientations. This common culture addresses the problem of 'allocation' and 'integration'. Parsons suggests that the social system needs to perform certain functions in order to exist. Hence, there has to be a set of roles which work in collaboration and complementarily with others. These roles are indispensable. But since the life span of an individual is limited, hence the system needs individual who can replace them so that the roles are performed continuously and the system perpetuates. Hence a proper definition of the roles and sanction for conformity or deviation needs to be specified. But it is not like anyone can perform any role, but the individuals are selected 'in accordance with standard of evaluation'. Hence the stability of the social structure of this system depends on the institutionalisation of the value patterns. These value patterns legitimise the selection and mobilise sanctions. This system fulfills the integration function by allocating roles that are interacting. Along with it the system would distribute sufficient power and prestige to these integrative roles. The individuals occupying these roles should confirm to the '*value consensus*' of the society. Hence these allocative and integrative roles perform integrative functions for the society.

For Parsons an analysis of the social system will outline the mechanism that governs social interaction and why certain kind of relationship exists among and between individual. Apart from these three systems Parsons also refers to the behavioral system.

2.7 BEHAVIORAL SYSTEM

This system is not one of the cornerstones around which Parsons has theorised the system of action. But through this system Parsons wanted to bridge the gap between personality and its biology base. For Parsons the behavioral system has adaptive functions. In this system the individual defines its environment stimuli

through values and motives. Behavior theory suggests that instinct plays an important role in influencing the choice of an individual but this thesis has been challenged by sociology and social anthropology as it fails to understand the significance of learning.

Parsons outlined certain basic fundamentals of behavior psychology and show how these get influenced. First, Parsons stated that there are some needs, which are physiological, i.e. the need to sleep, for food and to breathe. But the need to be in social relationship is more of a socio-cultural need. Here Parsons states that there is a shift from instincts to need disposition. In other words, the needs derived from biology to the socio-cultural orientation in the fulfillment of the needs. Second, motivations are derived through *cognitive and cathectic orientation*. When these choices become organised it forms a system of orientation. Third, evaluation is the process of selecting among a wide variable of choices. Here the action may or may not be oriented to attain a goal. Fourth, Learning does not just imply gathering information but implies acquisition of new patterns of orientation.

So, until now parson theory of action and the systems that govern action has been outlined. This section provided a brief overview on how the needs are being governed by physiology and socio-cultural constructs.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

1) How do people with different personality get integrated in the social system?

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

2) Complete the following sentences

a) Through the analysis of the behavioral system, Parsons wanted to bridge the gap between and its

b)is the process of selecting among a wide variable of choices.

c) Learning simply does not mean gathering information, it implies acquisition of new

2.8 LET US SUM UP

Parsons suggested that a personality structure gets established inside a child through the process of socialisation. These processes of socialisation are governed and influenced through social interaction. At the same time the adults who are orienting the child are also following certain roles that has been institutionalised within them. In this system the child develops expectations from the adults, which are termed as roles-expectations. The pattern of values are

maintained and modified by the adults and which gets modified further to suit their successive generations.

In the theory of social action, Parsons had outlined and stressed the psychological and the behavioral aspect of an individual personality. But at the same time he highlighted the dominance of the socio-cultural elements on the action of individual. For Parsons, order in the social system is dependent on the personality and the cultural system. This is the context through which one should understand why Parsons gave so much importance to the role of socialisation and social control in governing the 'motivation' of an individual.

Parsons had started by suggesting that, a theory should have three major functions. First, it should arrange systematically the existing concrete knowledge, mainly through a hypothesis. Second, it helps to identify the boundaries of our knowledge or ignorance. Third, it also provides for a point of departure. Parsons himself had addressed all the three concerns and established a 'theory of action' that could suggest ways through which individuals choose an action over other. Parsons reviewed the theoretical propositions from the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, and sociology and biology to conceptualise the action system. He identified the boundaries of these disciplines by categorising the basic unit of analysis into action system. And lastly, he expressed that although the action systems are interdependent, but at the same time they maintain its boundaries within and between various action systems.

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2.10 SPECIMEN ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) a) psychological and socio-cultural categories
b) 'situations'
- 2) According to Parsons, the individual (which Parsons refers to as actor) is a rational being. His actions are directed towards a certain goal. But in this process he is influenced by the societal norms and personal values. Parsons calls these influences as the 'frame' for the reference of an action. According to Parsons 'action has an orientation when it is guided by the meaning which the actor attaches to it in its relationship to his goals and interests'. Parsons suggests that 'situations' play an important role in the actor's orientation. Parsons suggests that the orientation of action is very contextual. He suggested that the action or behavior of an individual is influenced by the structure of the society. It is dependent on the particular setting and in a given

time. Parsons suggests that individual selections are influenced through cognitive, cathectic and evaluative methods. Cognitive discrimination relates to how much a particular action will lead to the satisfaction of drives. Cathectic mode of orientation means reacting positively or negatively to objects. Cathexis, means having attachment with objects that are satisfying and while rejecting the unpleasant or harmful ones.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Parsons suggested that every actor has his or her drives. But when the drives are conditioned through norms it is called *need disposition*. He gives an example of the social system where role-playing takes place between two or more actors. He further uses the example of two actors called ego and alter. According to him the role expectation from and the role fulfillment by ego governs alter behavior. But at the same time ego can choose not to confirm to alter's role expectation, it can either rebel or withdraw from situations. In this context Parsons suggests that the personality is relatively autonomous as it negotiates, modifies and adds to its role expectation.
- 2) Socialisation plays an important role in influencing the behavior of an actor. For example, Parsons gave an example of a child who in the initial years generally gets influenced by the adult perception. The child learns from the pattern of reaction of the adults. These reactions later influence the pattern of the child's choice. The child develops sensitivity to the reaction and thus learns appropriate attitudes. Here, the child develops social attachments apart from the biological satisfaction of needs. The child gets oriented with the wishes of the adult
- 3) Parsons classified the cultural system into three components. The first, being the idea and beliefs. The second is the expressive symbols e.g. art forms and styles. The third being the systems of value orientation.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Parsons suggested that different individuals have different value-orientations while a social system has common cultural orientations. This common culture addresses the problem of 'allocation' and 'integration'. Parsons suggests that the social system needs to perform certain functions in order to exist. Hence, there has to be a set of roles which work in collaboration and complementarily with others. These roles are indispensable. But since the life span of an individual is limited, hence the system needs individual who can replace them so that the roles are performed continuously and the system perpetuates. Hence a proper definition of the roles and sanction for conformity or deviation needs to be specified.
- 2) a) personality and its biology base
b) Evaluation
c) patterns of orientation.

UNIT 3 LEVI-STRAUSS: STRUCTURE AS A MODEL*

Structure

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Levi-Strauss: Life and Times
- 3.3 Levi-Strauss and Structuralism
- 3.4 Structure as a model
- 3.5 Types of Models
 - 3.5.1 Conscious vs. Unconscious Models
 - 3.5.2 Mechanical vs. Statistical Models
- 3.6 Structure as Model: A Critique
- 3.7 Let Us Sum Up
- 3.8 References
- 3.9 Specimen Answers to Check Your Progress

3.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this Unit, you should be able to:

- Give an account of Levi-Strauss's contribution to the theory of structuralism;
- Elaborate on his understanding of Structures as Models;
- Explain the different classification of models given by Levi-Strauss;
- Provide a brief critique of Levi-Strauss' classification of models.

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In our previous unit 1 and 2 we tried to understand how structure is understood by Radcliffe-Brown in relation to observable relations and their functions. Parson on the other hand was trying to understand the very complex relationship between individual behaviour and their motivations in relation to larger systems of society. In this unit we look at how Claude Levi-Strauss who is known for his innovative look at structures.

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We start with a brief look at his life and the times that he lived and the influences of various scholars on his writing. Following this we discuss his idea of structure and structuralism. Following this in section 3.5 we explain how Levi-Strauss conceives of models as something that can be approximated from one's understanding of structure. In section 3.6 we present a brief critique of his ideas by various scholars.

3.2 LEVI-STRAUSS: LIFE AND TIMES

Claude Levi Strauss was born in Brussels, Belgium in the year 1908. He studied in France, like many of the Belgians of his time. He studied law and philosophy



(pic credit:<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=8496339>)

at the Sorbonne in Paris. But was drawn to anthropology and when he travelled to Sao Paulo University in Brazil, as a visiting professor, he then traveled to the Amazon forest and studied the indigenous tribes

of the area, which drew him further into anthropological field. His wife, Dina, as a professor of ethnology at the university and perhaps contributed to his growing fascination with the anthropology. This was when he became a part of a mission to Brazil, where he began his research of the primitive tribes, inspired by Lowie's work *Primitive Society* (1920). He remained very keen on studying Indians, who were considered as 'primitives' at that time. During his four years in Brazil, however, he started by studying the Guaycuru and Bororo tribes, while staying among them for several days. It was this method of conducting research, which gradually, paved a way for his ideas on 'structure as a model'. During World War II he was conscripted to the army and served France, after he fulfilled his commitment and was free he moved to New York where he taught at the New School of Research and at the Ecole Libre des Hautes Etudes which he co-founded with other French emigrates in New York. In early 1940s, when Levi Strauss moved to New York, he got heavily influenced by the works of linguistics like Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetsky. Their concept of phonological oppositions had a huge impact on his ideas on structuralism. For instance: in Jakobson's linguistic analysis, he argued for breaking down the complex units of speech into 'morphemes', which according to him were the ultimate constituent of the speech and the most meaningful part of it too. In this

way, he built a case for how morphemes could be differentiated from each other and could lay at the root of understanding complex linguistic compositions. Much in the same way, Levi-Strauss gave the idea of models, which according to him could be the identifying feature of the social structures. While in US he was influenced by the American Anthropologist Franz Boas, who believed that societies cannot be differentiated on the basis of the progression like evolutionary theorist did. Boas believed that all societies have histories and in order to treat illiterate and literate societies the same way one must focus on things other than texts. One can see that Levi-Strauss examines myths, among other things across cultures to understand the underlying structures or mental categories.

He returned to Paris to receive his doctorate. Professor Levi-Strauss rose to prominence the next year when he published, 'The Elementary Structures of Kinship'. This work turned out to be his magnum opus and was revered in the circles of Anthropology.

He was born in the era when James George Frazer, who is considered as the founder of social anthropology in Great Britain, was working on discourses about primitive nations. On one hand, his method of research did not include anything like meeting or staying with his subjects, personally. On the other hand, Strauss's approach was totally different and became a big milestone for social anthropology. According to his approach, society must be considered as a collection of given facts which must be observed in detail and by ethnologist himself.

3.3 LEVI-STRAUSS AND STRUCTURALISM

Within sociology, structuralism is basically one of the approaches to study culture. Culture is nothing but the learned ideas and behaviours that characterise any society. According to Levi-Strauss, who is also considered as the developer of structuralism, human culture is just an expression of the underlying structures of the human mind. Thus, Levi-Strauss's structuralism asserts humans act as we do, not because of where we live or other social factors, but because of the actual structure of the human mind. Furthermore, according to him mind of the primitive or what he calls as "savage" is the same as the structure of the minds of the civilized ones. Structuralism has been defined as "the search for the underlying patterns of thought in all forms of human activity"(Angela, 2009).

He elaborates this with the help of an example. Humans like to eat their meat cooked. This is same for both - the "savage" and the civilized. It is not because they are directed by their respective cultures to do so, rather owing to the structures of their brain which tells them that cooked meat is better than the raw. Thus, according to Levi-Strauss the human beings think in binary opposites, owing to the structure of the human mind. For instance: to experience what is hot they must experience what is cold; to know light they must have experienced darkness, and so on.

When Levi-Strauss refers to structure, it is not in the way of the overt structures which are observable on the surface in a society, rather to the deeper abstract and unconscious logical structures that lie under the overt structures. These structures, as discussed above, remain abstract and conceptual. As a result of which, they remain inaccessible to the understanding of the people practicing them and can only be accessed by the analyst himself. For Levi-Strauss society is a system of logical structures.

So basically, Levi-Strauss saw culture only as a means of communication. In other words, from his perspective, culture becomes a system of transmission of meanings. Such meanings function towards holding the society together as a system of exchange. These vehicles of transmission of meaning in any given social structure included all the myths, folklore, stories and even ritual practices and beliefs which together constituted the essential core of what he understood as a culture.

Box 3.1 Influences on Levi-Strauss's Structuralism

Claude Levi-Strauss was strongly influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure and his concept of 'Linguistic Structuralism'. It was Saussure who coined the 'structuralism' through his publications in the early twentieth century. In his concept of linguistic structuralism, Saussure argued that language is constructed on the basis of certain invisible rules. Those who speak the language know these rules but remain unable to articulate them. All the native speakers of the language, thus, speak it fluently and without investing any thought into the rules of that language. They may even have the understanding to correct if someone speaks their language incorrectly, yet they may not be aware about the grammatical rules of the language, just as efficiently as an expert linguist. This indicates to the fact, according to Saussure, that those speaking the language internalise it to the level of their unconscious without any clear or direct knowledge of its underlying rules. Levi-Strauss implements this same understanding to the case of culture. He argues that in the case of culture too, the practitioners are aware of the rules and resultant cultural practices, but they do not know the reasons that remain behind the surface of the rules. So, he underlines that an anthropologist must look deeper and unravel the reasons that guide certain rules on which a given culture operates.

However, the most significant contribution of Claude Levi-Strauss to the study of social structure remains his cross-cultural analysis of myths and kinship systems. Based on which, in his acclaimed essay, '*Social Structure*' (1953), he pointed out that social structure refers to the models that emerge from the empirical realities. He writes: "The term 'social structure' has nothing to do with empirical reality, but with models that are built up after it." (1953: 279). Understood like this, all the components of a social structure, including myths, rituals, folklores, language

and cultural beliefs become a part of the models, on which a social structure is built. According to him, these models act as methods to study the social relations, that make up for a given social structure. By studying the models, one may understand the social relations in a given social structure.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

1) How does Levi-Strauss define human culture?

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2) What is Levi-Strauss's idea of binary opposites?

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.....

3) Who influenced Levi-Strauss's ideas on structuralism?

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.....

3.4 STRUCTURE AS A MODEL

Levi-Strauss believed that there is a systematic relationship between the observable and structural realities. And, it is on the basis of the former that models emerge. While explaining the logic behind this, he asserts that “the model should be constructed so as to make intelligible all the observed facts.” (1953: 280). Let us try to understand this: According to Levi-Strauss, there is a difference between social structure and social relations. Social relations are the relationships between people, which are empirical, i.e. directly observable. It is through these observations of the social relations that models of social structure are developed. So, he understands social relations as basically the raw material out of which the models making up the social structure are built.

This tells us what a model is not. Firstly, models are not the observable social relations. Secondly, models are the obvious ethnographic reality that an anthropologist observes in the field. Thirdly, models are also not the lived reality as explained by the respondents of the anthropologist, whom he interviews in the field. Then, Levi-Strauss also goes on to tell us what exactly are the models. According to him, models are the hidden and the unconscious reality, which according to him are the actual social structure of the society. To construct a model, Levi-Strauss guides that an anthropologist needs to conceptually articulate it through a process of abstraction. A model, even though reached through a process of abstraction, reflects the actual structure of any given society. Just like Saussure's insistence on reaching the actual reasons guiding the grammatical rules of a language (Refer to Box 1). However, Levi-Strauss further

cautions that even though a model is a 'true description' of a society, it does not represent the entire society, but just its structure. In simpler terms, a model is an expression of how a society works and what determines the underlying principles of its operation. In his vision the basic aim of anthropology is to construct such models.

Box 3.2 Example of a Model: Munda Kinship Structure

Each Munda village is divided into two social groups, known as *paharkhut* and *mundakhut*, respectively. While the religious chief of the village comes from the first, the secular chief came from the second. While the first is older and superior, the other *khut* is the contrary - younger and inferior. Yet, both belong to the same clan, known as *kili*. Both the *khuts* use the same totem, but they cannot inter-marry. Marriages are only allowed between *khuts* belonging to different clans and villages. However, certain rules are further prescribed for such marriages - firstly, if a marriage takes place between two *khut* of two different villages, other marriages of the same type are sanctioned within the limits of the same generation. But, a prohibition ensues for the following generations for such marriages, which lasts as long as the first couples live, and even as long as both *khut* preserve the social relations derived from the intermarriage. Secondly on the contrary, if a marriage has taken place between *paharkhut* of one village and *mundakhut* of another, this type of marriage is prohibited in the following generation, while that between two *paharkhut* and that between two *mundakhut*, are allowed (Levi-Strauss, 1969, p.426).

Now, according to this model Levi-Strauss is trying to elucidate how the Munda society works. In this, the *khuts* are actually the lineages. While there may be more lineages within a village, the two discussed figure out to be the most dominant of all among the Mundas. Such a tendency of the villages to associate with just one dominant clan and/or lineage has led to the preference for village exogamy, making these clans strictly exogamous. This model is identified with patrilineal cross-cousin marriage. The model highlights a rule of 'delay' in ensuing generations. In this model of patrilineal alliance it is the reciprocity that is delayed, the return of the woman who is to replace that one taken in the previous generation. There is no question of the complete prohibition on the re-alliance in the following generation, which is the key feature of the actual Munda system, according to Levi-Strauss. His example of a structure as a model can also very well be employed to understand the basic features of a model, in Levi-Straussian understanding:

- A model describes structures that make a society. Not society as a whole, rather just to explain how a society works.
- A model aims at making intelligible the complex social interactions in a given structure.

- The structure exhibits the characteristics of a system. It is made up of several elements, none of which can undergo a change without effecting changes in all the other elements.

According to Levi-Strauss, there is more than one possible model to describe the given situation. Nevertheless, we must use the model that is the simplest and that meets two criterion: first, it is based on the empirical facts; second, it can explain all the situations in a satisfactory manner. He furthermore calls such a model as 'real' or 'true' model. After the identification of this model, the research must continue towards the second phase i.e., of experimentation, when the model is subjected to experiments and its behaviour is observed in order to elucidate the properties of a structure. These two phases of research - the observation phase and the experimentation phase, constitute the structural analysis of the models. By experimentation, Lévi-Strauss means the 'controlled comparison 'of models of the same or of a different kind, with an intention to identify the model that accounts best for the observed facts.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

- 1) What is a model, according to Levi -Strauss?

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- 2) How do models emerge?

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- 3) What are the features of a model?

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Activity 1

Speak with the elderly in your family and in the extended community to understand the prescriptions and prohibitions in the domain of marriage in your community. Do this to conduct an in-depth analysis of your own social structure, the one in which you are located. On the basis of this, develop a 'model' in a Levi-Straussian sense. If possible, compare your model with the models developed by others at your study centre. This will give you sociological insight into universality or peculiarity of your social structure, as Levi-Strauss would say.

3.5 TYPES OF MODELS

Levi-Strauss provides two different ways of distinguishing between different types of models:

3.5.1 Conscious vs. Unconscious Models

The models through which a society views itself are known as 'conscious models'. These are the models that remain on the surface and are readily observable. These are also known as homemade models, norms or what Levi-Strauss calls as 'insider's models'. But under the conscious models, lie the 'deeper structures', with which a society is not directly or consciously aware of. These, he called as 'unconscious model'. An anthropologist's engagement with these deeper structures, lead to the construction of models in Levi-Straussian sense. Levi-Strauss strongly believed that observing conscious models is something that leads one to perpetuate the phenomena and not just to explain it. However, he cautions further that conscious models are not redundant in this process, as they are immediately observable and leads one to deeper structure that lie underneath.

Levi-Strauss argued that the objective characteristics of a social fact, by which a society is governed forms the subjective consciousness of those inhabiting that society. He further guides that to explore these is a subject matter of the history discipline, while the anthropology must study what he called as the 'unconscious foundation' of these social facts. In this argument of Levi-Strauss, a clear influence of Boas can be observed, in which he argued that unless the knowledge of scientific grammar, the structure of a language, its phonetics, the very sound of each unit remains unknown to the consciousness of the speakers. A purposeful analysis is required to make them aware of all these elements of a language's structure. Boas argues that is because language and its usage comes so naturally to a native speaker that seldom does he consciously feel the need to explore its deeper structures. Such structures or processes emerge at the level of 'unconscious mental processes' of a speaker. Similarly, Levi Strauss asserts that all types of social phenomena (language, beliefs, social prescriptions and prohibitions, and customs) have this in common, that their elaboration in the mind is at the level of unconscious thought.

Thus, the elements of subjective consciousness of a society like religion, customs, tradition, beliefs and practices, among others are all conscious models, which are constructed by the society itself. They do not explain their structure or meaning, thus, they could mislead an anthropologist. Yet this does not undermine their significance as a part of social life. This is what leads Levi-Strauss to believe that they may lead to the deeper structures that exist underneath them. He calls them as 'norms'. On the other hand, there are unconscious models. These are the models that are composed by the anthropologist himself to account for the unconscious structure that form the reason for the observable elements of the social structure.

Activity 2

Make a list of conscious and unconscious models that you observe in your immediate family, extended family and community at large. It would be interesting to compare your list with that of other students at your study centre. This would not only help you to understand the concept better, but also bring out the similarities and dissimilarities among your community and that of your fellow students.

Hence, Levi-Strauss goes on to the level of calling conscious models as a nuisance, because they stand in-between the anthropologist and the actual structures of his concern. He even said that more the number of conscious models, lesser would be the possibility of achieving the accurate unconscious models. Since informants, according to him, have no understanding of the unconscious models, it remains the responsibility of the anthropologist to construct these for himself, by studying carefully the unconscious structures of the informant's mind.

Levi-Strauss' distinction between the conscious and unconscious models has been both - accepted as well as critiqued - by his succeeding anthropologists and his contemporaries. So, for instance: Anthropologist David Goddard accepts Levi-Straussian distinction between these models. In which, he says conscious models are required as they direct individuals how to behave with each other in a given society. Thus, they impose what he called as 'conceptual order' on the affairs of man, on their dealings with one another and with nature. On the other hand, Hugo G. Nutini roughly critiqued this distinction. According to him, conscious models should not be called as models at all as they do not help anthropologist in revealing the underlying structures, he is looking to study. The conscious models do not even reveal why societies try to cover what Levi-Strauss saw as unconscious models. Thus, they lack any functional utility and thus, should become redundant to anthropologist's observations.

3.5.2 Mechanical vs. Statistical Models

Levi-Strauss defined mechanical models as those models, which exist on the 'same scale' as the phenomenon itself. And, when the models and the phenomenon lie of a 'different scale', they are called statistical model. Even though, he does not anywhere explicitly mentions as to what he meant by 'scale', something to make this distinction clearer can be observed through the subsequent examples that he gives in the further discussion. He gives an example of laws of marriage. When there is no difference between marriage rules and social groupings - the two are placed on the same scale - the model formed will be mechanical. And when several factors affect the type of marriage and people have no option but to deviate from the rule, the model formed will be statistical. So, one can conclude that by scale - same or distinct - he meant when people do

just as they say, it is a same scale; and on the contrary, when they do not do what they say, it is a different scale. In other words, the relationship between the scale of the model and the scale of the phenomena determines whether a model is mechanical or statistical.

According to Levi-Strauss, this differentiation remains significant for two reasons. Firstly, it enables one to map out similarities and differences between disciplines, contributing to a better understanding of various issues. Secondly, the distinction between mechanical and statistical models can be used to clarify the role of the comparative method in structural studies. With a knowledge of differences in scales, one is equipped to bring out a better comparative analysis of the social structure.

A few underlying features of this distinction have been further highlighted by Levi-Strauss:

- 1) According to him, when same data is looked at through different perspectives, can lead to both statistical as well as mechanical models. To further explain this, he gives an example of suicide, which phenomenon can be studied at two different levels. It is possible to construct mechanical models through a study of individual cases. Each case of suicide is analysed according to the personality of the victim, his or her biography, the characteristics of the primary and secondary groups in which the victim participated, etc. But it is also possible to construct statistical models through calculating the frequency of suicide during a certain period in one or more societies and for different types of primary and secondary groups.
- 2) He also argues that both these kinds of models can be transformed into each other. To explain this further, he gives an example of elementary and complex kinship structures. In elementary structures one has to choose the prospective spouse within certain groups or categories. However, if the prescription is followed only to a limited extent, a statistical as well as a mechanical model is called for to explain the system properly.

The classification of models between mechanical and statistical is considered as a one of the significant contributions of Levi-Strauss to the study of social structures. Providing this observation, Nutini (1965) points out that while mechanical models can be understood as 'ideal form 'of human behaviour, statistical models show 'the actual 'behaviour. He also agrees with Levi-Strauss that both the models are complementary to each other, as there can be no society which would always behave ideally without any aberrance, nor there can be a society which would not have any conception of ideal behaviour.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

1) What are the two categories of a model, given by Levi-Strauss?

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2) What is the difference between conscious and unconscious models?

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3) What is the difference between statistical and mechanical models?

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4) How does Nutini interpret Levi-Strauss' distinction between mechanical and statistical models?

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.....

3.6 STRUCTURE AS MODEL: A BRIEF CRITIQUE

Many have critiqued Levi Strauss' idea of constructing models to explain social structure for a very elementary reason that they are constructed by the anthropologist himself, purely based on his own understanding of the structure. According to them, in such a situation the primary concern remains that how well does such model represent the actual facts. Many including Edmund Leach have questioned the authenticity of the models hence constructed, as they believed such models could be fictional or trivial based on elementary logic. They also question Levi-Strauss's total neglect of the empirical facts in illustrating his idea of model construction. As critiqued by Jerzy Topolski, "model is not subject to test by empirical data". Similarly, according to Kaufman, the Straussian idea of structure as model remains unreliable. He further points out that reducing a model to anthropologist's own construction is actually removing the structure from from to human dimension to some other.

Another strong critic of Levi-Strauss's models is Lewis Maybury. According to him, the analysis based on model is not relevant because the model does not represent the social interactions sufficiently. He argues that, social relations cannot be formally represented by symbols in the same way as mathematical relations can. Accordingly, sociological models are not manipulable in the sense mathematical equations are. Conclusions drawn from such models without a

simultaneous consideration of the data from which the models were constructed run a serious risk of error.” (Maybury, 1960: 35) Thus, according to him, different models are not comparable to each other.

Check Your Progress 4

Note: i) Use the space given below for your answer.

ii) Check your answer with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Who said that, “model is not subject to test by empirical data”?

- a) Edmund Leach
- b) Jerzy Topolski
- c) Kauffman
- d) Lewis Maybury

2) What was Kauffman’s critique of Levi-Strauss’ model?

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.....
.....

3) How does Maybury critique Levi-Strauss?

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.....
.....

3.7 LET US SUM UP

According to Levi Strauss, human culture is just an expression of the underlying structures of the human mind. Humans act as we do, not because of where we live or other social factors, but because of the actual structure of the human mind. He pointed out that such structures are actually the models that emerge from the empirical realities. The model should be constructed so as to make intelligible all the observed facts. Models refer to an unconscious and hidden reality which he believed to be the actual social structure of the society. To construct a model, Levi-Strauss guides that an anthropologist needs to conceptually articulate it through a process of abstraction. A model, even though reached through a process of abstraction, reflects the actual structure of any given society. However, Levi-Strauss further cautions that even though a model is a ‘true description ’of a society, it does not represent the entire society, but just its structure. In simpler terms, a model is an expression of how a society works and what determines the underlying principles of its operation.

Levi-Strauss provides two different ways of distinguishing between different types of models -- conscious and unconscious models; and mechanical and statistical models. Conscious models are the ‘insider’s models’, i.e. those models according to which the society views itself. Underneath these models are ‘deeper

structures', the unconscious models, which the society does not perceive directly or consciously. Mechanical models are those models which lie on the same scale as the phenomenon is. And, when they - the model and the phenomenon - lie on a different scale, they are called statistical models. However, the classification of models, as provided by Strauss has been critiqued by many thinkers.

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3.9 SPECIMEN ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Human culture is just an expression of the underlying structures of the human mind. Humans act as we do, not because of where we live or other social factors, but because of the actual structure of the human mind.
- 2) Human beings think in binary opposites, owing to the structure of the human mind. For instance: to experience what is hot they must experience what is cold; to know light they must have experienced darkness, and so on.

- 3) Ferdinand de Saussure. Write more about his idea of Linguistic Structuralism and its impact on Levi-Strauss' ideas on structuralism.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) According to Levi-Strauss, models are the hidden and the unconscious reality, which according to him are the actual social structure of the society. To construct a model, Levi-Strauss guides that an anthropologist needs to conceptually articulate it through a process of abstraction. A model, even though reached through a process of abstraction, reflects the actual structure of any given society.
- 2) Levi-Strauss believed that there is a systematic relationship between the observable and structural realities. And, it is on the basis of the former that models emerge. While explaining the logic behind this, he asserts, "the model should be constructed so as to make intelligible all the observed facts."
- 3) Features of a model are:
 - A model describes structures that make a society. Not society as a whole, rather just to explain how a society works.
 - A model aims at making intelligible the complex social interactions in a given structure.
 - The structure exhibits the characteristics of a system. It is made up of several elements, none of which can undergo a change without effecting changes in all the other elements.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) The two categories of models are - conscious and unconscious models; and mechanical and statistical models.
- 2) The models through which a society view itself are known as 'conscious models'. These are the models that remain on the surface and are readily observable. These are also known as homemade models, norms or what Levi-Strauss calls as 'insider's models'. But under the conscious models, lie the 'deeper structures', with which a society is not directly or consciously aware of. These, he called as 'unconscious model'.
- 3) Levi-Strauss defined mechanical models as those models, which exist on the 'same scale' as the phenomenon itself. And, when the models and the phenomenon lie of a 'different scale', they are called statistical model.

Nutini (1965) points out that while mechanical models can be understood as 'ideal form' of human behaviour, statistical models show 'the actual' behaviour. He also agrees with Levi-Strauss that both the models are complementary to each other, as there can be no society which would always

behave ideally without any aberrance, nor there can be a society which would not have any conception of ideal behaviour.

Check Your Progress 4

- 1) Jerzy Topoloski.
- 2) According to Kaufman, the Levi-Straussian idea of structure as model remains unreliable. He further points out that reducing a model to anthropologist's own construction is actually removing the structure from to human dimension to some other.
- 3) According to Maybury, the analysis based on model is not relevant because the model does not represent the social interactions sufficiently.



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