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## **UNIT 2 TALCOTT PARSONS: SOCIAL ACTION\***

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### **Structure**

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- 2.2 The Concept of Social System
  - 2.2.1 Parsons' View of Social System
- 2.3 Parsons' Action Approach
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### **2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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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.

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### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

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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.

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## 2.2 THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL SYSTEM

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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.

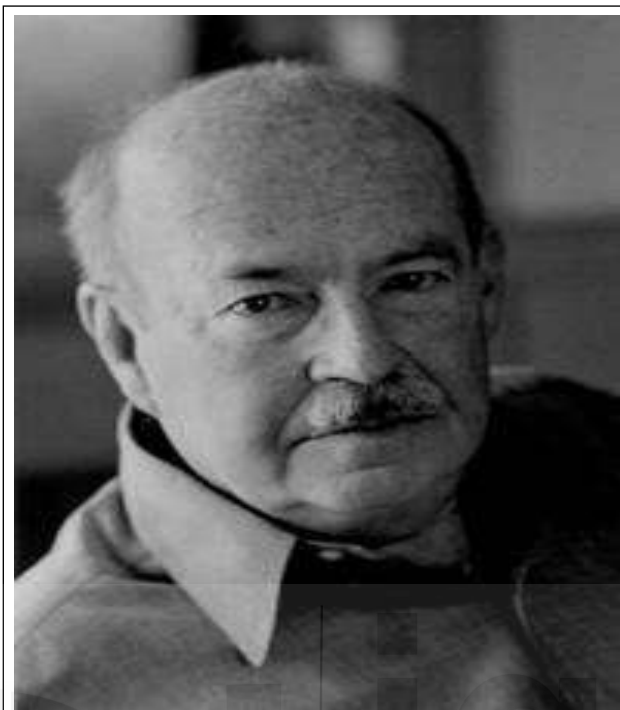
Parsons divides earlier contributions into three broad schools of thought, viz., the utilitarian, the positivist, and the idealist. The *utilitarians* see social action in a highly individualist fashion. They emphasise utilitarian rational calculation, but at the level of the individual. For this reason 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"

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## 2.3 PARSONS' ACTION APPROACH

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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'.

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## **2.4 PARSONS' ACTION FRAME OF REFERENCES**

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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 that .....play an important role in the actor's orientation. It can either limit or provide alternatives to an action.
- b) Parsons suggested that both .....and ..... 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

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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.

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## **2.6 CULTURAL ASPECTS OF ACTION SYSTEMS**

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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?

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3) What are the three components of cultural systems?

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## 2.6 INTEGRATIVE FUNCTIONS OF THE SOCIAL SYSTEM

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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.

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## 2.7 BEHAVIORAL SYSTEM

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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?

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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 .....

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## 2.8 LET US SUM UP

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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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## **2.9 REFERENCES**

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Parsons, Talcott & Shills, Edward A. (1962). *Towards a General Theory of Action*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

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## **2.10 SPECIMEN ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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### **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.