
SYLLABI-BOOK MAPPING TABLE

Sociological Theories

Syllabi	Mapping in Book
1. Sociological Theories Characteristics, Functions, Types.	Unit 1: Sociological Theories (Pages: 3-15)
2. Auguste Comte and Hebert Spencer <i>Auguste Comte:</i> Science of Sociology. Law of human progress. Hierarchy of Sciences. Social statics and Social dynamics. <i>Herbert Spencer:</i> Social Evolution. Organic Analogy.	Unit 2: Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer (Pages: 17-34)
3. Karl Marx and Max Weber <i>Karl Marx:</i> Dialectical materialism. Materialistic interpretation of history. Classes and class struggle. Alienation. Theory of surplus value. Theory of social change. <i>Max Weber:</i> Ideal type. Verstehen approach. Causality. Social action. Authority. Bureaucracy. Religion and economy. Class, Status and Power.	Unit 3: Karl Marx and Max Weber (Pages: 35-59)
4. Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton <i>Talcott Parsons:</i> Action theory. Pattern Variables. Theory of Social system.	Unit 4: Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton (Pages: 61-82)
5. Radha Kamal Mukerjee and M.N. Srinivas <i>R.K. Mukerjee:</i> A general theory of society. Regional basis of values and symbols. <i>M.N. Srinivas:</i> Theory of social change.	Unit 5: Radha Kamal Mukerjee and M.N. Srinivas (Pages: 83-110)

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

1

UNIT 1 SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

3-15

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Unit Objectives
- 1.2 Characteristics of Sociological Theories
 - 1.2.1 Classical Sociologists; 1.2.2 Concepts in Social Theory
- 1.3 Functions of Sociological Theories
 - 1.3.1 Concept and Scheme of Classification
- 1.4 Types of Sociological Theories
 - 1.4.1 Functional Theory; 1.4.2 Conflict Theory; 1.4.3 Critical Theory
 - 1.4.4 Evolutionary Theory; 1.4.5 Structuralism Theory
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 Key Terms
- 1.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 1.8 Questions and Exercises
- 1.9 Further Reading/References

UNIT 2 AUGUSTE COMTE AND HERBERT SPENCER

17-34

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Unit Objectives
- 2.2 Auguste Comte (1798–1857)
 - 2.2.1 Science of Sociology; 2.2.2 Law of Human Progress
- 2.3 Hierarchy of Sciences
- 2.4 Social Statics and Dynamics
- 2.5 Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)
- 2.6 Social Evolution
 - 2.6.1 Evolution of State
- 2.7 Organic Analogy
- 2.8 Summary
- 2.9 Key Terms
- 2.10 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 2.11 Questions and Exercises
- 2.12 Further Reading/References

UNIT 3 KARL MARX AND MAX WEBER

35-59

- 3.0 Introduction
- 3.1 Unit Objectives
- 3.2 Karl Marx
- 3.3 Dialectical Materialism
- 3.4 Materialistic Interpretation of History
- 3.5 Class and Class Struggle
- 3.6 Alienation
- 3.7 Theory of Surplus Value
- 3.8 Theory of Social Change
- 3.9 Max Weber

- 3.10 Social Action
- 3.11 Authority
 - 3.11.1 Weber's Discussion of Authority Relations
- 3.12 Bureaucracy
- 3.13 Religion and Economy
- 3.14 Class, Status and Power
- 3.15 Summary
- 3.16 Key Terms
- 3.17 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 3.18 Questions and Exercises
- 3.19 Further Reading/References

UNIT 4 TALCOTT PARSONS AND ROBERT K. MERTON

61-82

- 4.0 Introduction
- 4.1 Unit Objectives
- 4.2 Talcott Parsons
- 4.3 Action Theory
- 4.4 Pattern Variables
- 4.5 Theory of Social Systems
- 4.6 Theory of Social Change
- 4.7 Robert K. Merton
 - 4.7.1 Theory of Social Structure and Paradigm of Functional Analysis
- 4.8 Middle-Range Theory
 - 4.8.1 Manifest and Latent Functions
- 4.9 Theory of Anomie
- 4.10 Reference Group Theory
 - 4.10.1 Determinants of Reference Groups
- 4.11 Sociology of Science
- 4.12 Summary
- 4.13 Key Terms
- 4.14 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 4.15 Questions and Exercises
- 4.16 Further Reading/References

UNIT 5 RADHA KAMAL MUKERJEE AND M.N. SRINIVAS

83-110

- 5.0 Introduction
- 5.1 Unit Objectives
- 5.2 Radha Kamal Mukerjee and the General Theory of Society
 - 5.2.1 Social Science and Ethical Values
- 5.3 Regional Basis of Values and Symbols
 - 5.3.1 Conservation and Synthesis of Values and Ideals by Institution
- 5.4 M.N. Srinivas
- 5.5 Theory of Social Change
 - 5.5.1 Srinivas' View of Social Change; 5.5.2 Sanskritization and Theory of Reference Group Behaviour
 - 5.5.3 Sanskritization and Structural Changes; 5.5.4 Westernization
- 5.6 Summary
- 5.7 Key Terms
- 5.8 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 5.9 Questions and Exercises
- 5.10 Further Reading/References

INTRODUCTION

Sociology is a social science studying the nuances and concepts of society. This book deals with various classical and modern sociologists and their concepts of sociological evolution and the various theories they propounded.

The first unit provides a general introduction to the concept of sociological theories. It also provides a brief outline of the roles of concepts, and classifications in sociological theories. The unit also delineates the types of theories—functional, conflict, critical, evolutionary and structuralism.

The second unit deals with the lives and works of two founding fathers and protagonists of sociological thought, Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. The theories propounded by Comte, the science of sociology, law of human progress, hierarchy of sciences and social status and social dynamics have been analysed in detail. This unit also discusses Spencer's social evolution and organic analogy.

The third unit deals with the lives and works of Karl Marx and Max Weber. While Marx's dialectical materialism, materialistic interpretation of history, classes and class struggle, alienation, theory of surplus value and theory of social change have been discussed in detail; Weber's ideal types, *verstehen* approach, causality, social action, ideas on social action, authority, bureaucracy, theories on religion and economy and class, status and power have been examined and their contribution in shaping modern sociological theories assessed.

The fourth unit discusses the contribution of American sociologists, Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton. Parsons' action theory, pattern variables, theory of social system have been analysed, while Merton's Theory of social structure, role-set theory, reference group theory, theory of anomie and the paradigm of functional analysis have been examined vis-à-vis classical sociologists.

The last unit deals with two Indian sociologists—Radha Kamal Mukerjee and M.N. Srinivas and their contribution to the evolution of social thought in India. It talks about the general theory of society, regional basis of values and symbols propounded by Mukerjee and also critiques the theory of social change introduced by Srinivas.

The book, *Sociological Theories* has been written in the self-learning format. Each unit begins with an 'Introduction', followed by the 'Unit Objectives' and then the details of the topic of each unit. At the end of the unit is a 'Summary' and 'Key Terms' to help students recapitulate the contents. The 'Check Your Progress' and 'Questions and Exercises' sections in each unit will also help in better understanding of the subject. 'Further Reading' creates a research interest in students for further exploration of the topics covered.

NOTES

UNIT 1 SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Structure

- 1.0 Introduction
- 1.1 Unit Objectives
- 1.2 Characteristics of Sociological Theories
 - 1.2.1 Classical Sociologists; 1.2.2 Concepts in Social Theory
- 1.3 Functions of Sociological Theories
 - 1.3.1 Concept and Scheme of Classification
- 1.4 Types of Sociological Theories
 - 1.4.1 Functional Theory; 1.4.2 Conflict Theory; 1.4.3 Critical Theory
 - 1.4.4 Evolutionary Theory; 1.4.5 Structuralism Theory
- 1.5 Summary
- 1.6 Key Terms
- 1.7 Answers to 'Check Your Progress'
- 1.8 Questions and Exercises
- 1.9 Further Reading/References

NOTES

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The intricate and methodical frameworks used to explain social study are known as *sociological theories*. A sociological theory is based upon facts that sociologists conceptualize as data, i.e., verifiable information, gathered under controlled situations and with precisely established rules and guidelines. Science is based upon data, empirical facts and evidence open for all scientists to know and understand. Social theories are based upon the empirical superstructure of verifiable facts called data. This unit deals with the characteristics, functions and types of existing sociological theories.

1.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Define sociological theories
- Discuss the characteristics of sociological theories
- Analyse the functions of various sociological theories
- Elaborate on the types of sociological theories

1.2 CHARACTERISTICS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Sociological or social theory is constituted from contributions derived from a number of disciplines, including sociology, political economy, philosophy, psychoanalysis and linguistics, as well as from theoretical developments in feminism and cultural

NOTES

studies. The formation of social theory is not a fixed entity; it is dynamic, subject to reconstitution in the light of new interpretative moves, retrieval of the works of forgotten or marginalized thinkers, innovations and novel syntheses, changing relationships to relate formations such as philosophy, linguistics and political economy and in response to transformed social conditions.

1.2.1 Classical Sociologists

Classical sociologists believed that they had discovered a number of fundamental *social laws*, principally laws of social evolution, which constituted a body of theory capable of guiding both thought and action. Modern sociologists have been, on the whole, more modest in their claims. They are chiefly concerned with illustrating the character of the sociological approach and to work out more precise concepts and more adequate classifications. In this book, we look at the frameworks, accounts, concepts, and arguments of the classical social theorists who founded the discipline. In the 19th century, massive industrialization and its subsequent effects, like the development of nation-states, metamorphosis of social relations towards capitalism, transition of the affinity between the society and the State, led to the birth of the intellectual brainchild of the century, *sociological theory*.

The *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* describes a theory as a narrative of the world that holds true beyond what we see and measure. These theories take up complex relationships and explanations that affect our comprehension of the real world in a methodical manner. Generally, there are three different concepts of theory in sociology. Some think of theory as generalizations about, and classifications of, the social world. The scope of generalization varies from theorizing about a particular range of phenomena to more abstract and general theories about society and history as a whole. Others believe that theoretical statements should be translated into empirical, measurable or observable propositions, and tested systematically. This approach is usually characterized as August Comte's *idea of positivism*. Yet others argue that all theories should discuss such phenomena along with their various processes and structures that affect social study indirectly, and the effects of which can only be felt and not seen. For instance, Marxists might use the alleged contradiction between the forces and relations of production to explain fluctuations in the levels and development of class struggle. The term *social theory* is also applied commonly to the most general level of theories of society to perspectives.¹

1.2.2 Concepts in Social Theory

The development and application of concepts is a major dimension in sociological work and theory development. *Concepts* are particular cognitive tools which are applied to specific categories of social behaviour. These constitute a general agreement within the science for their meaning and composition. Concepts emerge in the development of theory, a process which begins with *observation*. For a sociologist, observation is a specifically controlled task which involves much training and profound sensitivity to nuances of human action. But, over the centuries, it has

¹ Marshall, G. 1998. *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*. New York: OUP.

been concluded that observation is not enough. One must be able to explain to another, *what* has been observed. This explanation is the centre of theoretical endeavour, for when sociologists are dealing with their data, they are dealing with *human experience*. A biologist must study plants and a chemist may observe chemical compounds, but when sociologists observe their data, they are observing the human experience in action. Thus, sociological theories consist of deductive-inductive systems of concepts, propositions and definitions that analyse interconnections between two or more perspectives. From the interactions of these factors, hypotheses are derived that are tested on controlled groups.

When we are reading the characteristics of social theory, we must engage in understanding the historical context of social theories and the intellectuals associated with it. The concept of sociological theory is connected with the history of ideas and emergence of sociology as a discipline.

Sociology is a science and it had its beginning in the modern times. Sociology is a scientific study of ideas linked with society or which are the products of social relationships. Sociological theorizing began with the ideas of an eminent thinker, Auguste Comte. Therefore, the history of ideas and history of theories begin from Auguste Comte and continues till present time. However, the history of social thought is quite ancient and begins from prehistoric times while the history of sociological thought/theories being relatively new begins from the time of the French philosopher, Auguste Comte (1798–1857). A founder of sociology and the doctrine of positivism, Comte was the first philosopher in science in the actual sense of the term. The early history of sociology has been represented in the works of Comte and Spencer. However, the conceptions of each seldom builds upon the work of those who have put forward their views before. Rather, these are typically laid out as alternative or competing conceptions and not consolidated and extended into a cumulative product.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. Define sociological theories.
2. List the disciplines that have contributed to the growth of sociology.
3. Name a few classical sociologists.
4. What is a 'theory'?

1.3 FUNCTIONS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Sociological theories are useful; they enable us to better understand what we already knew, intuitively, in the first place. Every social theory matters because it addresses social problems, questions the human condition in modern times. According to T.B. Bottmore, the function of theory is concerned with historical

NOTES

NOTES

interpretation or with interpreting the social actions of individuals on the basis of introspective knowledge of our own states of mind. The scientific sociologist may ask, in turn, what generally acceptable results have been produced by these methods and whether, in fact, they go beyond the insights of poets and novelists. In case of contemporary studies it provides information which is indispensable for the solution of practical problems and for the formulation of, and choice among, rational social policies. Secondly, in case of historical description, or the description of less-known societies, it makes an important contribution to humane studies. For, if a humane education consists in becoming sympathetically acquainted with a wide variety of human situations, strivings, ideals and types of personality, then sociological studies are, as Bottomore argues, the historical aspects of the natural sciences. But in a more striking way than most of these, sociology makes us aware of the wealth and diversity of human life. It is, or should be, the centrepiece of modern humane studies, and a bridge between the disciplines in science and humanities. In the natural sciences it is possible to conceive an ultimate closed theoretical system, while in social sciences this is impossible because in human affairs genuine novelty can result from conscious free will. Thus, we see that the main functions of social theories pertain to:

1. Generalization
2. Basic concepts and schemes of classification

Generalization

Ginsberg explains six types of generalization. These are:

1. Generalizations that deal with empirical correlations between concrete social phenomena.
2. Generalization of formulation, the conditions under which institutions or other social formations arise.
3. Generalization asserting changes in given institutions, associations between changes in class structure and other social changes.
4. Generalization asserting rhythmical recurrences or phase sequences of various kinds.
5. Generalization describing the main trends in the evolution of humanity as a whole.
6. Laws stating the implications of assumptions regarding human behaviour.

1.3.1 Concept and Scheme of Classification

Social theories have been most successful in the fields of *conceptualization* and *classification*. Concepts serve two distinct purposes: these demarcate between the various classes of phenomena which were initially considered as belonging to the same class; and also act as short records of the phenomena. Concepts also help in carrying out further social investigations. In the field of social classification, much useful work has been done by sociologists. One can consider the various attempts to classify societies, beginning with those of Comte, Spencer, Marx and Hobhouse. In these attempts, different criteria are employed to distinguish one

type of society from another. While Marx employs an economic criterion, Spencer uses the criteria of size and complexity, and Comte and Hobhouse use the criterion of levels of intellectual development.

According to R.K. Merton, social theories evolved through stringent research processes carried out on a daily basis. These theories ultimately led to the birth of similarities observed in practical social behaviour. The experience and conceptualization of social changes frequently leads to important alteration in social thought. As the sociology of knowledge shows, the relationship between changes in social conditions and developments in social thought is a complex matter. The connection between particular events and specific theoretical concepts hold an important focus for practical research.

NOTES

1.4 TYPES OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Sociological theories are of different types. These are functional, conflict, critical, evolutionary and structural.

1.4.1 Functional Theory

First theoretical orientation in sociology was *functionalism*. It emerged as a sociological theory during the 1950s and early 1960s. Functional theory enquires how a certain phenomenon works to meet the survival requirement of a society while it is still evolving and adjusting to its environment. However, the presence of needs makes the working of this theory difficult as these needs bring about the existence of things.

- Herbert Spencer (1874–1896) stressed on the axes along which social systems differ.
- Emile Durkheim (1893) examined the new bases for integration of social systems undergoing differentiation. He provides a functional analysis while seeking to understand the function of social facts. The characteristics of social facts according to Durkheim are:
 - (i) **Exteriority:** Social facts are external to and independent of the individual members of the society. These develop as a result of collective living and their origins cannot be traced to organismic or psychic aspects of the individual consciousness. This is only due to the fact that every individual is a member of the group and acquires group characteristics through socialization.
 - (ii) **Generality:** Social facts are diffused throughout the group and are commonly shared by most of the members. These are not exclusive property of any individual; rather, they belong to the group as a whole.
 - (iii) **Constraint:** Durkheim maintains that constraint is a moral obligation to obey a rule. Constraint takes place when social facts exercise a coercive power over the individual members of the group by which they shape and regulate their behaviour. A significant focus is Durkheim's

NOTES

study of order which maintains that legal or social constraints are enforced when some social demands are defied. These constraints, when imposed on the individuals, influence their wants and tendencies. He assumes that society has certain functional prerequisites, the most important of which is the need for social order. Durkheim begins with the question of how a collection of individuals can be integrated to form an ordered society. The answer lies in forming a 'collective conscience' consisting of common belief and sentiments. Without this concurrence on basic moral issues, social bond would not be feasible and bringing individuals together cannot be possible. Without social accountability implemented through moral force, the harmony and mutual cooperation which is the foundation of social life would be lacking. To Durkheim, social facts should be studied in interconnectedness. And what holds the society together as an ongoing concern is the cohesiveness between these interdependent parts which is 'social solidarity'.

The American sociologist, Talcott Parsons' early contribution was based on the conviction that the appropriate subject matter of sociology is *social action*. This view reflected the strong influence of Max Weber and, to some extent, Thomas. In *The Structure of Social Action* Parsons presents an extremely complicated theory of social action in which it is held to be *voluntaristic behaviour*. The analysis is largely based on the means-end scheme. This complex formulation of theory of social action represented an ambitious but early effort by Parsons. This is interwoven with a detailed analysis of the theories of Weber, Durkheim, Pareto and Alfred Marshall. Parsons' voluntaristic theory of action emerged from two different traditions—the tradition of *positivistic utilitarianism* on the one hand and the tradition of *idealism* on the other.

According to Parsons, every action involves an actor, a situation and the orientation of the actor to the situation and does not take place in isolation. According to him, the concept of action is derived from behaviour of human being as living organism. So social action is that behaviour by which man reacts to the external forces after understanding and interpreting them. This behaviour is motivated and directed by the meanings which the actor perceives in the external world, which he takes into account and to which he responds. So the essential feature of social action is the actor's sensitivity to the people and things about him, his perception of these and his reactions to the meanings they convey. Every behaviour becomes an action when it is oriented to attainment of ends or goals or occurs in situations. A behaviour also converts into an action when societal values and norms regulate it or there is energy, effort or motivation expended for achieving it. Parsons' functionalism stressed on certain requirements are developed an intricate category system around these requirements. A few of the elements of Parson's functionalism have been discussed in the following list:

- (i) **Adaptation:** Adaptation refers to the relationship between the system and its environment. It involves the problem of securing from the environment

sufficient facilities and then distributing these facilities throughout the system. At a minimum, food and shelter must be provided to fulfil physical needs. The economy is the institution primarily concerned with this function.

- (ii) **Goal attainment:** Goal attainment involves the determination of goals and encouraging the members of the system to attain these goals; also mobilizing of the members for the achievements of these goals. Procedures for establishing goals and deciding on priorities between goals are institutionalized in the form of political system.
- (iii) **Integration:** Integration refers primarily to the adjustment of conflict. It deals with the difficulties in coordinating and maintaining feasible exchanges among system units. The law is the main institution which meets this need. Legal norms define and standardize relations between individuals and between institutions and so reduce the potential for conflict. When conflict does arise it is settled by the judicial system and does not lead to disintegration of the social system.
- (iv) **Latency:** It stores, organizes and maintains the motivational energy of elements in the social system. Its main functions are pattern maintenance and tension management within the system. Pattern maintenance refers to the maintenance of the basic pattern of values, institutionalized in the society. Institutions which perform this function include the family, the educational system and religion. Tension-management deals with the internal tensions and strains of actors in a social system.

Parsons' views on society in terms of its constituent sub-systems are: the physiological system, the personality system, the social (role) system and the cultural system. The link between individuals and society (or the social system) is fashioned through social roles. These are structured around social expectations about appropriate behaviour associated with different roles as well as 'pattern variables' which express wider 'dilemmas' of action. The survival and smooth running of the social system depends on its 'needs' being fulfilled.

1.4.2 Conflict Theory

Conflict theory established the structure of human society in the context of forces and relations of productions. Karl Marx was a prominent conflict theorist. He traced the evolution of human society from one social type to another in the preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*. This theory became predominant in America during the 1960s and the 1970s. Conflict theory emphasizes on the sociological reasons under which types of conflicts emerge in social systems.

Marxian and Weberian emphasis on how inequality and stratification generate conflicts between social classes have been discussed as follows:

For Marx the basic postulate of dialectic method is as:

- All phenomena of nature are part of an integrated whole.
- Nature is in continuous state of movement and change.

NOTES

- The developmental process is a product of quantitative advance which culminate in abrupt qualitative changes.
- Contradictions are inherent in all realms of nature but particularly human society.

NOTES

Marx's theory of labour and the deductive reasoning which flows directly from it, namely the *pauperization of masses* are strong. Marx misjudged the extent of alienation in the average worker. The great depth of frustration which Marx witnessed among the workers of his day is not 'typical' of today's capitalism or its workers who tend to identify with a number of 'meaningful' groups—religious, ethnic, occupational and local. Marx also overemphasized the economic base of political power and ignored other important sources of power. In Marx's view, society has developed historically through several phases—tribal, ancient, feudal—to reach its present capitalist phase. Marx hoped that through the revolutionary efforts of the working class, society would move beyond capitalism to communism.

Under capitalism, workers are measured by their labour value and little else; hence they become 'alienated' from their work, themselves and other people. Conflict theory also deals with unique types of conflicts like ethnic animosity and gender biases. It also combines a criticism of capitalism, functionalism and colonialism.

1.4.3 Critical Theory

Sociological theories have always had a critical edge. The discipline emerged in response to the transformations associated with modernity, and theorists often cited pathological conditions such as frustration, exploitation, lawlessness, marginality, and other ills associated with the rise of capitalism. In America, despite the claim for being scientific, sociology began with an emphasis on 'social problems', seeing the goals of sociology as revolving around improvements.² In the 20th century, critical theory was first formulated in the Frankfurt School promoted Mark's zeal of freeing workers from the bondage of capitalism. However, the theory also had the negative assessment of Weber, who decried the legal and rational authority of individuals ruling individuals. Like most critical theorists, the Frankfurt School wanted to expose patterns of domination and control even if they had no real program to deal with these oppressive patterns. In the 21st century, Critical Theory has not really changed its form. Scholars like Jurgen Habermas, the direct descendant of the Frankfurt School, continue to agonize over the loss of 'the public sphere' and the invasion of the 'life world' by a rational-bureaucratic economy and by a politico-administrative apparatus. Such critiques are more philosophical than sociological, but they have inspired many to make similar claims about the power of the forces unleashed by capitalism to invade local cultures and personal self.

² Turner & Turner, 1990.

1.4.4 Evolutionary Theory

Sociological theories have rested on evolutionary framework. The founders of these theories saw societies becoming more complex and they stressed on certain aspects of this change. All of them emphasized that the society was undergoing a positive transformation. However, evolutionary theory has more to it than just this movement of the society towards more intricate forms. Herbert Spencer (1874–1896) and Emile Durkheim (1893) were influenced by ecological analyses like Darwin and posited that the competition among actors in a social unit was responsible for the transformation of a society.

A different and controversial ‘reductionist’ form of the evolutionary theory is the ‘sociobiology’ or the ‘evolutionary psychology’. This theory maintains that the patterns of social organization may be decoded with the help of gene fitness. Individuals are often influenced by their genes that fight to survive in the gene pools and pass on their expertise to become fighters and survivors to the social fabric. Social structures were definitely created by humans for surviving and reproducing, but their reaction to various social factors have helped them to move beyond mere survival. However, the stories about gene fitness are not testable and remain mostly just theories that make vague references to the evolutionary past. However, when we look at the closest relatives of the humans, the chimpanzees and gorillas, we find clues about human nature too. Since humans share 98 per cent of their genes with these animals, it is easier to use comparative evolutionary theories and anatomic reactions to study the process of evolution of humans.

Some sociologists, however, resist such a comparison as it is against the very grain of their theories of man being a part of the social structure as it hints at ‘reductionism’. These sociologists argue that humans are products of socio-cultural forces and must be treated similarly. This kind of extreme criticism of the evolutionary theory definitely creates a problem for socio-biologists as scientific research has increasingly proven sociological theories wrong as humans are obviously animals and the gene theory has proved that gene fitness is responsible for human behaviour.

1.4.5 Structuralism Theory

Sociologists have been concerned with social structure. Thus, the rise of structuralism as a broad intellectual movement has brought out the ‘structural’ aspects of sociology. The main champions of structuralism were Emile Durkheim (1893) and Claude Lévi-Strauss (1953), who turned Durkheim’s theory on its head. These have influenced theories by Anthony Giddens (1984), Pierre Bourdieu (1984) and Robert Wuthnow (1987). None of these structural theories, however, go as far as Lévi-Strauss or Noam Chomsky’s (1980) theorizing that the biology of the brain is the critical source of the generative rules of structure.

Yet another form of structuralism emphasizes how structural constraints influence interaction. Here structures are seen as parameters that influence opportunities for interaction. These opportunities determine the general rates of

NOTES

NOTES

contact among individuals. The most prominent theory had been produced by Peter Blau but other approaches often reveal the same underlying imagery. For instance, network theory argues that the place in a network will influence opportunities for ties, and hence, rates of contact among actors. Similarly, ecological theories often carry this view of distribution of characteristics in social space as influencing rates of interaction.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

5. What are concepts?
6. What do you understand by 'observation'?
7. Who was Auguste Comte?
8. List a few social theories.

1.5 SUMMARY

- The intricate and methodical frameworks used to explain social study are known as sociological theories.
- Sociological or social theory is constituted from contributions derived from a number of disciplines, including sociology, political economy, philosophy, psychoanalysis and linguistics, as well as from theoretical developments in feminism and cultural studies.
- Classical sociologists believed that they had discovered a number of fundamental *social laws*, principally laws of social evolution, which constituted a body of theory capable of guiding both thought and action.
- In the 19th century, massive industrialization and its subsequent effects, like the development of nation-states, metamorphosis of social relations towards capitalism, transition of the affinity between the society and the State, led to the birth of the intellectual brainchild of the century, sociological theory.
- The *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* describes a theory as a narrative of the world that holds true beyond what we see and measure. These theories take up complex relationships and explanations that affect our comprehension of the real world in a methodical manner.
- The development and application of concepts is a major dimension in sociological work and theory development. *Concepts* are particular cognitive tools which are applied to specific categories of social behaviour. These constitute a general agreement within the science for their meaning and composition. Concepts emerge in the development of theory, a process which begins with *observation*.

- Sociological theories consist of deductive-inductive systems of concepts, propositions and definitions that analyse interconnections between two or more perspectives. From the interactions of these factors, hypotheses are derived that are tested on controlled groups.
- Sociological theories are useful; they enable us to better understand what we already knew, intuitively, in the first place. Social theory matters because it addresses social problems, questions the human condition in modern times.
- Social theories have been most successful in the fields of conceptualization and classification. Concepts serve two distinct purposes: these demarcate between the various classes of phenomena which were initially considered as belonging to the same class; and also act as short records of the phenomena. Concepts also help in carrying out further social investigations. In the field of social classification, much useful work has been done by sociologists.
- First theoretical orientation in sociology was *functionalism*. It emerged as a sociological theory during the 1950s and early 1960s. Functional theory enquires how a certain phenomenon works to meet the survival requirement of a society while it is still evolving and adjusting to its environment.
- Conflict theory established the structure of human society in the context of forces and relations of productions. Karl Marx was a prominent conflict theorist. He traced the evolution of human society from one social type to another in the preface to his *Critique of Political Economy*. This theory became predominant in America during the 1960s and the 1970s. Conflict theory emphasizes on the sociological reasons under which types of conflicts emerge in social systems.
- Sociological theories have always had a critical edge. The discipline emerged in response to the transformations associated with modernity, and theorists often cited pathological conditions such as frustration, exploitation, lawlessness, marginality, and other ills associated with the rise of capitalism.
- Sociological theories have rested on evolutionary framework. The founders of these theories saw societies becoming more complex and they stressed on certain aspects of this change. All of them emphasized that the society was undergoing a positive transformation. However, evolutionary theory has more to it than just this movement of the society towards more intricate forms.

NOTES

1.6 KEY TERMS

- **Concepts:** Particular cognitive tools which are applied to specific categories of social behaviour.
- **Observation:** Specifically controlled task which involves much training and profound sensitivity to human action.

NOTES

- **Constraint:** Moral obligation to follow a social rule.
- **Generality:** Social facts shared by a group.
- **Latency:** Storing, organizing and maintaining motivational energy of elements in social systems.

1.7 ANSWERS TO 'CHECK YOUR PROGRESS'

1. The intricate and methodical frameworks used to explain social study are known as sociological theories. A sociological theory is based upon facts that sociologists conceptualize as data, i.e., verifiable information, gathered under controlled situations and with precisely established rules and guidelines.
2. The disciplines that have contributed to the growth of sociology are political economy, philosophy, psychoanalysis and linguistics, as well as feminism and cultural studies.
3. Comte, Spencer, Marx and Hobhouse are a few of the classical sociologists.
4. The *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* describes a theory as a narrative of the world that holds true beyond what we see and measure. These theories take up complex relationships and explanations that affect our comprehension of the real world in a methodical manner.
5. *Concepts* are particular cognitive tools which are applied to specific categories of social behaviour. These constitute a general agreement within the science for their meaning and composition. Concepts emerge in the development of theory, a process which begins with *observation*.
6. For a sociologist, observation is a specifically controlled task which involves much training and profound sensitivity to nuances of human action. But, over the centuries, it has been concluded that observation is not enough. One must be able to explain to another, *what* has been observed. This explanation is the centre of theoretical endeavour, for when sociologists are dealing with their data, they are dealing with *human experience*.
7. Auguste Comte (1798–1857) was a French philosopher. He was the founder of sociology and the doctrine of positivism. Comte was the first philosopher in science in the actual sense of the term. The early history of sociology has been represented in the works of Comte and Spencer.
8. Functional theory, Conflict theory, Critical theory, Evolutionary theory and Structuralism are some of the social theories.

1.8 QUESTIONS AND EXERCISES

Short-Answer Questions

1. What do you understand by theory?
2. Write a note on social theory.

3. When did social theories develop and how?
4. List the kinds of generalizations used in sociological theory.
5. How does theory contribute to human studies?
6. Write a short note on the philosophy of Herbert Spencer.

Long-Answer Questions

1. 'Concept is the essential component of theory'. Discuss.
2. Explain the functions and characteristic features of sociological theories.
3. Discuss any two sociological theories.

1.9 FURTHER READING/REFERENCES

- Abel, Theodore. 1980. *The Foundations of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat Publications.
- Abraham, Francis M. and John Henry Morgan. 1985. *Sociological Thought*. Chennai: Macmillan India.
- Aron, Raymond. 1965. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*, Vol. I and II. Middlesex: Penguin Books.
- Boguardus, Emory S. 1969. *The Development of Social Theory*. Mumbai: Vakils, Feffa and Simons.
- Ritzer, George. 1988. *Sociological Theory*, Second edition. New York: McGraw-Hill.

References

- Abraham Francis M. and Morgan John Henry. 1985. *Sociological Thought*. Chennai: Macmillan India.
- Bottmore, T.B. 1971. *Sociology: Guide to Problems and Literature*. Mumbai: Blackie and Son.
- Hadden, Richard W. 1997. *Sociological Theory: An Introduction to the Classical Tradition*, Canada: Board View Press.
- Lewis. Coser A. 1996. *Master of Sociological Thought*. Delhi: Rawat Publications.
- Sharma, Ram Nath and Rajendra K. Sharma. 1985. *History of Social Thought*. Mumbai: Media Promoters and Publishers Pvt. Ltd.

NOTES

UNIT 2 AUGUSTE COMTE AND HERBERT SPENCER

*Auguste Comte and
Herbert Spencer*

NOTES

Structure

- 2.0 Introduction
- 2.1 Unit Objectives
- 2.2 Auguste Comte (1798–1857)
 - 2.2.1 Science of Sociology
 - 2.2.2 Law of Human Progress
- 2.3 Hierarchy of Sciences
- 2.4 Social Statics and Dynamics
- 2.5 Herbert Spencer (1820–1903)
- 2.6 Social Evolution
 - 2.6.1 Evolution of State
- 2.7 Organic Analogy
- 2.8 Summary
- 2.9 Key Terms
- 2.10 Answers to ‘Check Your Progress’
- 2.11 Questions and Exercises
- 2.12 Further Reading/References

2.0 INTRODUCTION

Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, the founders of sociological thought, belonged to the genre of classical sociologists. This unit discusses their philosophies and the influences thereof on modern philosophical thought.

2.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Learn about the life and works of Auguste Comte
- Learn about the life and works of Herbert Spencer
- Analyse the science of sociology theory propounded by Comte
- Discuss the law of human progress discussed by Comte
- Elaborate on the hierarchy of sciences proposed by Comte
- Understand social statics and dynamics analysed by Comte
- Know more about the social evolution theory propounded by Spencer
- Critically discuss organic analogy as proposed by Spencer

2.2 AUGUSTE COMTE (1798–1857)

NOTES

Auguste Comte was born in France in 1798 during the height of the French Revolution, a period of chaos and unrest. His parents were devout Catholics and ardent royalists. Comte was a brilliant student excelling in physics and math with an unusual memory. His early career was poorly organized and a rather self-destructive affair in which he proceeded to 'shoot himself in the foot' several times. Along with fourteen others he was expelled from school after a student uprising over a geometry instructor, thus dashing hopes of an otherwise promising academic career.

He did, nonetheless, manage to become secretary to Henri St. Simon, another prominent thinker with whom Comte shared many ideas. He met, and later married, a nineteen-year-old prostitute but had an unhappy married life. He had a falling out with St. Simon and organized on his own a subscription series of lectures on the 'Positive Philosophy'. Comte attempted suicide by throwing himself into the Seine and was rescued by a passer-by. Comte interpreted this Samaritan act as a sign that his mission in life was to complete and disseminate his positive philosophy.

In 1829, Comte completed the series of lectures, and between 1830 and 1842, published his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* in six volumes. In 1832, he managed to achieve a minor appointment at the Ecole Poly-technique, but, in 1844, he wrote a scathing attack on St. Simon and the Ecole and was dismissed. During the same year, two other important events also occurred. Comte obtained a small stipend from the English philosopher, John Stuart Mill, who had been impressed by his *Positive Philosophy*, and he also began an affair with Madame Clotilde de Vaux. In 1846, she died in his arms and Comte was later to credit her with teaching him about the affective tendencies of human nature, a consideration which was to inform his suggestion for a 'religion of humanity'.

In fact, Comte was to see this religion of humanity as part of the practical application of his philosophy as recommended in his works—*The System of Positive Polity or Treatise of Sociology: Instituting the Religion of Humanity*. *Positive Philosophy* was the work in which he outlined his preferred way of knowing the world, and the *Positive Polity* contained his ideas about how to improve society, and how to establish what was, in his view, the best society possible by applying this knowledge.

According to Comte, a stable social order rested on a consistent form of thought. He saw his own thought as leading to the establishment of a more stable, industrial order. He saw this relationship between thought and practice as a natural, rather than a causal one and saw thought as evolving naturally towards the kind of philosophy which he was formulating and recommending. Ways of thinking, of philosophizing, of knowing the world, were, in his view, primary, both in the history of humankind and in his own practice. In other words, Comte believed that people

acted in such a way as to correspond with the way they thought. In different societies or periods of history, furthermore, a person's way of thinking, of knowing their world, was responsible for producing the kind of society in which they lived.

2.2.1 Science of Sociology

According to Comte, sociology is a social, organic science. Sociology is a relatively new, evolving science dependent upon all the foregoing theories in science. However, it is quite clear that sociology is gradually moving towards the goal of a *definite* science. Comte had a very wide conception of sociology. According to him, all other social sciences are subsumed under it. He believed in a unified integral study of all social sciences taken together. He posited that the subject matter of sociology is society. It studies the structure of the society and the set of rules governing its functions.

Since sociology tries to explore the principles which help society to stay integrated and in order, it is essential that the law of sociology should be scientific. In order to make the societal laws scientific, they should pass through the full circle of making of scientific laws, namely *observation, experimentation, comparison* and *classification*. What needs to be emphasized here is the fact that in making these societal laws, use of full scientific technique is necessary.

Comte maintained that the positive science of society called sociology must pursue the method which was followed by definite sciences like astronomy, physics, chemistry, and biology. He insisted that the new science must be *positive*. Positive means pursuing scientific methods of analysis and prognosis. The method of sociology includes observation as well as experimentation. Observation must be guided by a theory of social phenomena. Experimentation is controlled observation. In sociology, experimentation involves the study of pathological cases. According to him, central to sociology is the comparison of different co-existing states of human society on the various parts of the earth's surface. By this method, he argued, the different stages of evolution may be allowed once. These conventional methods of science, like observation, experimentation and comparison, must be used in combination with the historical method.

2.2.2 Law of Human Progress

The law of human progress is Comte's one of the most important central ideas. He proposed that the evolution of the human mind is parallel to the evolution of any individual mind. The development of the individual human organism is termed as ontogeny. This forms the basis for the development of phylogeny or the development of the human race. In our childhood, we all believed in imaginary worlds; when we become adults, we start accepting the world with its vices and virtues. Mankind has also undertaken quite a similar journey; from believing in the make-belief to the maturity of adulthood.

NOTES

NOTES

According to Comte:

Each of our leading conceptions—each branch of our knowledge passes successively through three different theoretical conditions: the Theological or fictitious; Metaphysical or abstract; and the Scientific or positive. In the theological state, human mind, seeking the essential nature of beings, the first and final causes (the origin of purpose) of all effects supposes all phenomena to be produced by the immediate action of supernatural beings. In Metaphysical state the mind supposes abstract forces, veritable entities (that is personified abstractions) capable of producing all phenomena. In the final, the positive state, the mind has given over the vain search after Absolute notions, the origin of destination of the universe, and the causes of phenomena, and applies itself to the study of their laws, that is, their invariable relations of succession and resemblance¹

2.2.2.1 Theological or fictitious state

According to Comteian proposition, all theoretical conceptions, whether general or special, bear a supernatural influence. This kind of thinking is found among the primitive people and sometimes the thinking of children. At this state, there is substantial lack of logical and orderly thinking. However, Comte argues that the primitive man as well as children do have scientific outlook also. Owing to theological state of their minds, their understanding is characterized by an unscientific outlook. The main subject matter of the theological state is natural events. The unusual and unintelligible events of nature tend man towards theological or fictitious interpretation of events. Unable to discover the natural causes of various happenings, the primitive man attributed them to imaginary or divine force. The explanation of natural events in non-natural, divine or imaginary conditions is known as theological or fictitious state. The theological state implies belief in the other world wherein reside divine forces which control the events in this world. It is clear that theological state implies a belief in divine and extraterrestrial forces. Comte has classified the theological state further in three stages:

Fetishism: The first and primary stage in the theological state is that of *fetishism*. Fetishism is a belief that there is some living spirit in non-living objects. This is also known as *animism*. The concept of animism signifies that the inanimate objects are not dead but are possessed by living spirits. One can argue that in India, particularly rural and tribal areas, there is a widespread belief that some deities reside in tree, stones and mountains. Therefore it has been seen that people engage in the worship of a particular tree, stone mountain.

Polytheism: With the gradual development in human thinking, there occurred a change in the form of thinking. *Polytheism* is the next stage to fetishism. In this stage, man had classified god and every natural force had a

¹ Auguste Comte. *System de Politique Positive*, Fourth edition. Vol. 4., Paria.