M.S.O.-1
Sociological Theories and Concepts

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SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES AND CONCEPTS   M.S.O.-1

Time: 3 Hours]   **[Maximum Marks: 100**

*Note : Answer **five** questions in all, selecting at least **two** from each section. All questions carry **equal** marks.*

SECTION-I

Q. 1. What do you understand by 'Objectification of Labour'? Discuss its effect on the production process.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-17, Page No. 88, Q. No. 3.

Q. 2. Compare and contrast Weber's and Schumpeter's perspective on entrepreneurship.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 73, 'Theoretical Background of Entrepreneurship with Special Reference to Max Weber and Joseph Schumpeter's', 'Contribution of Max Weber' and Page No. 74, 'Contribution of Schumpeter'.

Q. 3. Explain the concept of power with reference to the viewpoint of Anthony Giddens.

Ans. Power or domination is often thought to be right and legitimate; however, domination has also been described as a form of repression. In our everyday lives we have to deal with individuals and agencies that attempt to exercise power over us, making us do things which they want us to do. For Anthony Giddens, 'power' is a fundamental concept in the social sciences. By 'power' Giddens means 'transformative capacity', i.e., the ability to make a difference in the world. In Giddens's view, whenever an individual carries out a social action – by which we understand any action with an intention behind it – that individual makes a difference in the world. The consequences of a social action may go against many other individuals' vested interests. We all carry out social actions, so it follows that we all have power. However, the amount of power an individual has is related to 'resources'. Giddens outlines two distinct types of resources. One is allocative resources i.e. control over physical things such as owning a factory. Another is authoritative resources i.e. control over the activities of people. For example, by being high up in an organization like the civil service All social systems are viewed as 'power systems', and usually this means that they are involved in the 'institutional mediation of power'. By this, Giddens means that institutions, such as schools, attempt to control the lives of individual people by the use of rules, which become deeply embedded in our everyday lives. The nation-state, such as France or Britain, a geographical area with recognised borders and a government, is described by Giddens as a 'power container' that has a high concentration of both allocative and authoritative resources. In other words, the state

More specifically, in the narrow sense, power implies dependency upon the agency of others and the capability of an individual to prevail upon them. The thrust is on domination on the part of the individual who may be said to hold power and compliance on the part of others over whom the individual exercises control. This relationship then, may be understood as one of domination. Thus Giddens writes, 'It is in this sense that men have power over others; this is power as domination'. Power, therefore, depends upon the distribution of resources and the capability of individuals to make the most of them effectively. He upholds that in actual situations everyone does have possibilities of exercising power. An individual in a subordinate position is never completely dependent and is often able to convert the available resources 'into some degree of control over the conditions of reproduction of the system'. Giddens opines that power is not always oppressive. In fact, power may best be understood as the capacity to achieve outcomes. In fact, power flows smoothly in processes of social reproduction in the larger matrix of structures of domination. More importantly, despite the fact that constraints of power cannot be ignored, power is often a medium for attaining freedom or emancipation.

Q. 4. 'Social structure refers to the relations between groups.' Discuss.

Ans. Evans-Pritchard carried out a piece of intensive fieldwork with the Nuer of Concept and Theories of Structure of Sudan. In his first monograph on them, he tried to describe Nuer society on a more abstract plane of analysis than was usual at that time because of a lack of a proper theory. Evans-Pritchard looked for such a theory in his work on the Nuer, although many of his ideas that exercised impact on sociology and social anthropology developed later. In his monograph on the Nuer, he first gives an account of the importance of cattle for the life of the people he had studied. The ecological system in which they find themselves conditions their territorial distribution and transhumance. The Nuer concepts of time and space arise largely from their patterns of livelihood. Then, Evans-Pritchard examines the territorial sections which form their political system, in the absence of a centralized political authority. The Nuer are a good example of a stateless (or, acephalous) society. Their discussion has given rise to the concept of segmentary political system, where social order is largely a function of the opposition and balance of different sections of society. Evans-Pritchard's description of the elements of Nuer society and their interrelationship guided him to the concept of social structure. Instead of beginning with the idea of person, as did Radcliffe-Brown, he began with viewing social structure in terms of groups.

According to him, "By social structure we mean relations between groups which have a high degree of consistency and constancy". Structure is an organized combination of groups'. Individuals come and go, they are recruited and eliminated over time, but the groups remain the same, for 'generation after generation of people. The processes of life and death condition individuals, but the structure of society endures. It is clear that for Evans-Pritchard, social structure deals with units which are largely invariant, i.e., groups. What Radcliffe-Brown means by 'structural form' is what Evans-Pritchard means by 'social structure'. The groups considered for describing social structure may be called 'structural groups'. Evans-Pritchard does not consider the family as a 'structural group'. It is because he thinks that the family does not have the kind of consistency and constancy which other groups have. A family disappears at the death of its members and a new family comes into existence. However, it does not imply that the family is less important, for it is 'essential for the preservation of the structure'. New members are born into family, which maintain the system and its continuity. This formulation of structure, Evans-Pritchard clarifies, does not imply that the groups - consistent and constant - that constitute the structure are static. Territorial, lineage and age-set systems do change, but slowly, and 'there is always the same kind of interrelationship between their segments.' Reflecting on the example of the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard says that the tribe is not a haphazard congregation of residential units. Every local group is segmented, and these segments are fused in relation to other groups.

Q. 5. Explain Parsons' theory of social action.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 13, 'Parsons' Action Theory'.

SECTION-II

Q. 6. Critically discuss why modernization process in India did not lead to institutional and structural breakdown.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-29, Page No. 155, Q. No. 2.

Q. 7. Discuss gender as the basis of social stratification.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-27, Page No. 140, 'Gender and Social Stratification in Cross-cultural Perspective'.

Q. 8. Outline Barth's position on ethnic boundary maintenance.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-24, Page No. 124, Q. No. 1.

Q. 9. What is 'Civil Society'? Discuss its role in democracy.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-21, Page No. 108, Q. No. 1 and Q. No. 2.

Q. 10. Discuss how pluralists and elitists differ on their understanding of state and power.

Ans. The pluralist approach to the study of power, states that nothing categorical about power can be assumed in any community. The question then is not who runs a community, but if any group in fact does. To determine this, pluralists study specific outcomes. The reason for this is that they believe human behaviour is governed in large part by inertia. That said, actual involvement in overt activity is a more valid marker of leadership than simply a reputation. Pluralists also believe that there is no one particular issue or point in time at which any group must assert itself to stay true to its own expressed values, but rather that there are a variety of issues and points at which this is possible. Pluralist theory argues that political power is dispersed

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES AND CONCEPTS

Social Theory and its Context

1

INTRODUCTION

The emergence of sociological theories is traced to two great events of Western Europe, namely, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution. These theories are in these particular social contexts. These contexts had a great impact on the emergence of sociology. Thus, the social conditions of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were of the utmost significance to the development of sociology.

The chaos and social disorder that resulted from the series of political revolutions ushered in by the French Revolution in 1789 disturbed many early social theorists. While they recognized that a return to the old order was impossible, they sought to find new sources of order in societies that had been traumatized by dramatic political changes.

The Industrial Revolution was a set of developments that transformed Western societies from largely agricultural to overwhelmingly industrial systems. Peasants left agricultural work for industrial occupations in factories. Within this new system, a few benefitted greatly while the majority worked long hours for low wages. A reaction against the industrial system and capitalism led to the labour movement and other radical movements dedicated to overthrowing the capitalist system. As a result of the Industrial Revolution, large number of people moved to urban settings. The long list of urban problems that attracted the attention of early sociologists.

Socialism emerged as an alternative vision of a worker's paradise in which wealth was equitably distributed. Karl Marx was highly critical of capitalist society in his writings and engaged in political activities to help engineer its fall. Other early theorists recognized the problems of capitalist society but sought change through reform because they feared socialism more than they feared capitalism. The ensuing problems affected social thinkers deeply and Karl Marx, Weber and Durkheim set out to find a solution to these problems.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

PROMINENCE OF SOCIALISM

Socialism emerged as a direct critique of capitalism and was supported by some thinkers while a majority of them were indeed hostile to it. Socialism literally sprang from observing the success of capitalism, while believing that condition for workers could be improved if the control of production were moved from capitalists to the state. A top-down control system, such as that used in large business, was the model for socialist society.

Socialism arose in the early 19th century, and the key figure among sociologists was Karl Marx who was different from armchair social theorists who were against socialism. They wanted to bring an improvement in the capitalist system and streamline its defects, like the creation of alienation among factory workers (masterfully depicted in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*). For them, socialism was in no way an answer or solution to the problem unleashed by capitalism. Marx's socialism was often seen as a counterpoint from which to develop different theories. Due to the industrial revolution people migrated from rural to urban areas. Hence, problems such as overcrowding, pollution, inadequate transport systems, disparities in income, etc. arose. This influence the system also with a plethora of cults coming up and some of these predicted the 'end of the world' in the

last years of the 20th century. Early sociologists tried to emulate the physical and biological sciences for giving prestige and creating popularity to their new discipline.

Context of Social Theory

Apart from the outer context of social theory, the role of ideas in the development of social theory can also be analysed. For example, during Enlightenment a number of new ideas were introduced and replaced existing ideas. In fact, the 17th century philosophy and science were the major moving factors which influenced the thinkers/ intellectuals of France, such as Descartes and Locke. Thinkers of the later period did not reject the grand theories of these thinkers but tried to find ground reality instead in order to give their ideas social relevance. This proved crucial in the development of sociology. But, the liberalism of the Enlightenment was criticized in the form of the 'Counter- Enlightenment'. The early sociology was a product of an interplay between the ideas of the Enlightenment and the 'Counter- Enlightenment'.

For example, the Counter-Enlightenment ideologues, such as De Bonald wanted to return to medieval times where they felt life and living was far harmonious as compared to the Enlightenment period. These writers were against any progressive ideology as they felt that both the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution were forces that destroyed law, order, peace and harmony in society.

INDIVIDUAL *Vs* COLLECTIVITY

As against the ideas of the Enlightenment thinkers emphasising the individual, the thinkers opposed to it wanted to emphasise, the collectivity or the society. These thinkers wanted to show that other than the individual, there was society itself which was viewed as one long flow from past to present and onward to the future. Moreover, there are roles and relationships along with organizations which are its important aspects. The 'wholeness' was vital aspect emphasising showing that parts of a society were interrelated. the conservative thinking did not like the idea of social change which it felt was disruptive and could lead to disorder and chaos in society.

COMTE AND ENLIGHTENMENT

In his famous book, *Sociology*, Comte analyzed and reacted to the Enlightenment and the French revolution. His 'positive philosophy' was an attempt to counter the Enlightenment. His own approach was influenced by various counter-revolutionary ideologues like De Bonald but he ruled out a regression to the medieval period because science had advanced too much.

Comte developed 'social physics' or what he called sociology as a counter to the social anarchy existing in France during his times. He wanted to build sociology on the lines of the rigorous approach of science particularly, physics. Comte's was an evolutionary-law which has three ascending 'stages' which claim universality:

1. **Theological Stage (1300 AD):** Supernatural powers and religious icons are the most important factors influencing the society.
2. **The Metaphysical Stage (1300-1800 AD):** 'Nature' was considered to explain everything about man and society during this period.
3. **The Positivistic Stage (1800 AD):** This was the age of science and the nature and God lost their importance.

Thus, the evolutionary Comte was against violent type of revolutions (Lenzer, 1975).

His work and observations on social structure and social change stressed the relatedness of all the components of a society. He believed in consensus and did not subscribe to the exploitative view of the production processes.

DURKHEIM AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

Durkheim (1858-1917) believed, unlike Comte, that the Enlightenment was not all negative but in fact did have some positive aspects such as emphasis on scientific method. He opposed anarchy and social chaos, and was largely preoccupied with social order. He has many pioneering works to his credit, such as, *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1895) in which he stressed the study of 'social facts.' These social facts are external to and coercive of individuals in society. He demonstrated this approach in his study of *Suicide* (1897). According to Durkheim there are two types of social facts–material (bureaucracy, law) and non-material (social institutions and culture with which Durkheim was preoccupied).

The Division of Labour

According to Durkheim, *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893), binds the society. While early societies had a moral basis for being integrated, which was known as the collective conscience, in the more advanced society the collective conscience is weak and was it is held together through a division of labour. Durkheim suggested social reforms as the solution to the problems inherent the division of labour.

In *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912/1915), Durkheim explained that society itself was the basis for religion itself. This meant that he stood for the status quo. In 1898, Durkheim founded a journal called 'L'annee Sociologique' which promoted his brand of sociology to the other schools and

academics. Hence, Durkheim responded to the context of the French Revolution and rise of industrialisation and helped in establishing sociology as a distinct discipline.

THE MARXIAN IDEOLOGY

In the same span of time, sociology was developing in Germany also. Karl Marx (1818-1883) was deeply influenced by Hegel (1770-1831) but later contradicted him. Hegel stressed upon the 'dialectic' and 'idealism'. Dialectic itself provides a view of the world as well as an 'image' of the world. It stresses the processes including those of conflict. In the same manner, the image of the world is also dynamic. However, Marx accepted the use-value of the processes, he wanted to apply it in the study of economics and not as a concept applied to ideas only. Moreover, Hegel's 'idealism' stressed the mind and ideas, and not the material world. This extreme position was ameliorated by Feurbach. According to Feurbach, it was society that projected God and put him in a hallowed position above them, getting separated/distanced from God himself but nevertheless imbuing God with various uplifting attributes or qualities.

Marx criticized these theories. According to Marx, everything could be reduced to a material base not to mind and its processes. Marx believed that capitalism caused the problems of alienation, polarisation and revolution. The revolution of the proletariat was, thus, the answer to this 'evil'. The work of Ricardo and Smith finalised Marx's approach which pointed out the profit of the capitalist was at the expense or exploitation of the wage labourers. In this manner, the 'surplus value' was the very basis of exploitation and the root of the capitalist system (Marx, 1862).

Marxian Ideology

Within Marx's economic works one can find a sociological theory. Moreover, due to his radical political ideas, ideological leanings and polemical style, his theory has been questioned by conservative thinkers even as he had questioned Hegel and Feurbach.

Marx's sociology attracted many critics. The type of activist orientation that was part of his approach and some other reasons led to an eclipse of Marx's dialectical materialism. However, his ideological aspect was a major area of difficulty for other thinkers and this radical approach was not appreciated by the sociologists who had been bred to hate traces of anarchy in the society, let alone the distubances of the enlightenment or the industrial revolution. Marx tried to fuel a mood of hostility which would lead to a 'polarization' of classes and exploited proletariat would violently dispossess the factories, industries, banks and so on. After which there would be a societal/community

of ownership of means of production and the exploitation of the 'nots' by the 'haves' would come to an end. Thus, Marx stressed the oppressive nature of capitalism.

WEBERIAN IDEOLOGY

Max Weber (1864-1920) was another major German sociologist. Max Weber developed his theories as a counterpoint to Marxian thought. Weber said that Marx had developed a unicausal theory in which every social aspect was driven or propelled by the economic factors giving rise to 'economic determinism'. Weber pointed out that were several other factors or causes which operate simultaneously in a society.

In economic determinism, it was the material that determined ideology but in Weber's works, we find that it is the idea that determine the economy. Weber discovered that the effect of religious ideas had a bearing on economic development. He tried to prove through his studies on Protestantism. Weber also studied other religions than Protestantism, including Hinduism. He believed that the lower rate of economic development in Hinduism was due to a constricting segmentation of society into a large number of castes. However, Weber's ideas regarding Hinduism were not found to true because sociologists in the fifties conducted studies and concluded that Hinduism does not obstruct economic development and that castes adapt to new economic challenges in a positive way.

Weber was also concerned with the process of rationalisation which led to economic development and to the creation and existence of large bureaucracies and social institutions in our society (Weber, 1904). Weber showed how a social actor makes decisions regarding his goals and his decisions themselves were influenced by the existing rules and regulations.

Formal Rationality

Formal rationality was the preoccupation of Weber's discussion of the development of bureaucratization. He pointed out that there are three types of authority in political structures: traditional, charismatic and rational legal systems of authority. Traditional authority derives from the sanctity of belief patterns, like that in monarchy. Rational-legal authority is the basic model of leadership most modern political systems. Most of the system chose their leaders from legal-rational procedures.

THE BRITISH SOCIOLOGISTS

The British sociologists emphasized the statistical presentation with little or no theorizing. They collected field based data and combined these findings into a collective picture. Since the statistically oriented sociologists were also extremely close to the

government, they failed to see any flaw in the overall political and economic systems of their period.

Another basic characteristic in British sociology was the concern for reforming individuals and then keeping them to fulfil larger goals of society. Although they could see the flaws in system but they were very much interested in putting the blame on individual behaviour and attitudes. Their stand was clearly conservative was felt to be necessary to ward off the ogre of Marxian socialism that had gained prominence.

Individual problems of many types were analyzed which included factors like 'alcoholism, 'crime' or 'ignorance'. However, gradually social structure became more prominent particularly in the theories of social evolution. Herbert Spencer was one of the leading figures of this approach. He believed in *laissez faire*. This meant that he wanted social dynamics to be without external interventions and hence did not advocate social reform.

SPENCER'S EVOLUTIONISM

Since Spencer was a 'Social Darwinist', he believed that society would progress by itself. He felt that this evolution should not be interfered with. Spencer supported the idea of 'survival of the fittest' where those people who could adopt to the social and natural environment would live while those could not so adapt had to die (Buttel, 1990).

For Spencer, society as an organism, which had interconnected parts or 'organs' and each had a role or function. Unlike Comte, Spencer's evolutionism was thus the real material world.

Spencer's evolution has at least two-fold. Firstly, the 'size' of society increases so do the various infrastructural and institutional needs. Secondly, differentiation and specialization begin to manifest in giving rise to complexity. Hence, Spencer viewed increase in size from that of a simple to that which is complex or 'compound' society.

Spencer presented yet another scheme where evolution takes place from militant to industrial society. Militant societies are early forms of organisation meant for defense of a society or aggression towards another society. These attitudes were in themselves responsible for increase in the size. However, when industrial societies face war they becomes dysfunctional and their evolution is obstructed. In industrial societies, there is great human interaction and specialization. The state is simply a monitoring agency and its basic function is to maintain law and order in society. According to Spencer, if a society is strongly bonded it will survive or else die out.

SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

Q. 1. Discuss Comte's evolutionary scheme for the progression of society.

Ans. *The Law of Three Stages* is an idea developed by Auguste Comte. It states that society as a whole, and each particular science, develops through three mentally conceived stages: *(i)* the theocratic stage, *(ii)* the metaphysical stage, and *(iii)* the positive stage.

(i) The theocratic stage refers to explanation by personified deities. Comte broke this stage into 3 sub-stages:

A. Animism: Turning everyday objects into items of extreme religious purpose and worship, perhaps with godlike qualities.

B. Polytheism: Explanation of things through the use of many gods.

C. Monotheism: Attributing all to a single, supreme deity.

(ii) The Metaphysical stage refers to explanation by impersonal abstract explanation. Often those who developed metaphysical systems believed they were engaging in scientific activity, but they were not.

(iii) The positivity stage refers to scientific explanation based on observation, experiment, and comparison. Positive explanations rely upon a distinct method, the scientific method, for its justification.

Comte proposed a hierarchy of the sciences based on historical sequence, with areas of knowledge passing through these stages in order of complexity. The simplest and most remote areas of knowledge– mechanical or physical–become scientific first. These are followed by the more complex sciences, those considered closest to us.

The sciences, then, according to Comte's 'law', developed in this order: Mathematics; Astronomy; Physics; Chemistry; Biology; Psychology; Sociology. A science of society is thus the 'Queen Science' in Comte's hierarchy as it would be the most fundamentally complex. Through social science, Comte believed all human social ills could be remedied.

Q. 2. Which were the most important early British sociologists? Give their theories in brief.

Ans. Herbert Spencer was one of the most important early British sociologists. He developed an all-embracing conception of evolution as the progressive development of the physical world, biological organisms, the human mind, and human culture and societies.

Spencer pointed that all structures in the universe develop from a simple, undifferentiated, homogeneity to a complex, differentiated, heterogeneity, while being accompanied by a process of greater integration of the differentiated parts. This evolutionary process could be found at work, Spencer believed, throughout the cosmos. It was a universal law, applying to the stars and the galaxies as much as to biological organisms, and to human social organization as much as to the human mind. It differed from other scientific laws only