
UNIT 12 STRUCTURE AND FUNCTION*

Structure

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12.0 OBJECTIVES

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

- Explain the premises of functionalism;
- Discuss the relevance of the concept of function in understanding society; and
- Compare and contrast the theoretical approach of Radcliffe-brown, Malinowski and parsons.

12.1 INTRODUCTION

Functionalism is the name of an approach in social anthropology and sociology according to which a society is a whole of interconnected parts, where each part contributes to the maintenance of the whole. The task of sociology is to find out the contribution of each part of society and how society works together as an ordered arrangement of parts. At the same time 'function' is a multi-meaning and multi-usage term, Levy, Jr. (1968: 22) writes: 'Perhaps the major difficulty associated with the general concept of function has been the use of a single term to cover several distinctly different referents.'

As a distinct approach, as a way of looking at and analyzing society, functionalism emerged first in social anthropology in early twentieth century, and later in sociology, beginning in the 1930s. However, its roots are as ancient as the concept of organic analogy, used in the philosophy of Antiquity by Plato (B.C. 428/7-345/7) and Aristotle (B.C. 384-322). Some writers regard **Claude Henri de Saint-Simon**, the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century scholar, writing after the French Revolution, as the '**father of sociology**', because in his writings, one finds a coexistence of two ideas- one from which a scientific study of society emerged, and the other which contributed substantially to the growth of Marxian theory (**Giddens** 1973). The first idea is that 'scientific methods' should be used for the study of society, and the second is that each society contains in it the

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germs of its contradiction, because of which it changes over time. Saint-Simon also recognizes revolution as an important process of change.

It is the first thought of studying a society scientifically that Auguste Comte (1789-1857), the collaborator of Saint-Simon and the person who has coined the term ‘sociology’, fully develops under the rubric of what he calls ‘positivism’ or ‘positive philosophy’. In this view, the methods for the study of society come from natural and biological sciences. The aim of the study is to discover the ‘Laws of evolution’ as well as the ‘Laws of functioning’ of society, i.e., ‘how has the society evolved with the passage of time and what are the various stages through which it has passed’ and ‘how does the society function (or work) at a particular point of time.’

In this unit we expose the concept of function in sociological writings. We begin with the basic premises of functionalism and then look into the theoretical contributions of Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski, and Parsons.

12.2 FROM POSITIVISM TO FUNCTIONALISM

The immediate forerunner of functionalism in sociology is Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), who is a sharp critic of Comte as well as influenced by his ideas. Like Comte, Durkheim is keenly interested in defining the subject matter of sociology as distinct from that of philosophy or biology. For him, sociology is a comparative and an objective study of ‘social facts’, which are the ‘ways of thinking, acting and feeling’ that have the ‘noteworthy property’ of existing outside the ‘individual consciousness’. Social facts do not originate in the individual but in the collectivity, in the ‘collective mind’. Because they exist outside the individual, they can be studied in the same way as one studies the material objects. Social facts are ‘things’, perceived objectively and outside the individual. This however does not mean that they are as tangible as are the ‘material things’. Instead, for their study one uses the same frame of mind which one uses for the study of natural and biological objects that constitute the subject matter of natural and biological sciences. Durkheim’s book titled *The Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895) was basically concerned with these issues.

Box 12.1: Sociological Explanations

From the study of social facts, sociologists offer what Durkheim calls ‘sociological explanations’. Each sociological explanation is consisted of two parts: to quote Durkheim (1895: 123) here : ‘...to explain a social phenomenon the efficient cause which produces it and the function it fulfills must be investigated separately,’ the first component of the sociological explanation is the ‘causal-historical explanation’: to delineate the cause(s) which produce a phenomenon by examining historical sources rather than indulging in what Radcliffe-Brown calls ‘conjectural history’. The second component is ‘functional’, i.e., the contribution that a part makes to society ‘in the establishment of ..general harmony’ (Durkheim 1895: 125).

Durkheim’s definition of function has tremendously influenced the writings of later functionalists, both in social anthropology and sociology. For him, function is the ‘contribution’ a part makes to the whole for its ‘maintenance and well being’. Thus, function is a ‘positive contribution’: it is inherently good for society (the whole), for it ensures its continuity and healthy maintenance.

For instance, in his doctoral work, which was on the division of labour, Durkheim (1893) rejects Darwin's idea survival. Instead of lending support to the theory of competition, conflict and elimination, Durkheim shows that as human population increases, society becomes more and more differentiated with the division of labour moving towards the specialization of jobs. Rather than competing with others for survival, human beings are able to depend on one another. Specialization makes each one of the beings important for society.

Durkheim is also critical of the utilitarian (i.e., economic) and individualistic (i.e., psychological) explanations, because according to him none of them actually explains the real function of the division of labour. For him, the function of the division of labour is sociological: it contributes to social solidarity. Modern industrial society is integrated because of the interdependence that comes into existence with the specialization of jobs. In his study of Australian Totemism, he shows that the function of religion is to produce solidarity in society, 'to bind people in a moral community called church' (Durkheim 1915).

Durkheim is particularly interested in showing that the function of social facts is moral. Social institutions work to produce the goal of integration.

With this perspective, he is able to account for such phenomena that to many may appear 'unhealthy' for society. For example, he regards crime as a 'normal' and healthy' feature of all societies, because it reinforces collective sentiments and works towards the evolution of morality and law. A normal rate of crime indicates that the society lacks the total authority to 'suppress' all 'divergences' of the individual to express them as 'individuals'. However, if crime exceeds the normal limits, then it becomes unhealthy (or 'pathological'), jeopardizing the normal functioning of society. As is clear, Durkheim distinguishes between the 'normal' and the 'pathological' forms of social facts. What is general in a society is normal and what is not is pathological. The former performs the function of integrating society, whereas the latter, thwarts the process of integration.

12.3 THE PREMISES OF FUNCTIONALISM

Durkheim is not a 'functionalist' in the sense in which this term has come to be used for the approach that the British social anthropologists, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955) and Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), have espoused. Durkheim does not use the term 'functionalism', although he defines the concept of social function. One comes across in Durkheim's works a fine coexistence of the diachronic (genetic, evolutionary, and historical) and the synchronic (society 'here and now') approaches. For instance, in his celebrated study of religion, he begins with a consideration of Australian Totemism as the most elementary form of religious life, but instead of speculating on origin he is more concerned with the function of totemism and how its study can help us in understanding the place of religion in complex societies. This emphasis on the study of synchronous (or 'present') societies exerted a tremendous impact on later scholars.

The beginning of the twentieth century witnessed the rise of functionalism and disappearance of evolutionary theory. Adam Kuper (1973) thinks that 1922 was the 'year of wonder' (annus mirabilis) of functionalism, for in this year were published two monographs that substantiated the functional approach. One was by Radcliffe-Brown titled *The Andaman Islanders*, and the other, by Malinowski,

titled *Argonauts of the Western Pacific*. The impact of anthropological functionalism was felt in other disciplines, particularly sociology. Sociologists such as Talcott Parsons were clearly impressed with the writings of functional anthropologists. As a result functionalism emerged as an extremely important approach, holding its sway till the late 1960s and the early 1970s. In its history of about 150 years, first in the positivism of Comte, then in the ‘sociologistic positivism’ of Durkheim, and then, in the works of the twentieth-century functionalists, functionalism has come to comprise a number of variants and fact. Pointed differences exist between different functionalists – in fact, some of them happen to be archrivals, like Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. Notwithstanding their differences, it seems that all functionalists share the following five propositions:

- 1) Society (or culture) is a system like any other system, such as solar system, or organic system.
- 2) As a system, society (or culture) consists of parts (like, institutions, groups, role, associations, organisations), which are interconnected, interrelated, and interdependent.
- 3) Each part performs its own function – it makes its own contribution to the whole society (or culture) – and also, it functions in relationship with other parts.
- 4) A change in one part brings about a change in other parts, or at least influences the functioning of other parts, because all the parts are closely connected.
- 5) The entire society or culture – for which we can use the term ‘whole’ is greater than the mere summation of parts. It cannot be reduced to any part, or no part can explain the whole. A society (or culture) has its own identity, its own ‘consciousness’, or in Durkheim’s words, ‘collective consciousness’.

12.4 FUNCTIONALISM IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY: RADCLIFFE-BROWN AND MALINOWSKI

Both the founders of the British functional approach (Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski) were vehemently critical of the nineteenth-century evolutionism. Radcliffe-Brown (1952) said that it was based on ‘conjectural history’, a term we used earlier, and not ‘authentic history’. It was ‘pseudo-historical’, thus devoid of a scientific value. For Malinowski (1944), classical evolutionism was a ‘limbo of conjectural reconstructions’. With the works of these scholars came a shift from:

- 1) Arm-chair anthropology to fieldwork-based studies;
- 2) The study of the origin and stages of evolution of society and to institutions (diachronic studies) to society ‘here and now’ (synchronic studies);
- 3) The study of the entire societies and cultures (macro approach) to the study of particular societies, especially the small-scale societies (micro approach); and
- 4) An understanding of society confined to a theoretical level to putting the knowledge of society ‘here and now’ to practical use, to bring about desired changes in society. It was believed that the knowledge acquired should be

used for improving upon the conditions of people in society. Malinowski called this concern of anthropology ‘practical anthropology’.

The functionalists did not level their criticism against the processes of diffusion and evolution, for they knew that they were important processes of change. In fact, both Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski thought that eventually they would take up the study of these processes. What they were against was a study of the past through ‘imaginative history’ rather than empirical studies. If authentic documents were available about societies, they might be used for some insights into change. But the functionalists noted that these documents were not available about ‘primitive and pre-literate’ societies.

Structural-functional Approach of Radcliffe-Brown

Radcliffe-Brown (1952: 180) defines each society as a ‘functionally interrelated system’ in which ‘general laws or functions operate’. He accepts that Durkheim offered the first systematic formulation of the concept of function and that this concept is based on an ‘analogy between social life and organic life’. However, Radcliffe-Brown suspected that functionalism as used by Durkheim might become teleological. He thus substitutes for the word ‘need’ the term ‘necessary conditions of existence.’ He believes that the question of which conditions are necessary for survival is an empirical one, and the study of a society will tell us about this. Radcliffe-Brown recognizes the ‘diversity of conditions necessary for the survival of different systems.’ Once we have recognized this, we shall avoid asserting that each item of a culture must have a function and that ‘items in different cultures must have the same functions’ (Turner 1987: 48)

Radcliffe-Brown dislikes the use of the word ‘functionalism’, which Malinowski propagated with enthusiasm. His objection is that ‘-isms’ (like functionalism) are ideologies, schools of thought, philosophies, and realms of opinions. Science does not have either of them. What it has are the methods of study, opting for those methods that are regarded as the best for study.

Moreover, Radcliffe-Brown also looks at the distinction between an organism and society. For instance, an organism dies, but a society continues to survive over time, although it may be changed and transformed. An organism can be studied even when its parts have stopped working. In other words, the structure of an organism can be studied separately from its function, which is not the case with society. Social structure is observable only when it functions. Structure and function are inalienable concepts in social-anthropology; that is why Radcliffe-Brown calls his approach ‘structural-functional’, rather than ‘functional’, as many have done. He writes (1952: 180):

The concept of function... involves the notion of a structure consisting of a set of relations amongst unit entities, the continuity of the structure being maintained by a life-process made up of the activities of the constituent units.

Radcliffe-Brown’s structural-functional approach comprises the following assumptions:

- 1) A necessary condition for survival of a society is a minimal integration of its parts.

- 2) The concept of function refers to those processes that maintain the necessary integration or solidarity.
- 3) And, in each society, structural features can be shown to contribute to the maintenance of necessary solidarity.

For Durkheim, the central concept is of solidarity, while for Radcliffe-Brown, it is the 'structural continuity' of society. For example, in an analysis of the lineage system, according to Radcliffe-Brown, one must first assume that some minimal degree of solidarity must exist for it to continue. Then, one must examine the processes associated with the lineage system, assessing their consequences for maintaining social integration. Then, one will move to the other systems of society, analyzing at each level the contribution a part will make to the structural continuity of the whole.

Reflection and Action 12.1

What are the assumptions of Radcliffe-Brown's structural functional approach?

Radcliffe-Brown is far from being dogmatic in his assertions. For him, the functional unity (or integration) of a social system is a hypothesis. That we look for integration and structural continuity of society does not imply that it does not change, Radcliffe-Brown believes that the states of 'social health' (eunomia), and 'social illness' (dysnomia) constitute two ends of the continuum, and the actual society seems to lie somewhere in between.

b) The Functionalism of Malinowski

By comparison to Radcliffe-Brown, it is Malinowski who claims the creation of a separate 'school', the 'Functional School'. Malinowski (1926:132-3) assumes that In every civilization every custom, material object, ideas and belief fulfils some vital function, has some task to accomplish and is indispensable within a working whole.

Whereas Radcliffe-Brown begins with society and its necessary conditions of existence (i.e., integration), Malinowski's starting point is the individual, who has a set of 'basic' (or 'biological') needs that must be satisfied for its survival. It is because of the importance that Malinowski gives the individual that the term 'psychological functionalism' is reserved for him, in comparison to Radcliffe-Brown's approach which is called 'sociological functionalism' because in this society is the key concept.

Malinowski's approach distinguishes between three levels: the biological, the social structural, and the symbolic (Turner 1987: 50-1). Each of these levels has a set of needs that must be satisfied for the survival of the individual. It is on his survival that the survival of larger entities (such as groups, communities, societies) is dependent. Malinowski proposes that these three levels constitutes a hierarchy. At the bottom is placed the biological system, followed next by the social-structural, and finally, by the symbolic system. The way in which needs at one level are fulfilled will affect the way in which they will be fulfilled at the subsequent levels.

The most basic needs are the biological, but this does not imply any kind of reductionism, because each level constitutes its distinct properties and needs, and from the interrelationship of different levels that culture emerges as an integrated whole. Culture is the kernel of Malinowski's approach. It is 'uniquely

human', for it is not found to exist among sub-humans. Comprising all those things- material and non-material- that human beings have made right from the time they separated from their simian ancestors, culture has been the instrument that satisfies the biological needs of human beings. It is a need-serving and need-fulfilling systems. Because of this role of culture is satisfying biological needs that Malinowski's functionalism is also known as 'bio-cultural functionalism.'

One more difference between Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski may be noted here. A concept fundamental to Malinowski – the concept of culture – is a mere epiphenomena (secondary and incidental) for Radcliffe-Brown. He believes that the study of social structure (which for him is an observable entity) encompasses the study of culture; therefore, there is no need to have a separate field to study culture. Further, whilst social structure is the individual peoples, culture is in the minds of people, not amenable to observation in the same way as social structure is. Radcliffe-Brown wants to make social anthropology a branch of natural science, which would be possible when there is an empirically investigable subject matter.

Reflection and Action 12.2

What are the major differences between the theoretical approaches of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski?

The basis of Malinowski's approach is a theory of 'vital sequences', which have a biological foundation and are incorporated into all societies. These sequences number eleven, each composed of an 'impulse', an associated physiological 'act', and a satisfaction which results from that act. For instance, the impulse of somnolence accompanies the act of sleep, resulting in satisfaction by 'awakening with restored energy' (Malinowski 1944: 77; Barnard 2000:68). Malinowski follows this eleven-fold paradigm with a set of seven biological needs and their respective cultural responses (see Table 6.2).

Basic Needs

1. Metabolism
2. Reproduction
3. Bodily comfort
4. Safety
5. Movement
6. Growth
7. Health

Cultural Responses

- Commissariat
- Kinship
- Shelter
- Protection
- Activities
- Training
- Hygiene

For example, the first need is of food, and the cultural mechanisms are centered on the processes of food getting, for which Malinowski uses the term 'commissariat', which means the convoy that transports food. Similarly, the second need is of reproduction (biological continuity of society) and the cultural response to which is kinship concerned with regulating sex and marriage. From this, Malinowski goes on to four-fold sequences, which he calls the 'instrumental imperatives', and associates each one of them with their respective cultural responses. The four-fold sequence is of economy, social control, education, and political organization. From here, he shifts to the symbolic system – of religion, magic, beliefs and values – examining its role in culture.

12.5 FUNCTIONALISM OF TALCOTT PARSONS (1902-1979) AND ROBERT K. MERTON (1910- 2003)

In 1975, in an important article, Parsons labels his student, Robert Merton and himself ‘arch-functionalists’. For him, structure refers to ‘any set of relations among parts of a living system’. On empirical grounds, he says, it can be assumed or shown that these relations are stable over a time period. By process, which is the correlative concept with structure, one refers to the ‘changes’ that occur in the state of the system or its relevant parts. With respect to structure, the key concept is of stability, and with respect to process, it is of change. Thus, by structure, we refer to a pattern of relationships in a social system, and process refers to the changes occurring in that system. A significant characteristic of ‘structural functionalism’ has been that it has stressed ‘structure’ over ‘process’.

Parsons thinks that his original formulation under the rubric of ‘structural functionalism’ tends to analyze society as if it is static, but the new formulation, where stress is laid on the concept of function than structure, in the name of functionalism, takes much more account of change and evolution. For example, one may examine in the American context, the function of the process of education of women on ‘static’ structures like family.

Parsons’ functionalism is best known in terms of the ‘functional imperatives’, the essential conditions required for the enduring existence of a system (Parsons 1951). Also known as the ‘AGIL model’ (based on the first letters of the four functions that Parsons has devised) or the ‘four-function paradigm’, it evolved from Parsons’ collaborative work with Robert F. Bales in experiments on leadership in small groups (Rocher 1974).

All ‘action systems’ – and society is one of them – face four major ‘problems’ (or have four major ‘needs’), namely Adaptation (A), Goal Attainment (G), integration (I), and Pattern Maintenance, or, as Parsons later renamed it, Latent Pattern Maintenance-Tension Management, or simply, Latency (L). Parsons pictures society (or the social system) as a large square, which he divides into four equal parts. The underlying idea is that all systems need to accomplish these four functions in order to survive. The meaning of these four ‘functional imperatives’ is as follows:

- 1) *Adaptation*: By this is meant the problem of securing sufficient resources from the society’s external environment and distributing them throughout the system. Each society needs certain institutions that perform the function of adaptation to the environment-which is an external function. Adaptation provides the means – the instrumental aspects – to achieve goals. Biological organism performs the function of adaptation in the general system of action. In the context of society, economic institution performs this function.
- 2) *Goal Attainment*: this function is concerned with the need of the system to mobilize its resources to attain the goals and to establish priorities among them. It mobilizes motivations of the actors and organizes their efforts. In the general system of action, personality performs this functions, while in case of society this task is given to the political institution, because power

is essential for implementation and decision-making. Goal attainment is concerned with ends – the consummatory aspects. Since goals are delineated in relation with the external environment, it is, like adaptation, an external function.

- 3) *Integration*: It is regarded as the ‘heart’ of the four-function paradigm (Wallace and Wof 1980: 36). By integration is meant the need to coordinate, adjust, and regulate relationships among various actors (or, the units of the system, such as the institutions), so that the system is an ‘ongoing entity’. According to the general theory of action, the social system performs this function, whereas in society, legal institutions and courts are entrusted with this task. Integration is concerned with ends, and the internal aspects of the system.

- 4) *Latency (Pattern Maintenance and Tension Management)*: This function pertains to the issues of providing knowledge and information to the system. In the general theory of action, culture – the repository of knowledge and information – accomplishes this function. Culture does not act because it does not have energy. It lays hidden, supplying actors (who are high in energy) with knowledge and information they require for carrying out action. Because culture exists ‘behind’ the actions of people, it is called ‘latent’. Integration takes care of two things: first, it motivates actors to play their roles in the system and maintain the value patterns; and second, to provide mechanisms for managing internal tensions between different parts and actors. The problem that every society faces is of keeping its value system intact and ensuring that there property transmitted and imbibed. The institutions that carry out this function are family, religion, and education, and education. Latency gives means to achieve ends; it is internal to the system.

AGIL Model

Means (Instrumental)	Ends (Consummatory)
External A Adaptation	Goal attainment G
Internal L Latency (Pattern maintenance and tension-relieving mechanisms)	Integration I

General Level of Action Theory

Organism	Personality
Culture	Social System

AGIL Functions in the Social System

Economy	Polity
Fiduciary System	Societal Community

For the purpose of analysis, Parsons identifies sub-systems corresponding to the AGIL model in all systems and their sub-systems (see Diagram 1). As we have seen, at the general level of action theory, the biological organism performs the function of adaptation, the personality system, the function of goal attainment, the social system integrates different units, and the cultural system is concerned with pattern maintenance. Then, the social system is broken down into the four AGIL functions. We noted earlier that economy performs the function of adaptation, whereas, polity (or political institution), the function of goal attainment. For the sub-system that carries out the function of integration, Parsons uses the term ‘societal community’, which reminds one of Ferdinand Tonnies’s ideas of *gemeinschaft* (‘community’). ‘Societal community’ produces solidarity, unity, cohesiveness, and loyalty to norms, values, and institutions. The function of pattern maintenance, Parsons says, is the task of what he calls the ‘fiduciary system’, which pertains to the nature of a trust or a trusteeship. This system produces and legitimizes moral values, beliefs, and expressive symbols.

Each of the sub-systems of the system can be taken up for analysis by treating it as a ‘system’, and then, breaking it down into four parts looking for its components that respectively perform the functions of adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and latency. This way of analyzing society is known as the systemic approach.

12.6 LET US SUM UP

Parsons’s AGIL model is an ideal type, applicable to differentiated societies than simple societies. It is popularly known as a ‘grand theory’ – an all-encompassing, unified theory – which is believed to have a large explanatory power. Parsons’s student, Robert Merton, is skeptical of such a theory, for it is too general to be of much use (Merton 1957). Instead, he expresses his preference for mid-level (middle-range) theories, which cover certain delimited aspects of social phenomena (such as groups, social mobility, or role conflict). Partially because of this middle-range strategy, Merton’s functionalism is quite different from that of Parsons. For instance, Merton abandons the search for any functional prerequisites that will be valid in all social systems. He also rejects the idea of the earlier functionalists that recurrent social phenomena should be explained in terms of their benefits to society as a whole. For criticism, Merton identifies the three postulates of earlier functionalists given below:

- 1) Postulate of the functional unity of society. It is an assumption that there is unity in society, which comes about because of the contributions that parts make to the whole.
- 2) Postulate of the universal functionalism. It is an assumption that all social or cultural forms have positive functions, which are for the maintenance and well being of society.
- 3) Postulate of indispensability. It is an assumption that the function that a social or cultural form performs is an indispensable precondition for the survival of society.

Merton notes that none of these postulates are empirically justifiable. For instance, there is no reason to suppose that particular institutions are the only ones to fulfill the functions. Empirical research shows that there may be a wide range of

what Merton has termed ‘functional alternatives’ that may be able to perform the same function.

With a critical look, Merton tries to attempt what he calls a ‘codification of functional analysis in sociology’, a functional paradigm (for perspective) (which is not a grand theory) that takes into consideration the actual dimensions of social reality, of conformity and deviance, understanding and explaining them. Like other functionalists, he views society as a system of interconnected parts, where the functioning of a part has implications for the functioning of other parts and the entire system. Like his predecessors, he is interested in the concepts of equilibrium and integration, and the contribution of customs and institutions to the persistence of societies. His definition of function is also in terms of the ‘positive contribution’ of a part to the whole: functions are those contributions or consequences that ‘make for the adaptation or adjustment of a given system.’

While agreeing with other functionalists on certain points stated above, Merton has made a distinct contribution to a set of two typologies, namely, the distinction between ‘function’ and ‘dysfunction’, and between ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ functions. Most functionalists think that all contributions are inherently good or ‘functional’ for society, a proposition Merton finds difficult to accept. He thinks there are acts that have ‘consequences which lessen the adaptation or adjustment of the system’. Such acts have harmful consequences, the technical term for which is ‘dysfunction’. It is, therefore, expected that the sociologist will always ask the following question: ‘For whom are the consequences functional or dysfunctional?’ The same institution can be functional in one context and dysfunctional in another. All social institutions are expected to have some mix of functions and dysfunctions. Whether the institution tilts to the pole of function or dysfunction in a continuum will depend upon the net balance between the functional and dysfunctional consequences.

Box 12.2: Manifest and Latent Function

The distinction between manifest and Latent functions has its roots in the writings of the founders in sociology. In his study of religion, for example, Durkheim (1915) makes a distinction between ‘what people do of which they are aware’ and ‘what emerges from their collective acts which they had not intended and anticipated.’ When people assemble for collective totemic rituals, their explicit aim is to honour their totem, but what these rituals produce is a sense of we-ness, which is an unintended, unrecognized, and unanticipated consequence. Following this, one can say that manifest functions are those consequences people observe or expect, while latent functions are those consequences that are neither recognized nor intended.

Merton was able to advance four types of explanations in terms of the two dichotomies (function and dysfunction; manifest and latent functions). The earlier functionalists put forth only one explanation and that too with respect to latent functions. Merton’s conceptual scheme guided empirical research, rather than remaining a theory with several explanatory claims, like the ‘grand theory’ of Parsons.

12.7 CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) What are the assumptions of Radcliffe-Brown's structural functional approach?
- 2) What are the major differences between the theoretical approaches of Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski?
- 3) Examine Parsons' model of AGIL.

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