

Evans-Pritchard developed a notion of social structure which was basically concerned with the persistent, permanent groups in society like the family, the tribe and the nation. He brought home the realisation that the social anthropologist need not stop at observation of the actual interactions between persons to arrive at conclusions about the social structure. One needs to go to higher levels of abstraction. In his study, the Nuer (1940), he demonstrated the 'segmentary' structure of Nuer society in which different groups were mutually united and opposed at various levels of the social structure. In this fashion, he brought in a higher level of abstraction to the understanding of social structure. It was in fact Evans Pritchard who rejected 'structural-functionalism' and brought pure 'structuralism' into the discipline.

Another development was the work of the French 'structuralist' Claude Levi-Strauss. Borrowing heavily from linguistics, Levi-Strauss took the notion of 'social structure' to the highest level of abstraction. He distinguished between the 'structure' and 'social relation' and constructed models, which were basically analytical constructs against which actual social relations could be compared and contrasted. Levi-Strauss's studies of kinship and mythology became extremely influential.

In a nutshell, Malinowskian functionalism was refined into 'structural-functionalism' by Radcliffe-Brown. Following his lead, Evans-Pritchard introduced a greater level of abstraction in his theoretical framework and developed 'structuralism'. In France, 'structuralism' was given a new dimension with the work of Levi-Strauss. Sociology today may be said to be in the 'post-structuralist phase'. Many scholars have borrowed extensively from diverse disciplines like literature, linguistics, mathematics etc. resulting in exciting theoretical developments. It is not within the scope of this course to bring to you these developments, you may learn about them at the M.A level.

This brief resume of post-Radcliffe-Brownian developments may have conveyed the impression that functionalism died with Malinowski. This is certainly not the case, as functionalism continued to thrive. To this day it remains an important theory in sociology. The work of Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton is important in this regard. Block 7 will bring their contributions to you.

26.6 LET US SUMUP

In this unit we assessed the contributions of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. First, we gave critique of Malinowski's achievements. Then we discussed in a little more detail Radcliffe-Brown's scholarship as both a fieldworker and a theoretician. We reviewed anthropological research under the direct and indirect guidance of both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown. The unit ended with a brief account of subsequent developments in sociological theory.

26.7 KEY WORDS

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Abstraction | It expresses a quality apart from an object and refers to the intrinsic form with no attempt at concrete representation. In the context of this unit, the term has been used to express the theoretical ideas as opposed to descriptive accounts of human behaviour |
| Aborigines | The original inhabitants of a place. The tribal people in Australia are generally known as aborigines |
| Monograph | A written account of a single theme |
| Sanskritisation | It is a concept, given by M.N. Srinivas, who writes, “Sanskritisation is a process by which a low Hindu caste or tribe or other group changes its customs, ritual, ideology and way of life in the direction of a high, and frequently twice-born caste”. |
| Synchronic | It concerns with the set of events existing in a contemporary time frame, without referring to historical events |

26.8 FURTHER READING

Mair, Lucy, 1984. *An Introduction to Social Anthropology*. Oxford University Press: New Delhi

26.9 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Malinowski cannot be described an evolutionist because he became obsessed with empirical reality. Though he remained an evolutionist at heart, in practice he was moving away from the evolutionist’s love for speculations about human culture.
- ii) In catch-all accounts of social phenomena, it is not possible to find systematic and logical correlation between different aspects of a culture. But as systematic, ethnography is always based on data from a particular society, it is possible to relate all aspects of that culture in an integrated whole.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Radcliffe-Brown maintained a certain aloofness and distance from the people he studied. Hence his fieldwork is sometimes dull, lifeless and sterile. Malinowski, on the other hand tried to fully involve himself with his subjects, resulting in lively and richly detailed field-work.

- ii) Malinowski speaks of function primarily in terms of physiological and psychological needs. Radcliffe-Brown, on the other hand, speaks of the needs of society or its necessary conditions of existence.

**A Critique of Malinowski
and Radcliffe-Brown**

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Meticulously prepared ethnography
- ii) a) e
b) a
c) d
d) b
e) c



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