

Merton focus, there is much commonality of approach. Both sociologists explain changes within the social system as arising out of “strain” or pressure on members of groups in society to constantly relocate their roles and statuses. Role and status mobility arises out of tension of redefinition of aspirations, which Merton called “anticipatory socialisation”. According to Parsons strain arises because of conflicting motivational orientations in the context of a plurality of interests. Thus essentially both Parsons and Merton share a common view of why there is a continual tendency in social systems or social structures for internal differentiation and social change. Parsons, however, also brings in the forces of social movement and mobilisation of interest groups to bear upon the processes of social change. He in addition attempts to advance a general evolutionary direction of social change through a set of stages of transformation as you studied in Unit 28. Merton has largely ignored such aspects in his study of social change

Check Your Progress 2

i) Discuss the main similarities and differences between Parsons and Merton in their study of social system and social structure Use about seven lines

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ii) Fill in the blanks

- a) According to Merton constructing too general and abstract theories neither has clearly defined sets of hypotheses nor the tools for their verification
- b) He feels that testing a single hypothesis does not lead to of theory in sociology
- c) Tools of logical classification called are necessary steps in constructing theories of the middle range, according to Merton
- d) Parsons favours a rigorous method of classification of concepts, such as his concept of
- e) Parsons’ general and abstract theory is best illustrated by his general theory of
- f) Unlike Merton, Parsons has also discussed changes of social systems through his universals

31.3 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have read the critique of Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton on such selected themes as

- i) their perspective on sociology
- ii) their functional approach
- iii) their understanding of the concept of social system and social structure and finally
- iv) their sociological theory and social change.

Both Parsons and Merton considered sociology to be a scientific discipline. But both of them had a different vision of sociology. Parsons' approach is much more universal and general than Merton's is. Merton's approach is much more empirical and application oriented than Parsons' formulations. In their functional analysis too they had a lot of similarity. Yet, Merton's approach is time and space bound while Parsons' is universal and can be applied to any social system at any point of time.

In this unit you have learnt about the common ways in which both Parsons and Merton have studied social systems and social structure. Both studied concepts of role, status, social structure, etc. However, Parsons gives a general abstract theory while Merton provides a theory of the "middle range". Finally, both of them have a theory of social change. Parsons described social change within the social system as well as change of social systems. Merton however, has given theory of social change within the system and has largely ignored the changes of social systems

31.4 KEYWORDS

Ahistorical	It refers to any aspect of knowledge, which is not rooted in time or place and therefore has no history.
Diagnostic	The process of deciding the nature of a diseased condition by examining the symptoms. In this context the reference is made to social diseases or problems.
Hypothesis	A theory or a proposition, which is tentatively accepted to explain certain facts and which is not yet verified.
Methodology	It refers to the study of methods, such as the tools and techniques of conducting research in sociology.
Positivism	A term originally used by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) refers to two facts. First that it takes natural sciences, such as Physics, Chemistry, Biology etc. as the paradigm of human knowledge. Second that it involves taking a particular view of natural sciences.
Vision	It refers to the mental image that Parsons and Merton had of sociology, which includes their perspective on sociology and also what they expected from it.

31.5 FURTHER READING

Hamilton, Peter, 1983. *Talcott Parsons*. Routledge: London and New York

Turner, J.H., 1987. *The Structure of Sociological Theory*. Rawat Publications, 4th Edition Jaipur

31.6 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i)
 - a) scientific
 - b) positivism
 - c) universal, general, specific
 - d) antagonism
- ii) In both Parsons and Merton functionalism assumes that there is similarity between a biological system and social system. But while Merton deals with functionalism in a more specific way, which is both time and space bound or rooted in empirical reality Parsons' functionalism is highly abstract and general. For instance, his functional prerequisites of a social system, namely, Adaptation, goal-orientation, integration and latency are not time and place bound. They are found in all social systems at all points of time.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Parsons' and Merton's concepts of social system and social structure have certain similarities. They both use concepts like role, status, groups etc. and considered psychological factors in their analysis of social behaviour. For example, Parsons used "motivational orientations" and Merton used "anticipatory socialisation". However, they differ in their approach to the study of social system and social structure. Parsons is general and highly abstract, while Merton is modest and specific in the development of his theory.
- ii)
 - a) empirical
 - b) verification
 - c) paradigm
 - d) logical, pattern-variables
 - e) action
 - f) evolutionary

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