

Unit 3

Theory and Paradigm

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Learning Objectives

After having studied this unit you should be able

- discuss the meaning of theory
- compare the contributions of Marx Durkheim and Weber to social theory
- describe classical and contemporary theories.

3.1 Introduction

In simple words theory refers to the explanation of general principles of an art or science which is constructed with practice. It is true that on the basis of practice we derive certain rules and at times we are able to separate these rules from whatever we have seen in practice. Thus we begin to differentiate between theory and practice. Theory is generally helpful in explaining practice, theory refers to the much higher level of abstraction whereas practice to the empirical situation. If we look at the relationship between theory and practice then broadly speaking there emerge two possibilities like: (i) theory and practice might be seen as quite distinct from each other and (ii) theory and practice might be conceived as complementary to each other. According to the first point of view it seems necessary to make a distinction between theory and practice. Thus we come across the statements like it is a very good idea in theory but in practice it just might not work. According to this point of view theory and practice are two quite different things. According to the second point of view it appears that theory and practice are not two different things but can help in understanding each other. From our point of view although it is important to understand the difference between theory and practice, but there is a need to see the relationship between the two. In fact both theory and practice constitute a whole which could well be examined in its own right. However, all this concerns with the general understanding of the term theory, which is often contrasted with practice. But in the area of logic and philosophy the term theory has been treated in a slightly different way. Accordingly, theory refers to a set of interrelated propositions. Proposition refers to the statement which could be proved either true or false. Here the emphasis should be given to the nature of the statement itself which bears the quality of being

proved true or false. In our daily life — experiences we come across such statements which could neither be proved true nor false. Such statements are to be kept out of the preview of proposition as well as theory. In the process of theory-building it seems necessary to formulate propositions carefully. Hence the proposition must be formulated in such a way so that it bears the quality of being falsified. Such an approach is very much helpful in formulating not only sociological theories but also reflects its required scientific status. The basic quality of scientific research is that it progresses forward through the process of falsification, it means that in the light of new data, the existing theories are tested again and again. Till these existing theories are found capable of explaining the data, they don't face any kind of challenge to them. But if these theories fail to explain the new data, they begin to be questioned. The community of scientists is busy in continuously examining these existing theories in the light of the new data. The moment these existing theories fail to explain the new data, these theories are put under a question mark and sometimes these theories can be rejected — also paving the way for new theories to take their place. Rejection of the existing theories is known as 'falsification' and scientific research proceeds ahead through this process. Here we would like to return back to our original question concerning the structure of theory itself. As discussed earlier any theory is composed of a certain number of interrelated propositions. These propositions normally display the conditions that they could be falsified and this very condition of propositions bring them on the track of scientific research. Thus before constructing any proposition we must ensure that it fulfills the conditions of falsifiability so that it could be accommodated well in theory. After this we shall try to understand the nature, meaning and types of sociological theories.

3.2 Sociological Theories

Broadly speaking, the discussion on the nature, meaning and types of sociological theories could be divided into five parts. In the first part we shall try to understand the nature and meaning of the sociological theories during its classical age or period. Considerable amount of work was done by the pioneers of sociology during this period to establish the credentials of the discipline. Sociology could well emerge as a separate discipline only due to the great efforts made by prominent scholars in its classical age. Next, in the second part we shall discuss about the nature and types of contemporary sociological theory. In fact, this period reflects to the time when the subject sociology could come out of its classical period both chronologically as well as conceptually. During this period certain important advances were made in sociology and some of the shortcomings of the classical period were also addressed to. In the third part there is a discussion on the recent advances made in sociological theories. Here we come to see of sociology not only emerging as a new discipline but also maturing as a subject. During this period sociology got established as an important mature and independent subject having its own identity. Next, in the fourth section, we shall come to know about theories and perspectives in sociology that characterise the subject with some new efforts and rigour and here we shall see how several doubts over the nature and types of sociological theories were clarified. After this, in the fifth part we shall examine how certain challenges were put forward before the sociological theory and how it responded to such problems and challenges. But one point can be added here that although sociological theory as it exists today has been able to overcome many obstacles and problems in its own way, but nevertheless this has never been an easy task to do so.

3.3 Classical Sociological Theories

The period of classical sociology belongs to the era when sociology emerged as a new discipline with the one central assertion that the scientific study of society is possible. Prior to that period philosophers, intellectuals as well as layman thought of and conceived of society in their own ways but the science of society could not emerge out. Philosophers' reflections, literary romanticism and criticism and people's own individual conceptions about society had been the characteristics of the era prior to the emergence of sociology. Although intellectuals belonging to different streams of thought as well as common people have had reflected upon the nature of society but their efforts were primarily individual efforts. On the other hand society had existed for a longer duration which displayed its own internal statics and dynamics. How does society behave as an entity in itself? How can it be studied scientifically? Can it be done? If yes then how? All such questions dominated the earlier era in the development of sociological theory. This era belongs to what is today known as classical sociological theory. The following discussion refers to the same.

The term sociology was coined by Auguste Comte (1798-1857) a French sociologist and philosopher. He is also known as father of sociology. Although he has made some significant contributions to the subject – a part of which shall be discussed here too, but the most creditable work done by him related to his efforts in establishing sociology as a scientific as well as an independent discipline. Before him instead of sociology, we rather had philosophy, literature and art through which reflections on society were used to be made. Thus, in other words how society could be conceived of philosophically, literally or through art had been the only available ways and tools to reflect upon society. The modern method of scientific-analysis of society as suggested by Auguste Comte was not just available before him. Therefore, the contributions of Auguste Comte must be seen as the pathbreaking ones helping to establish sociology as a new and independent discipline in its own right. Auguste Comte, in short discussed at length, of course philosophically to argue that the scientific study of society is possible and when such efforts succeeded the new subject would be known as sociology. What we must realise at the moment is the simple fact that this had never been an easy task. After establishing sociology as a new and independent scientific discipline, Auguste Comte had made some of his own contributions to it. Auguste Comte's own contributions to the subject sociology are referred to, although briefly, in the following discussion.

3.4 Law of Three Stages

Having established sociology as a separate and independent discipline, Auguste Comte divided sociology into two parts known as social statistics and social dynamics, former dealing with the questions of equilibrium in society and latter with the problems of change in society. Auguste Comte has also referred to hierarchy of sciences like : astronomy, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology and sociology. He was of the opinion that sociology can't be reduced to other sciences be it mathematics (especially statistics), biology or political economy. Auguste Comte has also talked about the law of three stages namely theological, metaphysical and scientific. According to him, every society passes through these three stages. In the theological stages all the explanations concerning the events happening in nature were attributed to God who was supposed to be in full command of the situation. The second

state i.e. metaphysical refers to the transitional stage where neither as the events taking place in nature were considered neither as a supernatural act nor as based upon scientific explanations. This sort of transitional stage existed somewhere around fourteenth century. The third stage is known as scientific stage, where neither theological nor metaphysical sort of explanations about society are considered sufficient. In the scientific stage of society the explanations are examined rigorously and no explanation is considered as a final one. Each explanation is considered as valid explanation only for the time being until a better explanation arrives on the scene. Auguste Comte believed that scientific methods could be applied for the study of society as well. The assertions like that one although look simple but it actually contains an important philosophy, widely known as positivism. It was the philosophy of positivism which dominated the academic scene not only in France but over the entire Europe. In fact the name of Auguste Comte has been associated with the philosophy in such a way that it is sometimes considered as the only important contribution that he had made as it cut across the geographical boundaries of France and the academic limits of the discipline of sociology. The scholars from some other disciplines have commented widely on the notion of positivism. Auguste Comte suggested that his scientific method for the study of society would be based upon comparison, observation and experiment. Auguste Comte has explained these and allied concepts in detail, but in short it could be said that he was able to establish sociology as a new scientific as well as an independent subject. Although it was Auguste Comte who had made the earlier but essential beginnings, it was Emile Durkheim who carried forward the fate of sociology by providing it new strides. His contribution to sociological theories is discussed next.

Box 3.1: Durkheimian Approach

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), a prominent sociologist from France continued with the tradition of positivism established by his predecessor fellow countryman and sociologist Auguste Comte. In a sense we can say that Emile Durkheim continued from where Auguste Comte had left. Durkheim was still grappling with the questions like whether it was possible to apply the laws of natural sciences for the scientific study of society or not and his answer to this question was surely in the affirmative. Emile Durkheim went ahead and virtually demonstrated how could it actually be done. He elaborated his sociological approach in his book, *The Rules of Sociological Method*.

Although his book deals with some of the complicated details regarding what according to him would be the sociological approach in future, but one illustration might be given here, Durkheim's method of social analysis emphasises on the study of what he calls it, 'social facts'. His discussion on social facts not only clarifies his methodological as well as theoretical formulations but also helps in establishing sociology as a new, important and independent scientific discipline. In fact we can say that the first serious sociological formulation in the history of the subject begins with Durkheim's detailed treatment of the idea of 'social fact'. His other formulations like the division of labour in society, the study of suicide, the notion of elementary forms of religious life and views on education and sociology are all concerned with the formulations built around social facts. We shall briefly attempt to understand some of the issues related to the notion and methodology concerned with the formulation of social facts. According to Durkheim, "social facts are ways of feeling, thinking and acting commonly spread among the

people, external to individual and exercising a constraint upon him". This quite compact notion might appear difficult to understand and comprehend. But we shall attempt to explain some of the complex issues related with it. These social facts are different from facts concerning us at the individual or the psychological level. Additionally, Durkheim has also clarified that these social facts are 'external' and exercise constraints upon individuals. According to him we can identify these social facts when we attempt to go against them. Some of the social facts identified by Durkheim himself in his various research works are like: rate of crime, rate of suicide, division of labour in society and religion. How to use these social facts for the purpose of social-analysis? In this context Durkheim has given two clues: one, he suggests that social facts should be treated as 'things' and two, one social fact must be explained with another social fact preceding it. In this, way Durkheim has tried to achieve mainly two objectives : one, to ensure that sociology virtually becomes a scientific discipline and two, to take care that sociology remains as an irreducible subject and doesn't split into several parts belonging to other subjects. Durkheim has also referred to 'normal' and 'pathological' aspects of society in this context. Durkheim's approach regarding how to deal with various theoretical and methodological issues could be seen in his book. *The Rules of Sociological Method* in detail. After understanding the theoretical contributions of Emile Durkheim, we shall try to explain the efforts of yet another pioneering scholar Karl Marx.

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a philosopher, social scientist as well as a sociologist from Germany. The academic scholarship of Karl Marx is widely known throughout the world. Although Marx attempted to solve several academic problems, he never claimed to be a sociologist. What is today known as the Marxist sociology is based upon his various formulations that are basically sociological in nature. In other words, we have to find out or make out the sociological contents from his writings. This additional task has been done by the sociologists at later stages. Marx's theoretical formulations that were basic for him and useful for sociologists are referred here. Some of the basic formulations of Marx include : historical materialism, classes and class-struggles, theory of surplus value and alienation. Marx's formulations provided a departure from the earlier discussed engagements for sociological analysis. Marx's theory was also used as a political ideology by various Leftist political parties of the world and a sizable part of the world had been under the rule of the communist parties of the world till recently. In and around 1989 several political – systems in different countries belonging to the 'Second World' collapsed at the end of the cold war period between the two then existing superpower countries. All such countries had practiced Marx's theoretical formulations as their political guidelines.

Marx's theoretical formulations reflect a departure from the ones by the previously discussed authors by exhibiting one major point. Marx's method includes the principles of 'dialectics' which was not discussed by any of the sociologist earlier. As in principle the use of the notion of dialectics was not an entirely a new discovery by Marx, it was used earlier by his fellow countryman G.W.F. Hegel. What was significant and new in Marx's theoretical formulation was materialistic interpretation of society with the help of dialectical method. As in the case of Hegel, he saw the progress of society through idealism, achieved through dialectics, in the case of Marx the progress of society was possible through materialistic dialectics. Another significant departure in the writings of Marx was his emphasis on the historical method. When the principle of dialectics was applied for the study of history, it was

called historical materialism. Materialistic interpretation of society mainly includes the social situation, which helps in shaping-up the ideas of people. At some places the notion of historical materialism has been used interchangeably with that of dialectical materialism. Marx's emphasis on history and dialectics was also related to his formulations on classes and class-struggles. Karl Marx along with his academic collaborator and lifelong friend, Friedrich Engels, had clarified that all the known periods of history upto present time could be seen as having class-struggles. For example, according to Marx and Engels in the slave society we have classes like masters and slaves, in the feudal society there are feudal lords and serfs and in the capitalist society we have capitalists and workers. These are the main classes struggling against each other for the sake of ownership and control over means of production.

Box 3.2: Working Class

Marx and Engels could however, foresee the victory of the working class which was struggling against the capitalist class. There are several other issues that are discussed by Marx and Engels especially in the context of capitalist society like exploitation, theory of surplus-value, alienation and the revolutionary potential of the working class. With the victory of the working class Marx and Engels could foresee the emergence of the socialist society, which would be the society without any class and finally coming of the communist society. In the writings of Marx we can see a lot of clarity of thought, new interpretations about society, progressive ideology and a call for the emancipation of people in general. Although Marx has written extensively, his ideas have been coherent as well as precise. The importance of his ideas and its application has been important to such an extent that almost no sociological interpretation of the existing reality was considered complete until and unless it has examined the phenomenon from the Marxist perspective.

After understanding the theoretical formulations of Karl Marx, we shall try to know about the contributions of yet another scholar namely Max Weber.

3.6 Weberian Ideology

Max Weber (1864-1920) was a prominent sociologist from Germany who belonged to the era of classical period in sociology. Max Weber is known in sociology for his brilliant writings on a variety of topics. Max Weber gave a new direction to sociology to which he offered, different as well as new ways of thinking and research. His ways of thinking and analysis were different from Auguste Comte or Emile Durkheim. In our opinion Max Weber presented his ideas which were basically concerned with the German sort of understanding but still reflecting the European and the Western flavour. Max Weber has written on a variety of topics from social action to bureaucracy and also contributed in the vital areas like methodology of social sciences. Although Max Weber attempted to define sociology in his own terms and ways, certain formulations made by him like *Verstehen* still require clarifications. Sociologists are still struggling with the idea of how exactly to proceed on the lines of thought developed by Max Weber.

Reflection and Action 3.1

Outline the ideologies of Marx and Weber. What are the commonalities in these sociologists.

How to go for experimentation with some of the formulations developed by Max Weber like social action, Verstehen or phenomenology? It still remains an area where much remains to be understood and subsequently done. However, some success has been achieved for example around the conceptions like bureaucracy. Max Weber's concepts of course carry higher values in terms of its theoretical contents, but its actual operationalisation has largely remained a problematic area. Max Weber for example defined sociology as an interpretative understanding of social action. Max Weber continued to speak of social as having two qualities: one, while doing such an action, the actor must take into account the presence of another actor and wholly or partially be guided by it and two, the actor must attach a subjective meaning to it. Max Weber has also written about the subjectivity versus objectivity issues in social sciences. His ideas about the importance of Verstehen and ideal-types are brilliant and excellent in terms of its theoretical value and rigor. But how to make them operational at the practical and empirical level still remains a problematic area. On the one hand the subject sociology has been widely enriched by the writings at the theoretical level but otherwise not much has been achieved at the experimental level as Max Weber during his own lifetime worked on different topics without clarifying much on the topics on which he himself had worked earlier. However, Max Weber's formulations on the Protestant ethics and its relationship with the rise of capitalism are widely accepted and acclaimed. Max Weber was able to demonstrate in his study that there was a positive relationship between the Protestant ethics and the development of capitalism. We must ensure making before any sort of a sweeping generalisation that Max Weber had presented it as a unique case in the context of Western Europe only. In spite of his brilliant ideas, Max Weber's work has to some extent remained unexposed due to various reasons. But in spite of all this there is no doubt that Max Weber's formulations have contributed to a large scale in the area of developing sociological theories. Thus after examining the theoretical contributions of some of the classical authors like Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx and Max Weber, here we come to the end of the contributions made by these scholars in the classical era of the development of sociology. After this we shall attempt to see the contributions made by the sociologists in the contemporary period.

The contemporary period of modern sociological theories could be seen as an important departure from its classical period. During the classical period the central question has been to establish sociology as an independent discipline but during the contemporary period the main concern has been not only to come out of that classical image, but also to carry on the subject further. During this contemporary period the scholars tried to learn from some of the previous shortcomings in the works of the scholars who did some researches after Durkheim, Weber and Marx. During this period, learning from the mistakes of the immediate past, taking the inspirations from the works of the classical sociologists and rebuilding the subject have been the main concerns. In this context, it seems relevant to mention the names of two important sociologists who have made their significant contributions. Their works have also been accepted and recognized as important ones after the classical period. These two scholars are Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton. Although the works of these scholars from the U.S.A. have been accepted internationally, but here only some of their important contributions are being discussed.

3.7 Parson's Action Theory

Talcott Parsons (1902-1979) was an important sociologist from U.S.A. who had contributed on the theory of social action, discussed about the action frame of reference and social-system and lately on evolution. His contribution on what he calls it AGIL – Paradigm and Pattern-Variable Scheme are also well known. We shall discuss about them briefly. Talcott Parsons had the advantage of reviewing several scholars from classical sociology and some other social scientists as well. He believed that he could present an integrated theoretical point of view where all the formulations of previous social scientists would lead to. His theoretical constructions, later integrated the points of view of psychologists like Sigmund Freud, economists like Alfred Marshal and sociologists like Vilfredo Pareto, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber to name a few. He also believed that all the contributions made by various social scientists lead in one direction to arrive at or rather converge at one single notion of what he calls it 'social action'. Parsons also wanted to understand how social and cultural values are internalised into personality system. In his later work *The Social System* (1951), Parsons said that the three essential components of action are 'personality system', 'social system' and 'cultural system', although each one being a part of action, but none being reducible to the other. In yet another work, *Working Papers in the Theory of Action* (1953), Talcott Parsons alongwith his colleagues like Robert Bales and Edward Shills has explained about what he calls it the 'AGIL Paradigm'. Accordingly, A refers to Adaptation, G to Goal – Attainment, I to Integration and L to Latency. Thus AGIL – Paradigm developed by Parsons provided him much higher respect as he ascended towards formulation of sociological theories at a much higher level. His another important theoretical formulation has been what he called it, the "Pattern Variable Scheme". It suggests that either an individual or community as an actor has important choices to make against two polar opposite categories. For example, whether an individual or community in general promote ascription or achievement, alternatively universalism or particularism. Talcott Parsons has referred to five sets of such alternative choices. Additionally, within these five sets of choices, some permutations and combinations could also be made out. For example, from the earlier referred choices mentioned here, it could be ascertained whether the choices made are for universalist achievement or alternatively particularistic ascription sort of orientations. A detailed discussion on these issues could be seen in his book *The Social System* (1951). As stated earlier Talcott Parson has also written on medical profession and theories of evolutionism. In general the theories of Parsons are also seen as his contribution to developing the theories of functionalism. But regarding the theories developed by him, several scholars from the Western societies as well as from elsewhere have expressed the opinion that his formulations are difficult to understand and there is a need to present it all in the simpler form. There is another criticism which is associated with his work. It has been stated by several scholars that the works of Talcott Parsons are too much theoretical in nature, sometime they appear as 'grand theories' and generally have very little to do with the existing life of today or with the empirical reality. Agreeing with all such criticisms that it is true that Parsons theoretical formulations might appear difficult to comprehend, might not refer to the empirical material but nonetheless, they could be considered as important contributions. In the views of the preset author, such theoretical formulations are required in sociology and the learners of sociology must attempt to comprehend such rigorous material. Talcott Parsons himself clarified that his works had remained concerned with the tasks of providing theoretical schemes only. According

to him then it remained the task of some other scholars/sociologists to verify and test his theories. But in order for sociology to grow as a subject, it was necessary to strike a balance between theoretical formulations and factual informations. Another sociologist namely Robert K. Merton has tried to move exactly in that direction. His contributions to sociological theory are discussed in what follows.

Box 3.3: Mertons Contributions

Robert K. Merton (1910-), another prominent sociologist from the U.S.A. has tried to strike a reasonable balance between theory and fact. He was somehow convinced that neither theory nor facts alone would suffice to move in the desired direction. Basically, he argued to develop research methodology in such a way as it not only included a meaningful balance between theory and fact but also attempted to improve the quality of both. For example, on the one hand Merton never accepted the formulations of his predecessor sociologists as such and on numerous occasions he has tried to make corrections in the writings of various scholars including Radcliffe - Brown and Malinowski. Robert K. Merton, who attempted to rebuild and reformulate "functional theory" has identified several mistakes committed unknowingly by earlier scholars and later he attempted to reconstruct functional theory.

Robert K. Merton firmly believed that the whole of functional theory could not be abandoned or discarded because some of the mistakes were committed by some of the contributors to it at the earlier stages. His approach was to learn from the mistakes, identify them, try to remove them and make functional theory as a viable approach for research investigations in sociology. Regarding social research he explained it as an interplay between theory and facts. Merton's views on social research could be found in his book, *Social Theory and Social Structure* (1968). his views on the functional theory could also be seen in the same book. While reconstructing functional theory, Merton has referred to three postulates one, the postulate of functional unity of society; two, the postulate of universal functionalism and three, the postulate of indispensability. He later suggested that such postulates which once upon a time guided the works of some earlier sociologists were no longer necessary. Additionally, Merton has explained about what he calls it, "Middle Range Theories" and its necessities in the contemporary period. Merton has also clarified in detail about what he calls it "Reference Group Theory". In this way we could see that in his own way, Robert K. Merton tried to build-up the much required ground and created the environment for the development of sociology as a scientific discipline. From the above discussion it is now clear that both Talcott Parsons as well as Robert K. Merton made great efforts to carry forward the discipline of sociology and in this endeavor they were quite successful too.

3.8 Recent Advances in Sociological Theories

Recent advances that were made in sociology are quite important and meaningful. Besides the works of Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, A.R. Radcliffe - Brown, Branislav Malinowski, Talcott Parsons and Robert K. Merton which were mainly influenced by and to a large extent remained concerned with the philosophy of positivism, there was another stream of thought emerging out during the same period. The development of sociology has witnessed, apart from the philosophical background of positivism another stream of thought initiated and encouraged by the German sociologists like Max Weber.

Reflection and Action 3.2

Provide an outline of recent advances in sociological theories. Write down your answer in your notebook.

It was Max Weber who defined sociology as an interpretative understanding of social action. Max Weber initiated the debate on why the elements of subjectivity, subjective understanding and Verstehen should be included in sociology. Max Weber, never impressed by the formulations centered around positivism wanted to give a new direction to the formulations in sociological theory. In fact the whole debate centered around the issues of subjectivity versus objectivity was initiated and inspired by Max Weber. In fact, sociology as a subject has been strengthened by the efforts made by Max Weber. Here a reference to only two such new areas of research namely phenomenology and ethnomethodology shall be made. These two topics represent the main areas concerned with the recent advances made in sociological research. Two other topics require a mention here as they have emerged in the recent times, they are postmodernism and globalisation. We hope that at various stages of learning sociology all such concepts shall be discussed. Although sociological theories initially developed to strengthen the subject and establish it as a core discipline in itself, but with the advancement of the subject certain perspectives clearly emerged in the process. Here a reference shall be made to only such perspectives which have had a direct bearing upon the development of sociology. Sometimes the terms like theories and perspectives have been used interchangeably also. Some of the popular perspectives developed in sociology are known as functional perspective, conflict perspective, exchange perspective and symbolic interactionist perspective. Although several scholars in one or another way have been associated different perspectives but here only those thinkers shall be mentioned whose names are generally familiar to us. The names of Emile Durkheim and Robert K. Merton have been associated with the functional perspective, Karl Marx represents the conflict perspective, B. Malinowski discussed the material related to the exchange perspective whereas Herbert Blumer discussed about symbolic interactionist perspective. Here it might be advised that while discussing about sociological theories it would be relevant to keep in mind the role of thinkers, as well as that of various perspectives to which they were associated.

3.9 The Concept of Paradigm

It was Kuhn, who first suggested that development within a discipline, especially science is not a gradual process but in fact takes place quite suddenly. Hence, Kuhn's books entitled the structure of scientific revolution. Kuhn calls these sudden changes as "paradigm shifts".

According to Kuhn, science and by extension social science undergoes its process in three phases which are discernible.

- i) Prescientific phase
- ii) Normal science
- iii) Paradigm shift

In the initial phase theories of explanation are incomplete and competing with one another. At some point one of the theories establishes itself bringing in the phase of normal science. In this phase a single theory or a set of theories emerge dominant which Kuhn calls a paradigm.

When there is a paradigm shift the situation is one where the previous theories have proved to be redundant. For Kuhn this a natural process and it repeats itself over time as the new and established theories themselves become incomplete as knowledge expands. At this point the solution lies in modifying the theories or to abandon them for another set of dominant or competing theoretical explanations which offer more complete and better explanation for both science, social science and world-view as whole.

We can give an example of paradigm shift by referring to Copernicus who pointed out that it was the earth that revolved around the sun rather than the sun revolving around the earth as was Ptolemy's position. Copernicus gained adherence to his views with scientific data to prove them. A sudden shift in terms of theories concepts and perspectives emerged with great speed and there was a paradigm shift. A new theoretical explanation emerges and establishes itself ushering in the new set of theories and perspectives. Another example of paradigm shift occurred when Einstein's theory of relativity replaced Newton's theory of gravity.

We must point that according to Kuhn the paradigm shift implies a rather drastic if not total replacement of the previously established theories of science and social science. In short the earlier theories are non comparable. The shift is total. The way language is used, the development of new concepts, words and meanings is part of a paradigm shift so are norms, values and mores.

To put it differently a paradigm shift implies a new view of the world, its perception, perspective, and overall attitudes of the world community changes and changes with great speed. In the era, of globalisation which witness the postmodern paradigm shift in which the local context is considered to be the focus of study and the consideration of general or mega theories is not considered either wise or practical.

Thus the concept of paradigm has two aspects to it. The first is that which engulfs the whole and subsumes its various parts on subsets. It comprises all the procedure of science or social science. This is a global paradigm. At the second level we find there are theories and practices which bolster the existing paradigm of the society/globe.

We must clarify it here that although some efforts have been put in to make sociology a distinct, independent and a scientific discipline, by some great scholars included, but the sociological theories thus produced have also been challenged on several grounds. This once again highlights the scientific nature of sociology where every theory can be put to test and liable to be rejected if found wrong. Thus, in sociological theories, as in other sciences as well, there is nothing like an eternal a universal truth that remains a truth under all the conditions and at every moment of time. Sociological theories should also not to be confused with something like religious or meta-physical assertions. Nor sociological theories are comparable to philosophical guidelines to be followed. Sociological theories have come out of such problems and the challenges faced by them today are of another nature and most of them are of scientific type. And in order to achieve that scientific nature, sociology has travelled a longer path since the writings of Auguste Comte who had established it as a positivist science. The first challenge to sociological theories has come from the huge amount of data that have been generated throughout the world, especially after the World War II. For example, data

generated in the area of demography has led to several new innovations at the theoretical level. Similarly data concerning Human Development Index has helped in making transnational comparisons. The second challenge to sociological theory has come from the processes of change that are taking shape at various levels of society. To put it in simple words it could be said that the processes of social change keep on going in society, independently of the fact whether sociologists study them or not. In fact in the contemporary world the processes social change are not only complex in nature but they are taking shape at a much faster pace today. As a result of it, many a times sociologists are not actually in a position to study them all. There are several such phenomenon which require some serious sociological studies like for example, the consequences of AIDS and that of terrorism. Much remains to be done in these areas. The third challenge to sociological theories came when society at large had undergone some significant periods of time. These important periods include the end of the World War II, end of the colonial rule at various places in the world and the emergence of various independent nation - states. The sociological theories have had to accommodate itself several times when such important changes were taking shape in the world. The fourth challenge to sociological theory has come due to some misconceptions about sociology as a subject that is basically meant to solve the current problems of society. In fact sociology is quite capable of solving the problems of society too, but so far it has kept itself limited upto their scientific study only. But at the level of response to some of these problems and challenges faced, sociologists have attempted to address some of them. As a consequence of the efforts of the sociologists we have seen the emergence of certain theoretical formulations centered around the conceptions like rationality, postmodernism, globalisation and civil society. At the level of sociological theory, intellectuals and academicians from the subject have also responded meaningfully on the topics like democracy, socialism and secularism. Sociologists to some extent through their writings have made their presence felt in the area of the reconstruction of society.

3.10 Conclusion

We have seen what comprises a theory and what a paradigm means. We have taken an analysis of classical sociological theories, and seen how Comte enunciated the law of the three stages, Marxian ideology, Weberian ideology, Parson's action theory and some recent advances in sociological theory. Finally we turned to the concept of paradigm and explained what it means in terms of the intellectually violent stuff's in the dominance of theories, which have been termed paradigm shifts by Thomas Kuhn. We have adequately indicated the subject to which we addressed ourselves to.

3.11 Further Reading

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