

Unit 29

Theories of Modernisation and Modernity

Contents

- 29.1 Introduction
- 29.2 Approaches to Modernisation
- 29.3 Implication of Modernisation Theories
- 29.4 Phases in Modernisation Processes
- 29.5 Modernisation : The Asian Syndrome
- 29.6 Modernisation Process as a Whole
- 29.7 The Phenomena of Modernity
- 29.8 Approaches to Modernity
- 29.9 Conclusion
- 29.10 Further Reading
- 29.11 References

Learning Objectives

After having read this unit you will be able to,

- define Modernisation
- outline approaches, implications, and phases of Modernisation
- discuss Modernisation in India
- describe the phenomena of modernity
- outline the approaches to modernity

29.1 Introduction

The theories of Modernisation inform us about how the various parts of the world developed into industrial powers. The approaches/theories that describe and analyse how and why this happened are the subject of the initial part of this lesson. Thereafter we will turn to modernity and see how a presentation and analysis of the same helps our understanding of modern western society as also the social processes witnessed in some Asian societies. Thus Modernisation is an outcome of various social processes. The major events in this historical development began after the IInd world war and these include the emergence of America (US) as a superpower in the globe which had the result of trying to stymie the rise of communism. To bring about this aim of 'containment ' the US invested greatly in the strengthening of the economic base of certain countries including Western Europe, South Korea and Japan. Modernisation also stems from the growth of the communist movements in China Vietnam, Soviet Union (now no longer existing as a communist bloc) and Cuba. The third of these processes include the factors of decolonialisation in Asia and Africa and the termination of colonies controlled by European powers.

At this point of time the former colonies had to face the challenge of adopting some appropriate model of growth. In this they were assisted and helped by the US which sent vast teams of social scientists to study the

ground situation in the new nations states. The idea behind this move of the US was to see how capitalist ideologies could be used in the economic growth of these nations most of whom were poor due to the long period of colonisation which had greatly debilitated their resources and has been deeply exploited. This included the export of raw materials which were turned into products and commodities and reexported to the colonies so as to make great economic profits. This strategy of supplanting capitalism and capitalist ideologies was no doubt also an attempt to the influence of communist ideology and to destroy it over a period of time. There is thus a great dimension of political maneuvers and ideology which is involved in the process of Modernisation. Thus the scholars in all fields of social science studied these societies and their findings began to be published soon after the IInd world war. The main tools of analysis and of subsequent published included primarily the evolutionary theory and secondly the functionalist theory. Let us describe these approaches now so that the overall process of Modernisation begins to be clear. Thus evolutionary theory and theorists pointed out the several factors which comprised the view point of this approach found social change in these societies to be in a linear progression going from primitive to complex society. This was held to be so in all societies. Again this theory and the theorists associated with it held that such linear progress of societies was leading to a better world and represented the good of humanity and civilization at large. Further social change was envisioned as a gradual occurrence and was dissociated from any sudden and violent chain of events eg revolution. Change was slow and steady and not sudden and violent as the communist ideology upheld. This slow change considering the situation of modern societies was felt to take enormous spans of time running in to centuries, not just decades. Thus the functionalist theorists, foremost of whom was Parsons, built up various tenets to promote its view point the main ones being the analogy of society as being an organism which had various interrelated segments in societal institutions. In this organismic entity (society) each of the various institutions performed a particular part which contributed to the whole. This theory propagated that there were four main functions which the institutions performed. These were the functions of - (a) adaptation to the environment performed by the capitalist economic system. Then was the function of. (b) goal attainment which was a government function a function which encompassed liberal aims(Rojas 1996: p1). Next came the function of integration performed by legal and religious institutions, specifically the Christian religion. Finally there is the latency function performed by the family and by educational institutions.

29.2 Approaches to Modernisation

Thus Modernisation approaches distinguished between traditional societies and modern societies. Thus the traditional societies were such that they tended to have a large personal, face to face nature which was felt to be inferior in terms of market relations. On the other hand modern societies tended to be neutral and therefore much more capable of dealing with and exploiting the market and the environment.

One of the key institutions in the society is the family and the nature of this differed again in traditional and modern societies. Thus the family in traditional societies was responsible for many functions. That is to say it is multifunctional and covered issues of religion, welfare, education, reproduction also emotional scaffolding. On the other hand the modern family which the functions of the family are now the domain of the state.

In this theory social disturbances occur when any of the parts of society begin to malfunction or to fail to deliver what was expected of it to maintain the status quo. Disturbances include peaceful / violent agitation, revolution, guerilla warfare and now terrorism. However there is a disturbing side to these activities because any individual / institution that provokes the state and the status quo is deliberately and often violently desisted and resisted for doing so. These actions are deliberately viewed as action which is humanitarian. The question of human rights is a recent phenomena and organisations have be instituted to ensure that democracy is not violated at the cost of middle level disturbances whether by groups or by institutions.

Box 29.1: Mc Donaldization

If we equate formal rationality with modernity, then the success and spread of the fast food restaurant, as well as to the degree to which it is serving as a model for much of the rest of society, indicate that we continue to live in a modern world...

While there may be other changes in the economy which support the idea of a post industrial society, the fast food restaurant and the many other elements that are modeled after it do not. (Ritzer 1996, sociological theory. P:579).

Smelser's point of view differed somewhat from what we have been pointing out. He took as his point of attention the effect of the economy and related institutions on the overall social structure. He pointed out that in Modernisation process society developed from simple technology to complex ideology. Further this was a movement away from subsistence to cash crops so far as agriculture is concerned. Again Smelser indicated that machine power begins to dominate pushing aside simply human (physical) labour. Finally there is an emphasis on urbanisation and urban structures rather than development of the rural areas. Smelser however was realistic enough to realise that these developments were not simple and linear but that these processes took place at the same time (together) but not at the same rate (Smesler, 1969).

Also such changes would occur at a different pace at different social structure and societies. In other words there was not one single trajectory towards social change because the traditions were varied in different societies. They therefore provided different kinds of challenges. Similarly Rostow published a theory of Modernisation which took the terminology of aviation and proposed various stages of development.

This theory talks of a primitive society moving on to get preconditions for the pre "take - off" onto the "take- off stage", the drive to maturity and finally to a mass consumption society. Thus for Rostow (Rostow, 1960) economic development goes through various stages and that this is universal to all societies, and that Modernisation is a process of homogenisation, of Europeanization, irreversible progressive, evolutionary and transformative. This theory has some questionable implications. Thus following this theory it is implied that the nations which are traditional have as their ultimate model western advanced societies which they must emulate in every way to themselves reach an advanced state/modern state. This in itself implies that the capitalist state and ideology is the path to be followed by the under developed states. Thus Modernisation and theories explaining it accept

without hesitation that American policies of trade and foreign policy, and that of international relations have to be accepted and subscribed to because they are at the core of the modernising process.

29.3 Implication of Modernisation Theories

As you will have noticed that there is a heavy western bias in these theories and their implications. Modernisation theory itself is mostly a western product and sets up these societies as an ideal that the less developed countries must follow without hesitation including capitalist ideology because this “works” and works best. However dependency theory takes a wider global perspective. It points out that the problems faced in development are not just those of social structure in traditional societies but in large part due to world wide structures imposed by the Western world, or the North.

Reflection and Action 29.1

Do you think that the “metropolis-satellite” relationship between countries of north and south still exists? Give reasons for your answer.

Thus Andre Gunder Frank has pointed out that relations between North and South are arranged as a chain described by him as “metropolis - satellite” relationships. Thus we can see that there is an underlying hierarchy in world relations (Foster-Coster, 1985). At the top of the chain is the metropolis (US) that has no strong dependence on other regions. We then go on to the strong dependencies but are dependent on the USA (or other well developed Western societies) for aid or any other kind of help. The downward chain continues and culminates right down to states (nations) which are very highly or even totally dependent on the nations higher up in the hierarchy of dependencies for almost everything in food, fertilizers, clothes, automobiles, machines etc.

According to Frank such dependencies become a problem when a State wants to develop itself economically and socially. Thus such moves often call for sanctions against the satellite states by the metropolises on which the satellite is dependent. This means also that dependency of this sort stems the freedom to chose by the satellite states, and to try and evolve in their own way because whatever they have by way of economic wealth is consumed by the nations higher in the hierarchy.

This theory is readily witnessed in international relations and the aid to the third world by the North have the most exploitative terms and conditions, which ensure that the satellite states can never be free of the donor in economic terms. Frank opines that the dismantling of such relations can alone lead to development along the lines that the third world nations want. Thus dependency theory is opposed to Modernisation theory, but it is definitely an alternative explanation. Further such an explanation exposes some harsh realities of contemporary societies across the globe. Modernisation theory is more of an ideology whereas dependency theories exposes the harsh economic international realities. Neither of them has produced any specific development just attributable to them. It may be noted however that Modernisation has since the 17th century has had an affect, beginning with the Western countries, impacted all over the globe. To give an example let us turn to the field of communication. Thus Modernisation theories shed light on how the media is affected by these relatively recent changes both in relatively traditional and postmodern societies we may note that the

Modernisation theories we have been discussing can be seen to have evolved in three relatively distinct phases. The first phase of these theories began in the 1950s and 1960s and tried to explain how Western styles of living gradually spread all over the globe (world). There was also a spread of technological innovations and the ideology of individualism.

29.4 Phases in Modernisation Processes

- The economic aspect where the mass media helped to spread technological innovations that were at the core of Modernisation.
- Cultural development including education and literacy rates. This too was aided by the mass media which can promote modernity.
- Identity development especially a rational identity was also helped by the media including the process of nation building and elections.

However a basic shortcoming of these approaches to Modernisation was their Western bias. Now the second phase of Modernisation was linked to critical theory that held sway in the 1980s. These theories are in fact a critique of the western impact of Modernisation. Thus according to the media dependency theory there was a dependence of the developing countries on the mass media of the western world. That is to say the peripheral countries depended upon the core. Now we come to the third phase of the development of Modernisation theory beginning in the 1990s. These theories attempted to be neutral in their approach. Thus according to Giddens modern society (Giddens, A. 1991) and culture is marked by time space distanciation and disembedding features or characteristics. Thus while traditional society involves much face to face interaction by those living in proximity to each other in modern cultures and societies the space across which interaction occurs using mass media. Thus the disembedding process such as currency, symbols, the internet and English language all help bring the North and South into a clearer focus. We now turn to another area of Modernisation which has its presentation and analysis based on work in India.

29.5 Modernisation: The Asian Syndrome

Yogendra Singh points out at the beginning of his analysis that prior to Modernisation the traditions of India were based on the various principles of hierarchy, holism, continuity and transcendence. These were the basic aspects of tradition. These factors to some extent existed also in the traditional west. However as Singh notes Indian and Western tradition were in fact divergent to each other. This arose specifically from their own differing historical background their specific social and cultural heritage and overall social situation. Singh asks whether despite these differences would it lead to a universal model of Modernisation? Singh distinguishes between social change per se and Modernisation. Social change as such need not necessarily imply Modernisation. However the changes which were ortho-genetic and hetero-genetic were pre-modern. Thus the Islamic tradition in India was heterogenetic and was established by conquest. Thus endogenous change in Hinduism were confined to Sanskritisation. This in itself was based on a historical process which took many generations and was positional alone not structural. Modernisation in India commenced with its contact with the west which brought about vast changes in the Indian social structure. However it cannot be said that all contacts led to Modernisation. In fact Singh notes that in the process of contact with the west certain traditional institutions

also got further strengthened. Thus as Singh notes it would be misleading to think of a clear polarity between tradition and modernity, and he feels this is more theoretical than actual.

Box 29.2: Changes in Traditional India

The changes which thus occurred were confined to differentiation within the framework of traditional social structure and values; structural changes were way few, and those which took place were limited in respect of the type of roles Similar development in religious role structure and organisations partially followed the emergence of other traditions. But these changes by no means could be called structural, since differentiation of roles was segmental and did not alter the system as a whole. (Yogendra Singh, 1986, *The Modernisation Of Indian Tradition*: p:193).

During the British period Modernisation was selective and sequential. It was not in synchronisation with family caste and village. These areas were not of much concern by the British, more so after the revolt of 1857. British administration felt that these structures were not dynamic and were autonomous, especially the village and caste system. Caste was considered in the army and beurocrasy, and in the national movement of a communal electorate was introduced. Singh feels these factors influenced the post colonial Modernisation process. The process of Modernisation found expression and ground in the freedom struggle of India led by Mahatma Gandhi whose actions and mobilisation of the masses led to what Singh calls a new political culture of Modernisation. However, Gandhi was not able to avert the partition of the nation into two because the historical background of Islam and Hinduism was different.

Singh asks how Modernisation can lead to an integrative pattern which is rather a complicated one whether this is overt or covert. How can a society avert a structural breakdown. From here on in the answer we are on familiar ground (discussed earlier in this unit) as Singh turns to the main theories of Modernisation, that is the structural and the evolutionary theories of Modernisation. These approaches have been adequately discussed earlier and we will not repeat them again. The student can at this point go back to the beginning of the unit before reading further.

29.6 Modernisation Process as a Whole

In this analysis Singh now turns towards a discussion of Modernisation as a whole. He points out that Modernisation did not lead to institutional and structural breakdown because of the characteristics of society in India. One of these characteristics was the political structures. Further the caste system itself was also independent of the political system. Thus the various village areas had their own councils (panchayat) through which they attempted to solve village level problems. This type of inter structural independence was a great facilitator of Modernisation, but as pointed out earlier did not lead to societal breakdown. Thus Singh notes that modernity developed as a sub-structure and sub-culture rather an over arching entity. Over time however this segmental presence of Modernisation became 'encompassing' and the structural autonomy was no longer the prime 'shock-absorber'. Again changes in political systems made this pervade on society and stratification cultures. In its wake there are stresses on the entire cultural system. However it is clear that Modernisation requires adaptive changes in value systems which are non traditional in terms of values and

norms. Singh gives the example of the process of secularism and untouchability which are definitely part of the Modernisation process in present day India which is resisted by the traditional value system (Singh, 1986).

Reflection and Action 29.2

To what extent does Modernisation lead to the breakdown of inequality? Give reasons to support your answer.

Singh asks again whether society in India be able to avoid “structural breakdown” in what he refers to as the “second phase” of Modernisation? Further the absence of the structural autonomy creates serious problems or “bottlenecks” for the transition to modernity? Thus Singh opines that in the cultural area legislations have altered the overall landscape since they have been made with a view to terminate social inequality and its attendant exploitation and alienation, and pave the way towards democratic rights and other commitments made in the constitution of India. Such processes have pushed society in India away from the positional changes of Srinivas’s theory of Sanskritisation. In place of this process there has been a creation of new identities, caste associations and tribes. This process in itself is speeded up by the Great Traditions of Modernisation eg education, industrialisation and urbanisation. Further Singh notes that traditional structures are being mobilised for modern objectives and protest movements. Paradoxically tradition itself is strengthened because media and transport processes spread ritual structures, and help organise further the various religious groups and activities. Again religious sects and other religious groupings employ the bureaucratic approach and this is in part responsible towards the integration of sects from the overarching religious order. However Singh is careful to point out that in the post colonial period of Modernisation there have been several structural changes. Thus caste, family, village, and community retained their traditional identity. Caste especially has been witnessed to be extremely fluid and adaptive to new situations and has in no way been abolished so far as the ground reality is concerned. Further caste has adapted to the modern era in India by involving itself in many different areas such as democratic participation, politics and trade unionism, and is tenacious in its persistence more so in the area of joint family groups.

Modernisation in the colonial era was relatively homogenous in the elite structures. Thus the elite from industry, military and politics came from a background in caste and class stratum. These elites had access to modern education and had similar ideologies. It is clear then that the base for such elites was fairly delimited. In the post independence era this narrow base has increased. The result of this that there is a differentiation between the elites themselves, broadly the political and the non political elite. Singh points out that the political elite is less Westernized and identify much more with traditionality and symbols related to it. Singh also notes that the federal structure of a one party system has given way to a multiparty system, with the subsequent divergence in ideologies. Further the income created by the various FYPs has mainly benefited those who are already rich rather than the poor, especially rural masses. Thus the attempt to plan has accentuated the divide between the rich and the poor. Again the fast rate of growth in population has itself created structural tensions. Thus till recently the industrialisation process India remained what Singh calls a ‘rural-peasant’ type of society, except for pockets such as the metropolitans of India of which there are few in India.

These structural inconsistencies arise therefore from a variety of sources; these are:

- Democratisation without appropriate civic culture
- Bureaucratisation without universalistic norms
- Growth of the mass media.
- Aspiration growth without increased resources and distributive justice.
- Stress on welfare ideology only at the verbal level.
- Over urbanisation without inadequate and proper charges in the social strata.

Singh cites Gunnar Myrdal according to whom nationalism and democracy have grown in an uneven way in Asia. In western societies an independent state, effective government and adequate law enforcement preceded nationalism and democracy. In contrast in South Asia this was not the case and therefore this imbalance also created a economic dependence on developed countries. It also meant slow economic development and extremely tardy changes in institutions.

In India especially with a larger percentage of intellectuals and middle classes which are important for a real democracy, Modernisation did not proceed unimpeded. As Myrdal notes the “soft-state” approach meant a serious blow for social change which can be “circular” or “cumulative”. Myrdal does not subscribe to evolutionary stages of growth which he feels is a teleological and conservative ideology. Thus the Modernisation process in India is moving towards a critical phase. However Singh is of the view that these stresses and contradictions will not lead to institutional breakdown. He feels that a ‘constant coordination of Modernisation’ is absolutely essential for a democracy based Modernisation in India. He is also of the view that Modernisation is not a single monolithic process and can and does differ from one society to another.

29.7 The Phenomena of Modernity

Let us now turn to a related concept and a related process to Modernisation viz. the phenomena of modernity. Thus the term modernity is a term employed to discuss the stage of a society that is more developed than another society. This term is usually employed to describe a society that uses world wide capitalism as the model to overall world development. Thus when a society is has the characteristics of modernity it is named a modern society. On the other hand the process of becoming a modern society is called Modernisation (as we have seen earlier). The defining features of such modern societies is:

- Emergence of nation state
- Industrialisation and capitalism
- Rise of democracy
- Heavier dependence on technological innovation
- Attendant urbanisation
- The overall development in mass media

In western Europe some of the defining features include:

- Renaissance and enlightenment

- Reformation and counter reformation
- French Revolution and American Revolution
- The Industrial Revolution

Many attempts have been made in sociology to try and define modernity. Some of the factors used to define modernity include:-

- Disenchantment of the world
- Rationalisation
- Mass society
- Secularisation
- Democratisation, and so on

Thus modernity is often contextualised by comparing modern societies to pre or post modern societies. This in itself creates some problems in terms of being able to define modernity. This is especially difficult when we try to construct a three stage model from pre modern to modern, and then onto post modernity. The features we have noted is a movement from somewhat isolated communities to more large scale integrated societies. In this sense Modernisation could be understood as a process which is not unique to Europe alone.

Box 29.3: Cultural Crystallisation

One of Germany's leading social philosophers in the Adenauer period following the second world war, Gehlen (1963) proposed the theory of "cultural crystallisation" to describe the modern situation. According to Gehlen in a famous phrase, "the premises of the Enlightenment are dead, only their consequences remain". In his view the institutional complexes of modern society have separated themselves from cultural modernity which can now be discarded... cultural ideas are no longer able to produce the "new" that was central to modernity (Genard Delanty 2000, *Modernity and Postmodernity*, p:73).

Thus large scale integration implies that there is a vibrant economy which reaches out to all parts of a nation state. This in itself is possible when mobility in the society has increased. Further these developments imply specialisation with is a society and linking up of sectors. However these processes can sometimes appear to be paradoxical. Thus a unique local culture loses its identity by these increasingly powerful influences of cultural factors eg. Folktales, popular music and homogenisation of cultures, food recipes. These factors are found to exist in a greater or lesser extent in all local cultures, and helps to diversify them. This is found to a greater extent in the metropolitan towns where mobility is higher.

Thus bureaucracy and hierarchical aspect of governments and the industrial sector are the areas which grow in power in an unprecedented manner. However the role of the individual still exists in such a society where there is dynamic competition and individualism, both exist side by side. This is then quite different from societies where the role of the individual is ascriptive. That is to say the individual in modern societies is influenced by more than family background and family preoccupations.

Now it is necessary to point out that such social changes are found at different

levels of social integration, and are not simply the features of European society at any particular point of time. These changes can happen when two communities merge together. Thus when two individuals develop a relationship the division of roles also tend to merge. Again in the process of globalisation we find the international flows of capital change the ground situation. Thus while it can be said that modernity has some apparently contradictory elements in reality these can be reduced to several simple concepts related to social change.

How then does this view of modernity explain the world wide influences of West European and American societies since the Renaissance. Initially, we can say that the internal factor is that only in Europe, that rational thinking began to substitute intellectual activities that were shrouded in superstition and religion.

Secondly, there was an external elements as well, and this was the factor of colonisation, which created an exploitation nexus between these societies, which were exploited and others which exploited the societies.

However we find that there are many traces of ancient societies which coexist within the umbrella of modernity. This includes joint families, small scale enterprise, vast income diversity and so on. It has however been argued that features many in fact be regarded as aspects of modernity itself rather than any threat to it.

Modernisation was very beneficial to society in many ways, especially in the field of health and in the field of nutrition. Thus fatal diseases were controlled or eliminated, and the values of egalitarianism began manifesting themselves.

However some drawbacks are also there and the picture is not just positive. This not only did technological advantages breed greater economic wealth but also developed nuclear bombs two of which were dropped on Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Nuclear technology still evokes negative responses, when it is proposed to be used for military purposes. Similarly the degradation of environment and overall pollution are well known. However decreasing biodiversity , climate change all result from a hyper individual society. Psychological problems and laxity of morals also create problems of modernity.

29.8 Approaches to Modernity

Thus as Taylor points out there are at least two approaches for the comprehension of how modernity came into being. These are ways of comprehending what makes the existing society so very different from that which enveloped man before modernity arose.

One method looks at the differences in contemporary western society and culture and medieval Europe as similar to the difference between medieval Europe and medieval India. So we can think about and analyse difference between civilizations, and their attendant culture. On the other hand the situation can be looked at from the viewpoint of change involving the end of one type of traditional society and the coming into being of modern societies. The latter perspective is the more influential one and it provides an analysis that gives a different perspective. The approach mentioned first is a **cultural approach** and the second an **a-cultural approach**. In the cultural approach there are many cultures, which have in them language and cultural

practices that help us to understand the self the other psychological sets, religion, morality and so on. These factors are specific to a culture and are often non comparable. Keeping the above in view a cultural theory of modernity outlines first and then analyses the transformation into the new culture. The present day world can be seen as a culture with specific comprehension of the self and morality. Thus this model of modernity can be seen and used analytically to contrast with the earlier aspects of civilization (Taylor, 2004). On the other hand, an **acultural** theory describes the entire process in terms of some culture neutral analysis. This implies that the entire process is not analysed in terms of culture that existed and then transformed into modernity. Rather it is considered too general an approach that can be seen as the process any traditional society would undergo. Thus **acultural theory** conceives of modernity as the rise of reason in different ways such as the growth of scientific consciousness, development of secular thought ways, instrumental rationality, fact finding and evolution.

Modernity can also be explained and accounted for in socio-cultural terms and also intellectual shifts. Thus transformation social, cultural, individual can be seen to arise from increased mobility, demographic changes, industrialisation and so on. In such cases as mentioned above modernity is conceived of as transformations which all cultures can go through and will undergo in due course of time.

Such changes are not defined in terms of individualism, morality, good and evil. They are instead talking of cultures and civilizations as a whole.

Box 29.4: Explanations of Modernity

...Explanations of modernity in terms of *reason* seem to be the most popular. Even social explanations tend to invoke reason. Social transformations, like mobility and industrialisation are thought to bring about intellectual and spiritual changes because they shake people loose from old habits and beliefs – religion or traditional morality – which then become unsustainable because they lack the kind of independent rational grounding that the beliefs of modernity – such as individualism or instrumental reason – are assumed to have (Charles Taylor, 2004, *Two Theories of Modernity*).

Thus any culture would be impacted by the increase in scientific consciousness, secularisation of religion and the growth of instrumental thinking. Modernity then, in this approach/theory issues from rationality which is culture-neutral. This is despite the fact that the theory can account for why modernity arose in one society rather than another; or why it arose in some societies first and other later. In fact the theory does not lay down specific points or stages into modernity but as something general that can take any particular culture as its input. So this operation/transformation is not to be seen as a perspective about human values or shared meanings. In the case of social explanations, causality is assigned to developments like industrialisation that do impact on values. Considering then the explanations in terms of rationality, this is thought to be the exercise of a “general capacity” which was ripe for maturing and unfolding. Given specific conditions, people see scientific thinking as having a place in society. They will also see that instrumental rationality is beneficial. Again religious beliefs are by no means universal or undisputed, and require a leap of faith. Finally facts and values are separated.

Now these transformations are facilitated by the presence of certain values and understandings and are hindered by other types of cultural values if they happen to be the dominant ones. These transformations are defined by the whole social and cultural context existing at any point of time.

We can see then that the dominant theories of modernity over the last few centuries have been of the acultural type. Modernity also involves a shift in the individual and community perspective. This is because until the viewpoint changes the society concerned cannot move from a pre-modern to modern and onto post modernity. On the other hand Weber paradoxically argues that the rationalisation (an important aspect of modernity) is a steady process, which was cultural general rather than culture specific. Similarly the process of pre-modern to modern in society was explained by Durkheim in terms of the transformation from mechanical to organised forms of social solidarity. This is also the aspect of Tocqueville's concept of "creeping democracy" in which there was a move towards greater sense and actualisation of equality among the various strata of society. These are all different but at the same time related activities.

29.9 Conclusion

Given all these types of explanations Taylor still feels that explanations and analyses of modernity focusing on reason are the most accepted ones. Explanations focusing on the social still tend to talk of reason transformations that are social. Thus the factors of mobility and industrialisation are felt to bring about intellectual and spiritual changes since they tend to create new layers of conditioning which by pass the old layers. That is they loosen old habits and beliefs, whether religion or the old morality including individualism and instrumental reason. There is however the question of negative theories of modernity which do not have the positive or beneficial view of modern developments and see society going into a decline with the onset and the maturing of modernity. Thus rather than seeing modernity as having unleashed many capacities in different directions, negative theories, see it as a dangerous development. These too are essentially acultural theories. Thus modernity is characterised by a loss of perspective, an erasure of roots, dependence on history or even God. Thus the negative theories of modernity see it as a loss of the previous state of overall well being.

That is to say that the arrival of modernity and all its various facets has to be seen as a mixed blessing. On one side are the positive socially relevant areas and technological development. On the other are the problems associated with the arrival of and settling down of modernity. Here the negatively oriented theorists point out that modernity has its own problems created by a fast developing technology that has its impact on the overall life of the people.

Thus while modernity began in the sixteenth century at the time of Enlightenment, it continued to develop until the beginning of the 20th century. In other words modernity has its "discontents" as well. Let us briefly mention what these are.

Firstly we must realise that modernity does have problems as we pointed out. The belief in development and progress, forward looking attitude, the dependence on rationality and reason have also given rise to optimism that was betrayed by doubts raised by post traditional thought. However we

must note that modernity achieved a lot of social structural changes.

Thus the routine behavior on day to day basis alters and changes as technology develops. This is because technological innovations and inventions since Enlightenment have altered the entire fabrics of the world, restricting itself to large well developed towns, cities, and metropolitans. It is capitalism which has basically been the power behind the innovations and inventions.

The airplane and motor car have from an initial slow start become integral parts of daily life the world over. Thus time and space have conceptually receded and nothing can be done in the modern world with precise timing and adequate space. Thus mechanical solidarity has given way to organic solidarity to use the terms coined by Durkheim. Weber's concept of rationalisation has pervaded the modern world and given rise to precise type of thinking. Further urbanism saw large scale migrations. Discipline, secularity, alienation, anomic and the iron cage of bureaucracy are all parts of the organic structure of bureaucratic organisation in the modern world.

29.10 Further Reading

Delanty Gerard 2000, *Modernity and Postmodernity: Knowledge, Power and The Self*. London, Sage

Lyon, David, 1999, *Postmodernity*. Bnckingham: Open University Press

Singh Yogendra, 1986, *Modernisation of Indian Tradition*. Jaipur , Rawat Publications

Wagner, Peter 2001, *Theorizing Modernity; Inescapability and Attainability in Social Theory*. London, Sage

29.11 References

Giddens, A (1991) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford : California.

Foster-Carter, Aidan 1985, *The Sociology of Development*. Canseway Press, California

Rostow W.W. 1960, *The Stages of Economic Growth : A Non Communist Manifesto*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Semlser N.1969, "Mechanisms of and Adjustment to Change" in T.Buns (ed) "Industrial Man", Perguin 1969.

Rojas Robinson, 2004, *Modernisation Theory and The Law of Change* Retrieved From <http://www.Rrojasatabank.org/Capital8.html>.

Singh Yogendra 1986, *The Modernisation of Indian Tradition*. Jaipur Rawat .

Taylor Charles 2004, *Two Theories of Modernity*. Retrieved :Taylor X. html.

Unit 30

Tradition and Modernity

Contents

- 30.1 Introduction
- 30.2 Tradition Society and Culture
- 30.3 Tradition and Modernity
- 30.4 Modernity as a Juggernaut
- 30.5 Ontological Insecurity and Modernity
- 30.6 Modernity Rationality and Norms
- 30.7 Conclusion
- 30.8 Further Reading
- 30.9 References

Learning Objectives

After reading this unit you will be able to

- describe the concept of tradition
- define modernity
- outline the “juggernaut” of modernity
- discuss modernity and rationality

30.1 Introduction

In this unit we will take up the topics of tradition and modernity. At the very outset it is pointed out that tradition and modernity are not contradictory or competing concepts. Rather they represent different faces of meaning and are in fact symbiotically related to each other. As such tradition (s) is the ground from which all manner of modernity arises. Further we may point out that as it stands tradition has to be qualified, which it is to say it could be a local tradition or an all-society tradition. Thus these are many different strands to the thinking on tradition and there are very many differing interpretations. Thus tradition is a live and vital factor in many cultures and could be:

- Tradition of food and edibles
- Tradition of music and dance
- Scriptural tradition
- Artistic tradition
- Martial arts tradition
- Sociological tradition
- Tradition and attire

Thus the terms ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’ do not exist in isolation of each other but are in fact related to each other. While these terms concepts and processes exist, they exist and function dialogically. Thus modernity is an economic force while tradition is fundamentally cultural and social.

What is the role of tradition is a pertinent point here. Tradition is basically a series of attitudes, languages, music, art, scholarship and so on which have

been developing since ages past. Over the passage of time tradition becomes more or less entrenched in the body politic and we have even traditional law and scriptures in any case are an aspect of tradition. Now why is tradition so important to the individual and society? This is because it provides a continuity to social process and garners the creative and improvisational and transmits these traditions to the forthcoming generations of the members of a given society and thereby assuring survival of the society itself. Tradition is, therefore, a repository of survival mechanisms without which a society would fail to cohere. It would set fragmented and break up, the result of which would be anomic. Let us consider the music tradition in India. In this particular tradition of classical music there are "*gharanas*" or groupings, and each of these has a lineage comprising the singers who had commenced or inaugurated the *gharana* and all those who have passed their talent down the line producing maestros who would take over charge once the older musicians went on into retirement.

Now, once there is an example to work upon we can see that tradition also implies a life-style, a way of living. As such the training in music, art, drama is very rigid and within the confines of tradition which often passes by rote and repetition of movement, notes, or other exercise which any particular training may require. Usually with the teaching of traditional music and dance are an endless series of do's and don'ts which is what tradition is all about. Thus tradition refers to a *body of knowledge that has a structured inventory of actions and ideology* that comprise its legitimate domain. Thereafter it is a question of pinpointing what area of tradition is it that we are referring to. Thus on examination we find that tradition itself has a reasonably long duration for which it has established itself; further there are many different strands or what we may call "varieties of tradition." Then to continue with the example of music *gharanas* in India we find that there is a basic division between north Indian classical music and South Indian classical music. Each of these two basic divisions has numerous subdivisions and so on. It is, therefore, a misnomer to treat the concept of tradition as a term which covers everything in society and culture. Thus if it is held that the tradition of music is very strong in India, it may also be asked "what type of music tradition is it that is being referred to? "

Clearly then tradition also represents a rubric under which all little traditions can be assimilated. If it is considered in depth tradition can be seen to involve various different types of activities within it which would need some brief elaboration. Tradition thus encompasses and embodies:

- a particular process or legacy
- sub traditions which from the field from which required contributions can be made
- a historical aspect, either oral or scripted
- a certain concept of the supernatural
- economic structures of sustenance
- aspects of indigenous art
- facts of architecture
- scholarship in all areas of social concern
- literature both scriptural and others
- technological structures
- military for self defense or offence

Thus tradition is clearly a type of structure and ideology that has a past and charges over time to absorb developments in that field so that tradition remains itself, but at the same time recreates and expands itself.

30.2 Tradition, Society and Culture

Tradition then is “accreted” over time and its boundaries become increasingly well defined. This means that tradition expands or contracts depending upon the social and cultural situation. Further it would be wrong to assume that traditions constantly expand and that progress is always linear. It is quite possible that there is non linear retrogression as well. A third situation arises when tradition develops an entropic tendency and stagnates for some time before once again addressing progression (linear forward movement) or retrogression.

Thus tradition begins when a particular action or activity is seen to be of significance to the society. However, as we have pointed out that there are many types of tradition (music, art, architecture) and many strands within each one of them. As such it is possible to study some of these strands but to study them in totality would imply many years of research and might still be lacking sufficient data to be able to come to a holistic and synoptic point of view (Rojas, 1966). Thus what we are talking about is the fact that there is no such thing as a total vision of any society which is pluralistic, since members from different races and ethnicities will have different traditions. Thus the tradition that peoples and societies inherit from their forefathers is available to them in various forms. Any process over several generations becomes by itself a particular tradition or a sub tradition.

Box 30.1: The Accretion of Tradition

Thus tradition:

- accumulates over decades/centuries. Consider for e.g. the scriptural tradition of India which is itself a plurality. Thus in the shift from oral tradition to the scripting tradition there is a formalisation of knowledge and as this process goes on the society that is subjected to it develops not just one but pluralist traditions.
- the field of art and architecture is replete with the traditions that have emerged from it. Thus in India there are several traditions in art and architecture including. The (i) Classical (ii) medieval and, (iii) traditional.

In each of these areas artists and architects have been responsible for development of classical medieval and traditional art and architecture. These traditions developed in India over centuries of accretion. Further the economic structures are such that they begin from centuries earlier and tend to be well fixed until Industrialisation begins in the 1800's. In the Indian tradition the exchange of goods and services commenced and worked in terms of physical exchanges of services which could be provided to the landlords by the hoi polloi. This was a traditional system and exploited the landless labourers by underpaying and making them work for long hours. For doing this the sharecroppers as they were known, were given at the end of the agricultural season a certain amount of grains to help them to subsist. Such examples can be found globally and feudalism was yet another iniquitous system. The point is that it is rather difficult to say with any degree of certainty that tradition(s) are 'good' or 'bad.' On examination, however, it is clear that though Indian tradition has sanctity yet sati and dowry is part of this very same tradition. Thus it is a weeding of tradition which alone can

make it work efficiently and not flow over into negative directives. Over a span of time (usually centuries) any specific tradition begins to coagulate into a specific conglomeration of beliefs and rites. These beliefs and rites are specific to any tradition and apply equally to sub traditions within and subordinate within it.

Traditions then cover the entire ideological gamut and are also applicable to the material culture. What then is tradition? Tradition is a particular approach to social reality which it influences and provides a direction to individual and social reality. Thus it would be better to talk in terms of the plural traditions than to mention some overarching condition which would be a false construct as reality is not entirely apprehended under it.

Traditional technology is another area which has been extensively used and improved upon. Thus in agriculture the use of the tractor or combine harvester has brought matters to a confrontation. Thus while the situation (harvesting) has changed, the attitudes are still traditional, both in the family and at work. Thus at a particular time in the flow of tradition non-traditional, modern machines, are used. This means now that there is a contradiction between the technology and the attitudes of the workers and their beneficiaries. Age old customs and tradition's often get non functional and sometimes changes have to be introduced to make the two compatible. Tradition then is what holds a society together. However, there are factors within a tradition which may go out of circulation. Thus in some metros in India the scriptural and popular level of celebrating festivals, like Holi, Diwali, and so on is such that tradition battles with culture and many changes have occurred in these festivals in cities including plastic lighting on the house and a few burning candles to observe traditional candle lighting in Diwali.

30.3 Tradition and Modernity

In such and other activities tradition comes head on with the whole concept of modernity. The question of course is in which way modernity relates to tradition. Is modernity a different type of tradition? Do tradition and modernity have anything in common and how are they related to each other?

Tradition has a tendency to become entropic and inward looking. This is true of many local level traditions and sub traditions are stamped out and disappear without leaving much of a trace. The pertinent question here is why does tradition disappear, change, ameliorate or attempt to coexist with modernity? The fact of the matter is that the vectors or chief characteristics of a tradition are themselves set to develop, change, or become stagnant. Thus tradition has many sub traditions and it is these that often linger on, indefinitely, in various geophysical territories within a specific culture area.

Reflection and Action 30.1

Discuss the concept of tradition ? Does tradition change or does it remain static?

At some point in the development or spread of a tradition tends to become less influential and is capable of dealing only with local traditions. At the some time tradition sees the necessity of dynamism and various religious traditions themselves find it difficult to sustain themselves. Thus when a tradition becomes entropic it becomes clear that the tradition is now stagnant

and in being so is quite capable of calcifying and becomes superficially related to rites, rituals, ceremonies while the essential communication remains obfuscated and confused.

Thus tradition is dynamic and records accretive changes. We must also keep in mind that social changes are part of the process of society. However, it is equally clear that beyond a point tradition is not able to deal with a new set of situations and the new institutions, At this point if the society is not to become anarchic, it will require that traditions ameliorate and try to change. Yet a tradition can only follow its ontology and find itself as inadequate in the face of modernity. Thus the forces of modernity tend to choke tradition or at least make it relatively insignificant and even innocuous. However, tradition though it becomes quiescent it is not really banished by modernity because modernity is evidenced only in the advanced countries of the West and in the metropolitans of the East. This is made clear when we compare architecture of the North and the South. Thus a luxury hotel in metropolitan of a developing country is virtually no different than that of an advanced country. Thus tradition is never really banished but is pushed back as the forces of modernity take root.

Box 30.2: Aspects of Modernity

Some aspects of modernity include:

- emergence of nation-state and nationhood
- industrialisation and capitalism
- democracy
- increasing influence of science and technology
- the phenomena of urbanisation
- expansion of mass media

There are, however, other defining characteristics of modernity which include

- disenchantment with the world
- secularisation
- rationalisation
- commodification
- mass society

Modernity, however, means different things in the North and the South. Thus modernity indicates a type of society that is more developed relative to other societies. So, a society characterised by modernity is described as a modern society.

We can compare modern society with societies that are pre-modern or those that are post-modern. However neither of these approaches is fully satisfactory. The social structure of modernity is such that it defines the transition from isolated communities to mass scale society. Referred to in this manner modernity is found, therefore, not just in the West. This process can be seen as working all over the world rather than just in the advanced nations.

Thus mass society implies:

- large scale movement of goods, people, and information among separate areas
- standardisation of many aspects of society which are helpful for mobility

- increased specialisation and interdependence of different parts of the society

Thus modernity can be apparently contradictory, but these features listed above are different parts of the overall ontology of this process. When the elements or products of modernity “invade” another culture through popular processes such as various cultural aspects such as folktales and cinema there is a widespread ‘overhaul’ of cultural and social ontology and these tend to change a society and prepare it for further changes. This results in a homogenisation of culture and creates widespread diversification at the local level. There are other features, such as democratic government and the hierarchical structures within it. So also does the private sector grow greatly in influence (Genard Delanty, 2000). This sometimes creates a friction and modernity can be perceived as being totalitarian. However, the individual in modernity belongs to those subsystems, and is part of the competition, liberty, and individualism. This is all the more true for comparisons of modernity with societies that are traditional.

Modernity brought with it many blessings to the people including much better health and economic prospects. However, there are also some problems which have emerged with modern society e.g. the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki during world war II; and the arms race thereafter. Other problems include environmental degradation e.g. air and water pollution. Modernity also creates great stress on people and alienation or being without specific interest in anything (malaise). At the present point the debate is still on whether modernity is socially positive or not, whether it has proved beneficial or not to world society.

30.4 Modernity as a Juggernaut

Giddens position conflicts with the contention that society has entered into a post modern world. Thus modernity witnesses tremendous increases in the scope, pace and depth of change relative to systems that preceded it. Further the path or trajectory of change is not linear, going forward step by step. For Giddens modernity implies

- capitalism
- industrialism
- surveillance programs and activities
- military power

Giddens theory of structuration and its basic components adequately describe modernity. These elements are:

- distanciation, or separation in of time and space
- disembedding
- reflexivity

While in pre-modern societies time and space were totally interconnected. However, with the onset of modernity time and space were no longer closely linked, and this interconnection became very weak. Now, this fact is important so far as modernity is concerned.

Distanciation helps in the establishment of organisations and bureaucracy, and makes possible the nation-state which is international. That is it is

possible to connect local and global arenas. Again the modern society is within the matrix of history and it takes from that to influence the present. Finally such distancing makes possible the second of Giddens factors of modernity that is disembedding. Disembedding itself is the process of transcending the local context and it's reorganising itself along indefinite stretches of time and space. According to Giddens there are two varieties of disembedding factors. These are:

- symbolic tokens e.g. money. This allows for time-space distancing and allows money transactions with those who are widely separated in time and space.
- systems of professional expertise. These are very useful because they help create the environment. Some such experts include doctors and lawyers. Other experts affect everyday commodities and even property. Thus expert systems provide reassurance across time and space. Again in abstract systems, trust is fundamental not only to modern societies also because the symbolic tokens and expert systems serve to disembed the society in the modern world.

Thus an economy based on monetary transactions and the legal system work because the members have trust in them.

Again another basic characteristic of modernity is the phenomena of reflexivity. Thus all social and psychological aspects, processes, events, can be reflected upon, understood better and working as an activity which influences the further development of a phenomenon. The fact of disembedding indicates

- the need for trust
- the need for expert systems

Trust according to Giddens is socialised into children and then reinforced by behaviour that conforms to this expectation of mutually reliable behaviours. However, this is also accompanied by destabilising factors, risk factors that threaten trust and create ongoing lack of security in people. Thus the risk of nuclear wars are neither fought nor won. The risk factor in global or local war is such that several danger points have arisen and disarmament of military of nuclear warheads could easily be one of the international projects to increase the sense of security for the subjects.

Giddens points out that the risk factor extends into the material environment and what can be done to prevent its degradation (forests, rivers, rural and urban habitats). Again global investments existing in institutional settings are also risky. The subjects take notice of risks while taking action. Religion receded and only those facts are believed in which the subjects can realise and turn into reality. The awareness of the different risk factors is increasing in the modern world and is one of the facts of modernity. Again the subjects and the 'public' are aware that even experts cannot handle certain risks and risk-situations.

30.5 Ontological Insecurity and Modernity

According to Giddens ontological insecurity has been created within modernity itself and suggests that

- *design faults* in the construction of the modern world
- *operator failure* of those who run the modern world

- *unintended consequences*
- *reflexivity of the modern society*

Thus according to Giddens in modern society 'control' becomes an important issue because new knowledge is continuously cropping up and superceding the old, and giving it a different direction altogether. As an answer to this Giddens suggests *utopian realism*.

That is utopian ideals and social reality should be taken together as a single unit rather than aim for just the one or the other. Giddens is critical of the postmodern theories and feels that were systematic knowledge impossible the intellectual activity/academics would come to a standstill. He feels that postmodernism would involve a world in which

- there are post scarcity systems
- multilayered democracy
- demilitarisation
- humanisation of technology

However, it is clear that post modernity cannot be predicted in such simple parameters which need not appear at all.

Giddens notes that the reflexive modern world pushes the self into becoming a "reflexive project." Thus the self becomes an area to be reflected upon with a view to ameliorating it and bringing it into tune with itself and society. Thus he points out that the subject is a result of inner search and also the body must be controlled and socially projected in a specific manner in the relevant physical spaces. There are formulas how which define we interact. In fact reflexivity has led to a body-obsession and a social neurosis. Modernity and modern society are also characterised by setting apart some areas of deviance from the normal day to day living. This has been termed the "Sequestration of experience" by Giddens. Thus phenomena like madness, sickness, death and sexuality are sequestered and delineated as areas that should be hidden from the attention. The reason that the phenomena of sequestration comes about is because abstract systems have controlled large segments of society. Though sequestration brings with it a sense of penaciling security it is quite clear that there is an avoidance of basic truths, such as the processes of death, sickness, madness etc.

Thus modernity has brought with both positive and negative consequences. One of the negative consequences is that there tends to be a sort of malaise or what Giddens terms "personal meaninglessness." This is because important areas of daily life have been sequestered, and repressed. The light at the end of the tunnel is reflexivity of modern life which as it increases will ensure that such sequestration does not take place and processes that have been swept under the carpet will one day be the most significant and important. While Giddens is concerned with modernity we find that Beck is interested in the new modernity. Thus Beck and Giddens feel that we are living in a modern world rather than a post modern one. What is the risk that accompanies the new modernity? Beck labels the new modernity as "reflexive modernity." Beck feels that relationships in such a society are increasingly reflexive and individuals are forced to make wide range of individual decisions so far as relationships are concerned, and how they can be begun and maintained.

According to Beck, within modernity itself there is a change from industrial society to the risk society which is different from industrial society but not totally. Thus the classical modernity was centred on producing wealth and equal distribution of the same. On the other hand the advanced modern societies the main issue is the reduction and canalisation of risk. Thus the main concern in classical modernity believed in equality, the concern of advanced modernity is a safety. These risks come from wealth produced in industry. This includes the nuclear industry and bombs whose effects and side effects can be devastating.

Box 30.4: The Risk Factor

Even industrial pollutants are themselves a source of risk and have most dangerous effects on health. This kind of risk, including nuclear annihilation, is not simply localized but global. Again risk and class intermesh to some extent. Thus in industrial society it is clear that the wealthy classes can avoid risk or reduce it simply because they have the wealth to purchase safety. And this helps to strengthen the class society. On the other hand poverty is full of risks. Beck extends his analysis and states that the truth about social classes applies to the nation-states as well.

Thus the rich nations are able to minimize risks, the poor or poorer nations find that risk is centred in and around them. Again richer nations make further wealth and profit by catering to the poorer nations in order to build technology that will help to control the risks in poor nations and try to ameliorate them to some extent. It is pointed out, however, that no nation is completely safe from risks, nor are individuals. However, the nations that profit from the risk factor in poor nations find that there is a 'boomerang effect' and factors associated with risk tend to become proactive and try to eliminate or control the areas where risk reduction technologies are being made in the wealthy nations. However, though advanced modernity creates risks we find that accompanying these risks is reflexivity and makes those that produce risks themselves begin to think about the situation and how to alter it. But this is also in the case of those nations that are poor and face these risks. According to Beck it is science and the scientists that are responsible and a protector of global "contamination" of nature and culture, and accuses science and scientists for being illogical.

Reflection and Action 30.2

Discuss the aspects of risk taking in modern society. Is there some way in which this can be reduced or removed?

Again in classical industrial society we find that nature and culture were separate entities in the case of advanced modernity they go hand in hand are deeply interlinked and interrelated to each other. This linkage means that changes in either nature or culture feedback onto each other. Thus Beck points out that nature and society are related to each other almost symbiotically. This has led to the facts of nature being made political and so scientists, including social scientists are now in the domain of and being effected by politicisation. According to Beck the governments are losing their powerful control because of sub political bodies like research institutes. Subgroups of people are more responsive relative to the government. We can say advanced modernity has generated both hormones risks and also ways to deal with it. Ritzer evaluates modern society using the concepts of hyperrationality, Mcdonaldization and Americanization. Let us begin with

hyperrationality. Ritzer points out that the concept of hyperrationality draws heavily on rationality as conceptualised by Weber. For Weber we live in an increasingly rational world. Formal rationality is seen to be used for system-usage than Weber's other types of rationality: Substantive, theoretical and practical. Thus we see that formal rationality implies the increasingly felt need and importance of institutions which force members to adhere to a strict code of behaviour and conduct.

30.6 Modernity Rationality and Norms

On the other hand, substantive rationality implies dominance of norms and values in making of rational choice. Thus theoretical rationality deals with intellectual apprehension. On the other hand practical rationality defines the context/situation so far as daily decisions are concerned.

Now, we can say that hyperrationality goes beyond formal rationality. Thus a hyperrational system combines Webber's forms of rationality which include,

- formal rationality
- substantive
- intellectual
- practical

The reason such a system is called hyperrational because it uses and combines all four of Weber's forms of rationality.

Formal rationality has four aspects which are:

- efficiency
- predictability
- quantity rather than quality
- Substitution of non human for human technologies

Box 30.4: The Irrationality of Rationality

Thus this form of rationality is also accompanied by the "irrationality of rationality." In this schema we find that efficiency is always with a view to an end. And how we can use the best means to a goal. In fact food restaurants the delivery system is made so convenient and automatic that there are drive in facilities to help accelerate the process of food distribution and consumption. Now, the next factor in formal rationality is that there is a standardisation of processes and events and there are "no surprises", and the branches of fast food restaurants are very similar even across nations. They all proceed along the assembly line, mechanised approach to food. Further fast food restaurants pay greater attention to quantity rather than quality. Such a formally rational system has intrinsic to it the generation of "irrationalities", such as making the "dining experience" most bizarre, demystifying and dehumanising.

Ritzer indicates that this is the trend all over the modern world where the emphasis is on quick turnover for business. Examining credit cards Ritzer feels that each of the factors applied to Mcdonaldization are true for the credit card industry. Loans are processed quickly. Again the credit card makes consumption predictable. Credit cards come with different credit limits and the transactions are relatively dehumanizing. Thus both the credit card and

the fast food restaurant can be seen to be an intrinsic aspect of the modern world.

Ritzer also argues for the “Americanization” of modern society which was evident in our discussion of fast food restaurants and credit card usage. Thus America is perceived as practicing/living in a modern world and engaged in the construction of the American way of life. Thus credit card usage is part of Americanization. The major credit cards companies are based in America. The Visa, MasterCard, and American Express are major cards relative to those based in Britain (Barclay Card) and Japan (JCB). The credit card companies are making a concerted effort to ‘globalize’ the credit cards. It is noted, however, that credit cards are and can be used for indigenous purchases. This both the credit cards and fast food restaurants have become part of the modern world and is in part a reflection of a specific world era. Let us now turn to some of the main ideas in the social theory of Jurgen Habermas, concerning modernity. Habermas feels that modernity has yet to play itself out and that there are many modern areas that can be developed further, before thinking of a postmodern world. According to Habermas modernity does have a number of paradoxes. Thus rationality that is a part of the overall social system is contradictory and conflictual with the rationality of the life-world as a whole. On the one hand social systems have multiplied their complexity and use instrumental reason. Again the life-world has also multiplied its diversity in terms of secularisation and the processes of reflexivity.

Thus a rational society according to Habermas is one where the system and the life-world exist together living an intermeshed but parallel existence. This conjoining and interaction leads to a stage in society of abundance economically, and environmental control due to rational systems being present and employed to their optimum. The problem of the modern world is that now the system begins to exercise power or to ‘colonize’ the life-world. This leads to a situation where the rational system denies the freedom to the life-world, a freedom that is necessary to allow the life world to grow to further maturity. Thus for Habermas the ‘colonization’ of the life world in modernity is its basic marker, and is, therefore, that he regards modernity as an ‘unfinished project.’ To Habermas the fully rational society where the rational system and the Life world(s) can exist and express themselves satisfactorily. At the moment such a situation does not exist and the life-world is greatly subdued and impoverished. This is the obstacle that has to be crossed over. It does not mean a violent destruction of systems economic or administrative, since they help life worlds to rationalize their existence and ontology. How is this to be done? This requires that we examine the relationship between system and life-world.

According to Habermas

- “restraining barriers” should be erected to reduce colonisation of life world
- “sensors” should be used to make a greater impact of life world on the system

In this manner the two areas that is life world and system benefit each other greatly. Habermas feels that until the above facts assert themselves modernity’s project will take long to complete. Thus Habermas is squarely of the view that modernity has much to offer and that we are not in a postmodern society as yet.

30.7 Conclusion

Finally to put the last word in Habermas has criticized postmodernism on several grounds. Since our next unit is on post structuralism/postmodernism this unit would serve also as a precursor of our discussion on the same. Thus for Habermas:

- It is very difficult to objectively evaluate the postmodernists because one is not sure whether what one is reading is social theory or literature. In the former case the problems arises in postmodernists erecting a formidable fascade of jargon which is not in the mainstream of sociological knowledge. Hence, one doesn't know where to classify such theory.
- Normative sentiments are concealed from the reader, but nevertheless they offer normative critiques of contemporary society. However, these are not exactly grounded and, therefore, not effective.
- It has a totalising tendency despite the fact that postmodernists themselves are against this phenomena.
- Post modernists ignore the facts of daily life.

In short postmodernists are shut off from the very sphere (life-world) of activity from which they deprive themselves. As such the source of social data and the area of expression, that is everyday life is, cut off from them.

Thus in this unit we have examined and presented several theoretical positions on tradition and modernity. We have covered the approach of Giddens to modernity as also that of Beck and Ritzer. Finally, we considered the ideas of Habermas. All this has set the stage for our next unit. To fully understand and appreciate the units on post structuralism and postmodernism the background provided in this unit will be of great use.

30.8 Further Reading

Bauman, Z(1989), *Modernity and The Holocaust*. Cambridge:Polity

Baudrillard, J (1994) *The Illusion of The End*. Cambridge:Polity

Castells, M (1996), *The Information Age, Vol-1:The Rise of The Network Society*. Oxford Blackwell

30.9 References

Rojas (1966), *Rojas Databank.Org/Capital L8.htm*

Gerard Delanty 2000, *Modernity and Postmodernity Knowledge, Power and The Self*. London : Sage

Unit 31

Post Structuralism and Post Modernism

Contents

- 31.1 Introduction
- 31.2 Critique of Structuralism
- 31.3 Post Structural Theories
- 31.4 Discourse Knowledge and Experience
- 31.5 Derrida and Deconstruction
- 31.6 Foucault and the Archaeology of Knowledge
- 31.7 Jameson and Late Capitalism
- 31.8 Baudrillard and Post Modernism
- 31.9 Conclusion
- 31.10 Further Reading

Learning Objectives

After having read this unit you should be able to

- outline post-structural theories
- critique structuralism
- describe deconstruction
- explain "late capitalism"
- discuss Baudrillard and postmodernism

31.1 Introduction

It is the intellectual trend in the ontology of ideas and schools of ideas, that they are constantly superseded. The ideas or ideologies that are superseded recede into the history of ideas. The new theories and ideas then occupy centre stage in the national and international sociological and social scientific world views. This cycle further repeats itself and though this fact is often lost sight of in the heyday of a theoretical orientation that has become popular.

In the essay that follows we will first take up post structuralism and then postmodern theory. We will see how there are several overlaps indeed intermeshes between various strands of these two contemporary approaches to the study of society and culture. Thus what we are dealing with are strands of an overall approach. There is no one view on these approaches and both post structuralism and post modernism are blanket terms containing many strands of thought. Let us turn now to post structuralism first. What does the term indicate? As is clear from the word "post structuralism", these approaches are those that came after 'structuralism'. These theories and approaches sought to seek insights into society by critiquing and deconstructing social and cultural processes. The post modernism break with structuralism was the fact that structuralism reduced everything into binary oppositions and the interrelations between them. The structuralists held they could analyse any phenomena with the help of their methodology. We must emphasise that post structuralism is a number of approaches and not one monolithic theory. However, these approaches have in common their point of departure a critique of "structuralism".

31.2 Critique of Structuralism

Poststructuralists often point out in their various writings that meaning in language is diverse and open to many different interpretations. Yet to get to the meaning of a text it can be deconstructed and is different from its apparent or surface meaning. That is different meanings can be assigned to a single text depending upon the perspective taken. As would be clear by now that post structuralism proceeds as a critique of structuralism which is itself bounded by its own linguistic boundaries. Structuralism, however, was found to be inadequate as an explanation of social process and phenomena. Thus we find that

- structuralism did not pay heed to historical processes and is a-historical
- applied the rules of linguistics to societal processes which is a questionable procedure
- it is assumed that a work has meaning in itself and this persists even before it is discovered and
- the text is only a conduit between the subject and the structure of rationality.

Thus the structuralists argue that it is language and its structure which itself produces reality and since it is language that is responsible for thought it determines mans perceptions whatever they may be. Further there is the idea that meaning does not come from individuals but the rules of language and the overall 'system' which controls individuals. Therefore, the individual is subordinated and superceded by "the structure." It is the structure which produces meaning not the individual. It is specifically language which is at the base of such domination over the individual.

31.3 Post Structural Theories

As can be seen post structural theories do not agree with the 'structuralists' in several key areas of analysis and understanding. We will now turn to these and see how the two differ. However, before that let us look briefly at the background to post structuralism. By the 1950's the influence of structuralism had set in. Saussure (1857-1913) was of the view that 'meaning' had to be found in the "structure" of the whole language (Guller, 1976). It could not be discovered in individual words, and had to have an overall linguistic setting - that is the language as a whole. We find that around the 1960's the structuralist movement tried to amalgamate the ideas of Marx Freud and Saussure. The structuralists were opposed to the existentialist movement which put the individual and life experience at the centre. By contrast the structuralists opined that the individual is everywhere being conditioned by social psychological and linguistic structures which control and direct him, rather than the individual doing the same. As you will have noticed this is an extreme stand and the claim for universality of application of method also drew attention to the fact that such claims of universal application did not necessarily hold true. Also how is it that any two structural analyses of the same field or phenomena would be different?

It was because of the short-comings of the structuralist approach that post structuralism was developed by the intellectuals. This post structuralism is based on a member of basic assumptions/positions. These include: 1) putting all phenomena under one explanation, 2) there is a transcendental reality which overarches all other reality. Post structuralism is also critical of the

concept of man as portrayed and developed by Enlightenment thought. The Enlightenment view that the individual is separate and whole and that the mind is the area where values evolve on the other hand the poststructuralists felt that the individual was embedded in social interaction. Such symbolic beings are referred to by the word "subject". We can then say that the subjects are intertwined with society and culture and occupy some place within them, and sociologically based sites. Further subjects are the actors in everyday reality. In fact it is the subjects that make up society and the activities therein, include work and entertainment. We could add here that the subjects meaning and values are embedded in the identities of groups and the activities which lead them to having an identity.

Thus these approaches that we are discussing have often been dubbed "anti-humanist" because post-structuralism is against the divine or transcendental wholeness as was the humanist theories view. However, 'anti-humanist' is a misnomer and is actually another way of looking at human beings one that is essentially not against individual persons. Further we find that while structuralism presents reality as relations between binary oppositions post-structuralism's vision of reality is a fragmented one. Social process and cultural relations are not viewed as neat oppositions - on the other hand social and cultural processes are seen in bits and pieces and the nature of reality is not seen as being amenable to total understanding of a whole process. Parts of social process can be focused upon and analysed. Poststructuralists are completely opposed to grand narratives and Meta theory feeling these are equivalent to a fiction and not really apprehending reality. Thus post-structural theories are themselves looking at the specific. Further the physical self (the body) is studied in the context of time and history, and brought out of the closet so to speak. Similarly it is the details of discourse and cultural actions that are now looked into. Further the role of language in building social and cultural reality is also evident in the work of the poststructuralists (Godelier, 1972). Thus the fact that society and the individual are "linguistically bound" with each other and the relationship between the two is complex. This stand clearly negates the earlier assumptions of social scientists that language was easy to comprehend and use and that there were no ambiguities regarding language - use. This the post-structural theories negate as an erroneous assumption. In fact "reality" itself is constructed within the social matrix and continues to reproduce itself over time.

31.4 Discourse Knowledge and Experience

The world of discourse and knowledge set the limits for our experience - and the subject (ego) can only experience or describe what he has experienced. That is to also say that there are experiences for which there is no language or a language is slowly being pieced together, and certain words and concepts gain ground and usage. This includes the usage of metaphor, metonymy and irony. These usages lead by themselves to a concern with ideology which provides an ingress and insight into relations of power and the world-view of the subjects.

Again another area in which post structural theories focus upon in their analysis on what are known as cultural codes which themselves provide an understanding of our lives and how they work out within various contexts. However, it needs to be pointed out that it is understood by the post structuralists that construction of meaning implies that some aspects of

social process and individual life will be emphasised and others will be relatively reduced in importance. In other words “objectivity” as in the case of earlier sociological theory is found to be an illusion. That is the analyses of poststructuralists does not deny its subjective orientation. Yet poststructuralists also hold that meaning in society can be deconstructed to open up new ideas and practices. However, such an exercise leads to an understanding of specifics rather than general constructions. Thus loops of meaning and process of construction reveal more about the specific scaffolding of the subject rather than an understanding of the whole. The world is mediated by discourse, language and ideology all of which structure the experience of the subject. According to post structural thinking it is the text which is the repertoire of meanings and there is no meaning outside the text. Thus meaning resides in the text itself in toto. An understanding resides in social signs and discourses in particular fields of study. Again almost paradoxically, every text exists only in relation to other texts. However, it needs to be pointed out that man’s ability to perceive reality is not at stake. Nonetheless what we know of reality is known through various processes of discourse symbols and language. Yet it must be understood that discourse itself is very varied in content. It is also a fact that discourse is sometimes sketchy and abrupt. It originates through chance and disappears also through unspecified reasons. Thus according to Foucault there is no question of predicting history through grand theories and meta narratives (Foucault, 1969). History is thus viewed by poststructuralists as happening by chance. Thus in history the twists, turns, plots, subplots and important events and happenings cannot be pinned down - that is it happens by chance.

31.5 Derrida and Deconstruction

This brief note on structuralism is important for our understanding of the process of “deconstruction” initiated by Derrida. The basics of this structuralism are:

- positing of a centre of power or influence which begins and ends all social processes. This could be ‘mind’ or ‘self’ or even ‘God’.
- all structures are composed of binary pairs or oppositions one of which is more important than the other and often signified thus: +/- . These could be good/evil, god/man and so on.

Reflection and Action 31.1

Discuss what is “deconstruction”. How did Derrida deconstruct structuralism?

Thus post structuralism began with Derrida’s critique of structuralism or rather this ‘deconstruction’ of language society and culture. The structuralists felt that man was chained to structures which controlled him. In contrast, however, Derrida feels that language can be reduced to writing which does not control the subjects. According to him all institutions and structures are nothing but writing and incapable of controlling the individual. The structuralists saw order and stability in language, hence in all structures; the poststructuralists on the other hand saw language as essentially changing and quite unstable. This means that the language structure being itself in flux cannot create structures that constrain, restrain, or punish people, because language itself is disorderly, and the underlying laws of language cannot be ‘discovered’. This is what is the process of deconstruction which as the term suggests is a sort of conceptual dissection of the concept or

process being studied. Derrida who coined the term deconstruction felt that logocentrism has dominated the Western countries. This way of perceiving has meant that writing has always been suppressed historically speaking. This has also meant that the freedom to analyse and think is taken away in a logocentric system. Derrida wants to dismantle this type of approach as it sets writing free from repression. Under these circumstances what takes place in the art form of traditional theatre is a representation of real life. Such a representation is extremely important, in fact a controlled theological theatre.

Box 31.1: The Theological Theatre

Derrida contrasts 'theatre of cruelty' as against traditional theatre which has representational logic and renders traditional theatre as theological. Derrida writes: the stage is theological for as long as its structure, following the entirety of tradition comports the following elements: an author creator who, absent and from afar, is armed with a text and keeps watch over, assembles, regulates the time or the meaning of representation He lets representation represent him through representatives, directors or actors who represent the thought of the "creator". Finally the theological stage comports a passive, seated public, a public of spectators, of consumers, of enjoyers. (Derrida, 1978, *Writing and Difference* : p:235).

Derrida's chosen alternative stage is one which will not be controlled by texts and authors but fall short of disorder/anarchy. Thus Derrida wants a fundamental change in traditional theatre/life which would mean a great change from the dominance of the writer (God?) on the stage (theatre) or in societal process as well leading closer towards freedom of the individual. Derrida feels thus that traditional theatre needs to be deconstructed. In this mode of suggestion is included a critique of society itself, which is, as mentioned earlier 'logocentric.' Derrida feels that in theatre it is the writer who puts together the script, and that this influence is so strong that it is akin to a dictatorship. Similarly in social processes the intellectual ideas and formulations are controlled by the intellectual authorities which create discourse.

Further we may add that post structuralists believe in the process of decentering because when there is no specific authoritarian pressure on society it becomes open ended and available for 'play and difference'. This process is ongoing reflexive and open (Derrida, 1978 :297). Thus the present alone exists and it is the arena where social activity takes place. Thus we should try to find solutions by harking to the past. The future itself cannot be precisely predicted. However, there is no precise solution that Derrida provides except that in the end there is only writing, acting and play with difference. At this point in our presentation it would be instructive to look briefly at an example of post structural ideas and ideology in the case of Michel Foucault one of the major poststructuralists. One critical difference between Foucault and the structuralists is that while linguistics is the main influence for the former, it did not occur exclusively as the domain of ideas that have to be adopted or modified into a poststructuralist schema. That is post structural thinkers use a variety of ideas and influence and are not reduced to examining the relations between binary terms. This variety of sources in presenting an argument is what puts Foucault into the group of the poststructuralists.

31.6 Foucault and the Archaeology of Knowledge

Foucault described his approach/methodology as the “archaeology of knowledge.” Using this approach Foucault studied knowledge and discourse. According to Foucault this approach provides better ingress to understanding society and it is different from history, which he feels is portrayed in a stereotyped linear progression, whereas the reality remains limited and ‘continuous.’

Box 31.2: The Archaeology of Knowledge

In his early work on methodology, Foucault (1966) is doing an “archaeology of knowledge”. His objects of study are bodies of knowledge, ideas, modes of discourse, he contrasts his archaeology of knowledge to history and the history of ideas, both of which he regards as being too rational and as seeing too much continuity in the history of knowledge.... This highly structural approach in Foucault’s early work was later abandoned for a poststructuralist orientation because it was silent on the issue of power as well as the link between knowledge and power. Michel Foucault died in 1984 at the age of 58 as a leading sociologist. Among Foucault’s last works was a trilogy of sexual study. These works indicated Foucault’s interest in studying sexuality. These books were *The History of Sexuality* 1976, *The Care of the Self* 1984, and *The Use of Pleasure* 1984. (From Ritzer, 1996 *Sociological Theory*, p:604-5).

Foucault, however, moved away from this structural type of analysis and began studying the ‘genealogy of power.’ His concern was to find out the facts about governance through knowledge production. The nature of knowledge as power should not be hierarchical and also that the higher the knowledge (e.g. science) the greater the power it wields over the subjects. Thus Foucault studied technique and process in science since this is what exerts power over people through the medium of institutions. This is not to say that the elites are scheming and manipulating power. Again Foucault uses a non linear perception of progress in societies from the stage of barbarism to the present civilisation. Thus history is seen instead as shifting patterns of domination. However, knowledge/power is such that it is always opposed and resisted. Thus Foucault’s post structural view is that while knowledge/power are ubiquitous they are certainly not omnipotent and total in their domination but their power/authority is always questioned and opposed. A brief introduction to Foucault’s ideas would help us in completing the section on post structuralism (Foucault, 1979). Thus according to Foucault

- the mad have been misunderstood and mistreated over the course of history, and subjected to moral control
- power/knowledge are implicative of each other
- technologies exert power e.g. the Panopticon a prison with the cells around a large observation tower from which every thing that inmates do is visible and observable. Such an institution is metaphoric of total societal control of the prisoners, since it forces even the prisoners or inmates to exercise self-restraint. Thus this is a direct relationship between technology, knowledge and power. Thus the Panopticon is a prototype of societal control and surveillance and the forerunner of intelligence services and satellite observations over geophysical territories.

Post modernism is not the term for a single type of theory, metanarrative, or grand theory. It is rather the term for an overall approach involving many

similar strands. There is thus no single position in postmodernism, but all the thinkers in this approach share certain common features that separate it from “modernism.” This has been both a feature that separates it from ‘modernism’ and the approaches all indicate that what they are doing is to present, dissect, construct ideas that will be relevant to the postmodern context. A large number of sociologists still tend to think that post modernism is a passing fancy, however, it is now obvious that postmodernism cannot be ignored both as fact and phenomena. However, it cannot be denied that postmodernism is surrounded by diverse positions within the field itself.

Reflection and Action 31.2

Outline the common features of postmodern writers. How are these separate from “modernism”.

It would be proper at this point to distinguish between some common terms that are often confused with each other although they are quite distinct from one another. Thus “post modernity” is the word used for the historical epoch following the modern era. Further ‘post modernism’ itself refers to cultural products which are different/separate from the modern cultural products (in art, architecture etc.). Again ‘postmodern social theory’ refers to a method of ideating that differs from modern social theory.

From the above it can be said that the post modern covers: 1) a new epoch, 2) new cultural products, 3) new theories about society. Further these new realities are getting strengthened and there is a widespread feeling that the modern era is ending and being superceded by another epoch. This was evident in breaking up of buildings which were modern and complete. However, the post modern theories themselves provide ready made solutions in a general sense. However, it is questionable whether the birth of the post modern era can be precisely dated though it appears to have transited, from the modern in the 1960’s.

Post modernism indicates that in the cultural field postmodern cultural products tend to replace modern products. Again postmodern social theory has emerged from and has differences with modern social theory. Thus postmodern theory rejects the notion of ‘foundationalism’ of the earlier theories but itself tends to be relative, non relational and nihilistic.

31.7 Jameson and Late Capitalism

Again the postmodern thinkers reject the nation of a grand narrative or meta narrative. For example Lyotard contrasts modern knowledge which has a grand synthesis e.g. the work of Parsons or Marx such narratives are associated with modern science. Thus as Lyotard identifies modern knowledge with metanarratives, then obviously postmodern approaches demand that such theorising should be negated in its completeness. This is because postmodern scholars such as Lyotard are not afraid to face the differences and challenges of such a viewpoint. Thus post modernism becomes an instrument that welcomes different perspectives under the same broad umbrella. Let us now turn to look at some examples of postmodern theory. A good illustration of the postmodern theory is clearly set out in the work of Fredric Jameson. The point of departure is that modernity and post modernity mark a radical break from each other and are hard to reconcile the two. However, a middle position is taken by Jameson who writes that there are some continuities between the two epochs. According to Jameson

capitalism is in its 'late' stages, but continues to be the main form of production the world over. However, this 'late' stage of capitalism has been ushered in with post modernism. Thus while the cultural logic is altered, the underlying structure remains the same as in the incipient forms of capitalism. This is reflective of the Marxian framework. Jameson sees the postmodern situation as possessing both positive and negative aspects of postmodernism. Thus there is progress and chaos side by side. Thus according to Jameson there are three stages in the progress of capitalism. The first is market capitalism typified by national markets. Following this phase comes the imperialist stage which is backed up by a global capitalist network. Then the third phase is 'late capitalism' where capital is used to commodify new areas. The effect of changes in the economic structure automatically create appropriate cultural changes. Thus Jameson points out that we can see that:

- realist culture is associated with market capitalism
- modernist culture is associated with monopoly capitalism
- postmodern culture and multinational capitalism

Box 31.3: Late Capitalism

.....aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more morel seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation. Such economic necessities then find recognition in the institutional support of all kinds available for art, from foundation and grants to museums and other forms of patronage. (from Frederic Jameson, 1984 "*Post-Modernism, or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*". New Left Review, p:57).

Jameson's perspective, works mainly within a base and superstructure model. According to Jameson postmodern society has some characteristics: firstly there is superficiality, in the sense the cultural products keep to superficiality and do not enquire deeply into the situation e.g. the soup cans and portrait of Marolyn Munroe - both of which are simulacra as they are a "copy of a copy." Both paintings were painted from a copy of the photographs. Thus the pictures are simulacrum - in which one cannot distinguish the original from the copy (Jameson, 1984:86). These paintings are simulacrum and lack in depth, and covers the surface meanings only. Further emotion or emotionality is hardly to be found in the postmodern societies. Thus alienation has been supplanted by fragmentation, which results in the impersonalization of interaction. Again, and thirdly historicity is set aside and it is clear that all that can be known about the past is textual and can spawn intertextuality at the most. What this implies is that the postmodernists do not restrict themselves to a single linear past but pick and choose from among the available styles. That is to say there is a strong element of *pastiche*. This implies that 'truth' about past history, is that we have no way of knowing what happened. The historians then have to be satisfied with a *pastiche* which in itself may not reflect much of past reality and there is no such thing as linear historical development. Finally postmodernism has a new technology available to it especially the computer and other electronic machines not present earlier. What we can say then is that the post modern societies are in deep flux and great confusion and many symptoms of this have appeared especially with regard to certain kinds of affliction. Thus whole new breeds of psychiatrists are busy trying to undo the stress and

tension that post modernism is clearly associated with. Thus there is a problem of chaotic and disturbing trends of late capitalism. It is difficult to cope with multinational economy and the according cultural impact of consumerism. Jameson feels that cognitive maps are needed to deal with postmodern realities. The maps can be put together by artists novelists and working people. Thus Jameson's schema tries to build bridges between Marxian theory and post-modernism, but ended up antagonising both Marxists and postmodernists. This was to be expected because despite Jameson's efforts to synthesise it was clear that a grand theory/metanarrative was unlikely to bend backwards, and therefore, Jameson uses mainly its base/superstructure dichotomy. Jameson's postmodernism does try to maintain some basic/tenous link with Marxian theory despite the fact that Marxism is a grand narrative. However, in the case of Jean Baudrillard postmodernism is presented as a maverick social theory of contemporary times. Thus Baudrillard journey of ideas commences in the 1960's, when he started out as a Marxist critique of consumer society he was influenced by both linguistics and semiotics. However, he soon left this orientation behind him and abandoned both Marxism and structuralism.

31.8 Baudrillard and Post Modernism

In the 1970's Baudrillard alleged that Marxists and their detractors both had a similar bourgeoisie orientation which was conservative. He felt that an alternative explanation was necessary. Thus Baudrillard put forward the notion of "symbolic exchange" as an alternative to economic exchange. Symbolic exchange itself involves a continuous process of a gift giving and gift taking. It is clear that symbolic exchange was beyond and opposed to the logic of late capitalism.

Such symbolic exchange implied the creation of a society based on the same, but Baudrillard chose to be a-political. He studied contemporary society, and saw that it is not production but the electronic media that characterises it e.g. TV, computers, satellites. We have moved from societies under different modes of production to a society that is more involved with the code of production. Exploitation and profit motives have given way to a domination by the signs/systems that produce them. Again signs referred to something else but in postmodern society they become self referential and characterised by "simulations" and 'simulacra' which are representations of any aspect of consumption (Baudrillard, 1973).

For Baudrillard the postmodern world is "hyper reality." Thus media becomes more real than the reality itself, and provides news, views and events in an exaggerated, skewed, and even ideological manner - thus the term hyper reality. This is not without consequences as the real tends to be buried in the hyper real and may ultimately be banished altogether.

Box 31.4: Catastrophe Management

In short, there is such distortion between North and South, to the symbolic advantage of the South....that one day everything will break down. One day, the west will break down if we are not soon washed clean of this shame, if an international congress of the poor countries does not very quickly decide to share out this symbolic privilege of misery and catastrophe. (Jean Baudrillard, *The Illusion of the End*, p:69).

For Baudrillard culture is undergoing a very deep change which makes the masses more and more passive, rather than increasingly rebellious. Thus the masses encounter these changes with seeming ease absorbing each new cultural idea or artifact. Thus for Baudrillard masses are not seen to be the products of media. Rather it is the media which is observed to provide these wants to the masses (for objects and entertainment). For Baudrillard society is in throes of a 'death culture.' Thus it is death anxiety that pushes people to try and lose this anxiety by using and abusing the consumerist culture. There is no revolutionary silver lining to Baudrillard's theory and the problem is also that symbolic exchange societies may exist but how to bring them about is not addressed to by Baudrillard. All in all Baudrillard's brilliant and unusual ideas make it a clear breakaway from the ideas and artifacts of modernism. Baudrillard in deconstructing contemporary society shows just how much sociological theory has moved forward and away from classical thought. Thus we can see post modernism does display certain characteristics and we can see below just what these are.

The first of these characteristics is that in postmodernism that is a multiplicity of views, meanings and so on. Secondly the postmodernists are looking for polysemic and alternative meanings. Thirdly there is a distrust of metanarratives and grand narratives as found in classical sociological theory. It also holds that since there a multiplicity of perspectives there will always be many truths. Thus postmodernists regard concepts ideas as texts which are open to interpretation. They also look for binary oppositions in the text. Further, these binary oppositions are themselves shown to be false or at least not necessarily true. Finally the post modernist identifies texts, groups which are absent or omitted. This is regarded important to any 'deconstruction.'

Now postmodernism is reflected in almost all areas of life including film, TV, literature etc. which are deeply influenced by postmodern viewpoints. Let us now turn to some postmodern aspects visible in other fields. Thus in language words and forms are used and the concept of 'play' is basic to it. Thus 'play' implies altering the frame which connects ideas - allowing the troping of a metaphor. Thus the 'text' has a meaning which is understood or interpreted by the reader and not the author. This 'play' or exercise is the way that the author gains some significance in the consciousness of the reader. The problem with this postmodern view about language is very difficult to understand and is against the basis of communication where the author communicates to the reader in as lucid a manner as possible.

In literature it is found that postmodern works is not so much opposed to modernist literature. Instead it tends to extend it stylistically. Some post modern literatures include David Foster Wallace and Thomas Pynchon both of whom are critical of the vast system building of the Enlightenment modernity. As you would have noticed post structuralism and postmodernism do have an intermeshing quality. Indeed some authors straddle both fields e.g. Francois Lyotard. Further structuralism tries to build models seeking out factor and patterns that are stable, which is anathema to postmodernists and rejected outright as a futile manoeuvre. Thus postmodernism has retained the cultural dimension of structuralism but has rejected the claims to its scientificity. Again post structuralism is a position in philosophy, it is not the name of an era whereas postmodernism is associated with the post modern epoch.

31.9 Conclusion

What then has postmodernism achieved? The answer is that postmodernism has turned away the shroud over the analysis and demystified both epistemological and ideological constructs. Further a deep look at ethnography has led to a reexamination and questioning of ethnography itself. Postmodernism and its adherents point out that sociologists should analyse the role of their own culture in the study of culture, and therefore, increase the sensitivity of the subject. Postmodern approaches have been criticised on several grounds. To begin with postmodernists are against theory. This is paradoxical since this is itself a theoretical position taken by the postmodernists. Again the postmodernists emphasise the illogical or non-rational aspects of a culture. Further, the postmodernist concentrates on the marginal which is itself evaluative. Then again the stress on intertextuality, but do not always follow their own advice and often treat texts as standing alone. Postmodernists also put away all assessment of theory - but this does not mean that there is no means of assessment. Thus according to postmodernists modernism is inconsistent but they themselves exercise it as and which way they want. Finally the postmodernists are self-contradictory when they deny any claims of reality or 'truth' in their own writings. Finally there is the issue of postmodernism not having any confidence in the scientific method. But if sociology does follow this position, then it will turn into a study of meanings, rather than causes which influence what it is to be an individual in society.

31.10 Further Reading

Baudrillard, Jean 1976, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*. London : Sage

Derrida, Jacques 1978, *Writing and Difference*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press

Foucault, Michel 1969 *The Archaeology of Knowledge and The Discourse on Language*. New York : Harper Colophon

Jameson, Frederic 1991 *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* Durham, N.C. : Duke University Press