Unit 4
Social Construction of Reality

Contents

Learning Objectives

Once you have studied this unit you should be able to

- define "reality" and "social construction"

- describe construction of reality

- indicate the relation between language legitimation socialisation and reality

- describe social reality and the symbolic universe.

4.1   Introduction

In this lesson we are going to try and understand what exactly is meant by the "social construction" of "reality". What do we mean by these words? Unless we understand each of these interrelated concepts it would be difficult to proceed with our presentation of this most important aspect of social reality. Social reality indicates quite clearly that what we are referring to is in fact basically the capacity of society to develop different ways of looking at the constituents of the visible aspects of reality. Thus in fact as we will see that there are many societies and many cultures, but what is common among them is that social reality tries to perpetuate itself through the younger generation, but this does not usually succeed and the social reality of each generation has several points of departure from the preceding generation.

What is being said is that members of any society live by certain beliefs and principles but these were not always there and there have been significant shifts in each generations point of view and perspectives. The points of importance in discussing the social construction of reality is that in most societies the version of reality is not a single monolithic construct but rather consists of several layers of meaning and existence. That is to say that there are many social constructions of reality which differ from category to category. So we must point out that while the method of social construction of reality remains similar in most societies it is also very clear that there are "multiple synchronic realities", that is many versions of culture and reality

are available especially in plural societies where these realities then intermesh and interact and influence each other in various ways. Thus it is clear that "reality" is constructed in a specific way but this does not mean that all versions of reality are the same. There is often much difference in their expression. Society which creates reality, as we will see, provides many different points of ingress and is responsible for creating a socially intermeshed reality. What we are saying then is that there are plural indeed multiple reality systems available for us to observe in our daily life which is really the very root of any social constructions and sustains the same even through periods of lawlessness and disruptions.

Once we have read and understood the points made above it should be clear that what we are discussing concerns the secure and integrated way in which society perpetuates its attitudes and beliefs. It is also clear that each generation brings with a whole lot of perceptual expectations and a minimum acceptable standard of living so that it can lead a meaningful existence. So it has to be noted that society as a whole contains and keeps in balance that entire social process from cradle to the tomb.

4.2 Construction of Reality

Now it would be natural to ask how is all this construction of multiple and synchronic realities are achieved. What are the ways and the mechanism in which we as members together create a perception of the world process. Surprisingly social realities are created as soon as the new members of society are ready a particular imprinting is begun to be ingrained in them. Among the important areas of life include the economic, political, psychological, and so on and each of them is put together by training the new generation to act and behave in some particular manner which they deem to be fit and worthy of them.

The social fabric of any society is a fragile construct which has to be constantly renewed through ritual and sustained interactions. Thus reality itself is "fragile"so that any disturbing or conflictual situations lead to a breakdown of order and mayhem rules. After such social breakdowns which occur in interaction, in times of war with another nation or even chronic lawlessness. It takes much time to recover from such breakdowns of reality and the time they take to repair the social fabric may last many years or even make a lifetime impact on some of the members. Thus as we introduce the lesson we have to point out that culture is many faceted and the construction of reality though similar in many societies does in fact differ from individual to individual and from nation to nation. There is doubt that in the mind of the young and impressionable that has to develop certain capacity to be bounded say by religious or economic status. Thus there is different life style created by the different castes and classes which have a full blown ideology and interaction in everyday life. These are not mere ways of looking at things out of curiosity. Rather it is a critical situation where the constructed reality has to be continuously fed and bolstered so to speak into the social system or systems.

As such when we discuss how social reality is constructed then it becomes very clear to us that in order to perpetuate itself society takes recourse to both socialisation and education and continues to control the individual to some extent and even bring within him a sense of responsibility to further perpetuate his reality.

We are going to explain in this lesson how social process constructs reality and thereby goes further to establish that very pattern of culture and ideology which they themselves were taught and learnt to make the appropriate judgments and decisions within that very frame work. Thus in such a delicate and precise operation it becomes obvious that not all members would be able to fit in fully into the social fabric, and these are deviant individuals and society attempts through various other therapies to bring the deviant back into the centre or the "mainstream" of society.

We have pointed out in various ways that our reality and experience are all constructed by human beings in communities, large groups, nation states, and at times by much larger concerns than the nation state itself. The task of the sociology of knowledge is to indicate how precisely these constructions of social reality are evolved by human beings and groups and community of human beings. Thus the interrelationship between knowledge and the social context in which it has evolved is an important ingredient in understanding how society is able to create and recreate itself over the ages.

According to some social scientists it is believed that the societal context was the basis of the existence of ideas but not the precise ideas themselves, and therefore gave the individual some critical degree of voluntary actions and freedom of action. On the other hand there are other social scientists who believe that human thought per se is never safe from ideology and the intellectual climate prevailing in the environment as a whole. It is thus clear that, as the social scientists have pointed out that the acquisition of knowledge is accretional and it gathers relatively slowly, and only when sufficient aspects of the knowledge sought are examined does the view of any reality become focused and clear. Thus knowledge is accumulated over time and it is not possible for it to be given full blown to the new members, and existing members are continually given fresh inputs through media, institutions, family and work environment and so on to keep them abreast of the events that are happening in society as a whole.

4.3   Phenomena of Social Reality

Berger and Luckmann feel that to study the phenomena of social reality implies that we use everyday common sense reality as a point of departure. This is what knowledge ultimately comprises: the interaction and participation in social life and process. Thus "commonsense ideas" are the most important ingress into understanding the sociology and phenomena of individuals, groups and society. Thus it is clear that society has at the very least two sides to its existence and ontology- one is subjective and the other is objective. Together these facts give rise to the understanding that while there is a group life for an individual there is in fact an objective reality , rules and regulations which have to be adhered to, unless the individual or group wants to be ostracized. Thus first of all the reality of social life is sui generic that exists over above and beyond any single individual. Thus Berger is interested, as are we, in finding out how humans produce and perpetuate social life in all its manifold facets and aspects. Thus by attempting to understand social reality we are really asking how it was constructed, because this is what will give us the cues to proceed further with our line of enquiry.

4.4   Everyday Social Reality

Berger and Luckmann point out that everyday life and its basis is such that it is best apprehended by the method of phenomenological analysis, which

happens to be a descriptive method. Thus we observe that consciousness has the basic property of existing in several dimensions and several types of reality. Thus human beings are aware to a greater or lesser extent that the social world comprises of many or "multiple realities" in everyday life. These multiple realities are themselves well ordered and more or less fully developed and quite capable of influencing each other. Thus phenomena are, such that a particular pattern can be discerned by human beings, and these social facts are imposed upon them. In other words a new entrant into a society sooner or later finds that he or she has a particular social order which is imposed upon him or her. Thus we find that common sense knowledge is what human beings share intersubjectively through interaction with other human beings. This becomes very clear in the structure of routine that human beings follow in the course of their daily life. Pursuing an enquiry into common sense knowledge and its social context is relatively simple, but Berger and Luckmann point out that the difficulty exists in the comprehension and "translation" of those areas which are not classifiable as common sense knowledge but are in fact non everyday reality.

Box 4.1: Indexical Constructions

The entire social world….. is a set of indexicalities, which are taken for granted. They are rarely called into question, and when they are, the questioning stays at a superficial level, accepting fairly quick and easy classifications instead of pursuing the search for objectivity to its end. For there is no end: the search for objectivity definable reality is a bottomless pit. (Randall Collins 1988, *Theoretical Sociology*. Onlando : Harcourt Brace p: 277).

To understand the social construction of reality we have to be aware of the time-structure of daily life since this sheds an important insight on the overall social order. As Berger and Luckmann point out that temporality reflects and is a basic property of consciousness itself. Again we find that the temporal structure of daily life is an extremely complicated matter. This is because consciousness exists and interacts at many different level and all these different levels of reality have to be seen as interrelated and arranged in a specific pattern. Thus the temporal structure existing in society indicates clearly defines the situation for members of the particular society they belong to.

Let us consider the question of daily interactions between human beings in any particular society. In these interactions it is the direct or face to face situations which define much of the structure of reality in everyday life. This is because when there is face to face interaction the self and the other an inter subjective understanding by each of the other. Self reflection is also an outcome of the behaviour with others, as it makes us conscious of what we are and stand for in society, since it creates or even "gives" us our attitudes and subsequently our behaviour, which in turn is the basis of human social reality, or "realities".

It may be pointed out however that everyday reality itself has many components and these itself could generate specific situations and attitudes. It is therefore clear on observation that while there are basic similarities in social reality there are also areas that create rules of their own and impose them on the members of a given reality. This reality again although it is so

clearly present in social situations is in fact influenced and bounded by the rules of social reality.

4.5 Language and Social Reality

Another area where social reality is present is that of the area of language. All languages have a particular grammar and syntax, and is the most significant and important sign system of all societies. It helps to create a fund of knowledge which is continuously going expansion and contraction as different words and ideas which enter into the overall fund of knowledge and ideas. And there are some aspects of knowledge and understanding which 'fall out' of the overall system of ideas and knowledge. Thus for example the English language has compiled vast dictionaries which are revised, edited and updated, and in these social procedures many new words and concepts enter into the language. There are also words and ideas that become defunct and are removed from the dictionary and language.

So we can say that language as a social reality accumulates knowledge and transmits it to other members of the human system, which in turn create a socially ordered environment.

It may be pointed out here that language itself is a highly complex aspect of social reality and research into how a human being leans and adapts to the social order or reality. Thus it is pointed out that language is symbolic and therefore capable of apprehending social reality. Therefore, it is a social fact which exercises control or restraint over human members, and yet remains an externalisation, and outside the individual. This is because the ontological reality of language is such that it is the backbone of social order and its main artery of communication.

Reflection and Action 4.1

Is society socially constructed or is it a divine religiously raised structure? Reflect and comment.

We can therefore say that language is a vast repertory of knowledge, reason, morality, politics and social attitudes. It can then be added that if the language is changed the particular ideological leaning of a linguistic framework would also be deeply affected. Thus social reality can be apprehended by a study of language and its application to varying situations within the societal context. Related to this is the idea that not only does language provide us an ingress into the overall structure of society, it is basic to human progress and the shift in the prominent features of social reality form a basic component on the history of theories and ideas so far as sociology and the sociology of knowledge is concerned.

4.6 The Objective Reality of Society

Let us now consider the objective reality of society. By objective reality we mean that society exercises control over the individual, and is beyond the control of any single individual. Let us see how this happens in society with the specific focus on institutions. How does an institution direct and control the behaviour of its members, and how is it that while individuals are born live and die, institutions can exist indefinitely in time. This is why we are choosing this area for the exemplification of the social reality which exists and how it continues to exist.

Let us look at the phenomena of institutionalisation, a procedure that creates a space and certain goals and aims that would be reached through various rules that define institutional behaviour. It has been pointed out that every institution exists in both a physical environment and a social environment. The fact is that both these are "given" and cannot be altered at will. In fact it is his overall social and physical environment that makes man a human being. It is this interaction with the physical and social environment that creates the existence of all human activity. This is because no human activity can be begun or completed without the due impact of the overall or "total" environment.

Now the question arises regarding how institutions themselves begin continue and establish themselves. In short we are now asking the origin of human institutions. It may be pointed out that institutions arise when there is the "reciprocal typifications" of the habitualized behaviour that make for strictly patterned behaviour which should not go out of the limits of the overall control pattern. Thus the various different tasks that members carry on lead to an institution taking over social control of its members. When this has happened we may say that the institutions has "arrived" or has become crystallized. Thus institutions which were initially humanly created over time soon develop a socially objective reality of their **own**.

Box 4.2: Experience and Interpretation

...We cannot claim that this embedded ness is absolutely universal... the world is not always taken as ordinary by all people and all occasions. Buddhist mediators and other mystics have devised deliberate methods for withdrawing the mind's assent to ordinary assumptions about reality and have claimed to experience an illumination by looking at whatever transpires without putting any interpretation upon it. (Randall Collins 1988, *Theoretical Sociology*, p:279 Orlando : Harcourt Brace).

Berger and Luckmann point out that the relation between man and his social world is dialectical, that is each phenomena acts, interacts and reacts to the other. Thus man and nature cannot be separated as each has an effect on the other which can be beneficial or detrimental. Thus we can say that social reality has three interrelated aspects. These are the facts that society is produced by human beings; further it becomes clear that society is an objective reality; and that as a consequence of these factors man becomes a social product himself.

Now society requires to be accepted or realised, that is to say it is in need of legitimation, which is done by socialising the new generation of members into the preexisting patterned ways of interaction. Socialisation it may be pointed out is done steadily and almost continuously during the growing years, and it never ends even unto death and attitudes towards the beyond. That is to say institutions provide for rules of birth, life and death and how these processes can be made more efficient. However socialization is never wholly able to keep all members in the line of control and as such there are some percentage of deviants in any society.

The inner control or the control of attitudes is what makes the institution such a powerful force. However social reality, shared experiences, and common compliance lead to an inner and outer congealing of experience

which settles down in the subconscious and exercises control and this is what makes socialisation firm , steady and perpetual. It is through institutions like the family that we learn to become human beings and to exhibit behaviours that are socially beneficial. However again there is no perfect correlation between legitimation socialisation and overall behaviour. And there are "lapses" in socialisation which can sometimes lead to a tear in the social fabric in the form of riots or other violent disturbances just because the social control of institutions and how it is passed on sometimes break down, and such a situation could be dangerous for social harmony.

Apart from the above we find that human beings have to enact a particular learned role behaviour which is essential to the wellbeing of the fabric of society. Roles set up mutual obligations and reciprocal links. When these roles are repeated often enough an elaborate role structure develops. This is so even if a role play is relatively simple, and much more so as the role has wider implications and much greater social control.

Thus a role defines the social self and the other way round. Roles have their origin in reciprocal typifications, just as do institutions. Roles create a social fabric that is linked both in time and space, and has further to conform to the role limits and thereby forming the very backbone of institutions and social life as a whole.

This is to say it is institutions that shape the individuals and then start depending upon them. Therefore to play a role properly the player or member must know the wholeness of the role, and realise it in its many intricacies, including the cognitive and the behavioral aspect. This implies that there is a social distribution of knowledge in society which occurs as the members play and enact their social roles, leading to a basic understanding of how a member is supposed to respond to some other social person in interaction or reflection. It has been pointed out that the study of roles is very important in the sociology of knowledge since that is what leads us to learn about how the macroscopic institutions impact upon the individual and the group and create "real" experiences which are part of the construction of social reality. Thus as we go along we find that construction of social reality is in fact an elaborate cooperative effort of all the members of society, and is not something that any one individual can undertake.

If a society is relatively coherent and orderly it will have institutions that are respected and shared by members of a society. On the other hand if there is much conflict and disorder in society it is clear that the institutions within society are breaking up or at least not being subscribed to in any great measure. In other words if there is a society that is highly balkanized its institutional base will also have multiple synchronous societies, or subcultures. In fact it is the existence of subcultures which indicate quite clearly that we cannot talk about "reality" in the singular and it must be realised that "reality" is not the same throughout a society or a nation state.   In fact there are plural perceptions of society depending on the precise position that a member is located within his or her community. This is because knowledge is the product of interaction between its knowledge base and the social context. However we need to point out here that there are such institutions which become so powerful, that they indeed become "reified" and take on an almost independent course sometimes disturbing the given arrangements in society in anomic situations where social order breaks down temporarily.

4.7 Legitimation and Social Reality

Let us now turn to another aspect of the social construction of reality, and this is the process of "legitimation" which provides an institution within society its overall rationale and rules of conduct. It provides the society with a set of rules and regulations which are taken to be the actual or true meaning of the purpose or ideology of an institution. By being legitimated the institutions in society are able to provide guidelines of the work conditions that members of each institution are supposed to follow or face sanctions which could range from the nominal to the extreme forms of the same existing rules that apprehend conduct that is not in the interests of the organisation.

Reflection and Action 4.2

Why does social institution need legitimation? Reflect and comment.

Thus legitimation provides a total rationale regarding what the actor or actors are supposed to do, could do and even want to do. In short we cannot say that institutionalisation is relatively successful unless all actions are legitimated by the ideology of the institution which is normally an extension of the overall national or globe society. However we need to keep in mind that the theoretical-ideological axis **that** upholds most institutions is often a fragile one and the indifferent or different behaviour within an institutional context can make it breakdown and cease to exist effectively. At this point we must indicate that another dimension of legitimation concerns the symbolic universe. These symbolic universes take the social construction of reality to another level, which help to make society cohere. The symbolic universe is a matrix of total meaning both objective and subjective and it is actually the apprehension of the symbolic universe is necessary to be able to be a member of society and thereby living within the prescribed social order and be a member of any specific society. Thus it is the symbolic universe which is a cognitive tool to apprehend, be a member of, or even to subvert the process of social construction which as we pointed out earlier suffers from being in a fragile condition and therefore has to be bolstered by various institutional modalities to give it continuity and to go on from generation to generation, all the while adapting and reordering itself to meet the challenged of a new generation, which has grown up with different values. As such no matter how legitimate an institution within society is, it definitely undergoes changes and new legitimation links have to be brought in to explain new , even threatening situations. As such the process of legitimation may be spread out over time ns that may prove to be much greater than even the total life of any of its members. Thus it is the symbolic universe which is of prime importance in the overall "hierarchy" of a human being can experience.

Box 4.3: Mind and Society

The symbolic universe is what arranges a society in the mind of the members so that what is perceived through the senses, in fact all possible experience is filtered down through the cognitive process both objective and subjective. It is thus the binding glue of society and we have briefly indicated that it takes control of all the discrete bits of knowledge and social procedure and is able to combine and resolve it within the given frame work of societal membership. As Berger and Luckmann put it that "it makes sense of the entire universe". By this we mean the social and cultural states of being

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that exist in any culture have to be apprehended as cognitive aspects of gaining membership. This is so because each group of members who share similar situations will be coerced into trying a finding meaning in the world of everyday life, because it is in part a projection of the desires, fears and expectations of other members within an institution or institutions in society.

Thus it becomes clear that the symbolic universe is a method for not only apprehending reality but creating it also, and thus what we are talking about is the fact that there is an intermesh between the subjective and the objective side of reality, both of which are perceived by human beings who are members of any institution or group of institutions in any society.

Thus it is pointed out that "placement" within a symbolic order or symbolic universe is really very important and the very basis of the perception that will be available to any member in society. Thus we can clearly see how members of any society are keenly engaged in the task of socially constructing a reality that is able to cope with all unforeseen situations. However such total control is very difficult and in every society we find that there are problems which cry for a solution. Further it is also absolutely clear since Durkheim that any socially constructed system "leaks", that is there are always some people or groups of people which see reality in a way different from the majority of the members. This is what often causes "tears" in the social fabric of society with no matter how much care the members have helped to construct or build it up. In short human beings have not only to be apprehending legitimate structures but maintaining their continuity. Indeed there are some groups or institutions like family, polity, commerce and so on which also find similarities among them but they are also quite different in their scope and spread in any group no matter how large or small it is.

4.8   Socialisation and Legitimation

Let us now turn to how the human mind uses various concepts to uphold the symbolic universe that is related to and is a part of societal processes. Thus if an institution is to be a part of the members existence it has to be appropriately legitimated, by being located or placed in some particular part of the symbolic universe. This is what gives it meaning and power to social reality. If the symbolic universe undergoes a shift over time then new legitimating structures and discourses are invented by the human mind, to bolster the social reality that has been disturbed or "shaken", and make it whole again. This happens in times of great stress political, economic or social, but the symbolic universe remains even though in a somewhat attenuated form.

Now further if the symbolic universe is confronted with a pattern of socialisation that is paradoxical or even contradictory to it then a problem of lack of meaning arises and has to be dealt with the establishment of a new ideological framework or concepts that can deal with the altered reality. When this happens the societal forces and institutions begin to repress the groups who are perceived as threatening for the symbolic universe, in an attempt to retrieve all that can be kept from the old symbolic order into the new, and thereby salvage something from the past or the social order which has readjusted itself to deal with the new situations in social processes.

Thus we find that the construction of social reality is also dependent on the precision of the concepts that are there to deal with it. If these concepts are traditional they will usually require a new or modern interpretation. On the other hand the concepts and attitudes that are retained will now be placed differently in the new ideology that has been both created and accepted by members of a society. Thus this process requires cognitive and normative bolstering or legitimation.

We may say then that mythology itself provides the conceptual apparatus for the symbolic universe, and this functions as a adaptive mechanism so far as the society is concerned. It has been pointed out that mythology itself was created to overcome paradoxes and inconsistencies in the overall environment. Berger and Luckman point out to maintain the symbolic universe there are several types of conceptual equipment including:

1)   Mythology

2)   Theology

3)   Philosophy and

4)   Science

Now while mythology is associated with the mass construction of social reality we find that the other three elements mentioned become increasingly the domain of the specialists and the elites. Such a body of knowledge is quite different than what the specialists in theology, philosophy and science are concerned with. That is to say that the relation between the lay person and the expert becomes very different from each other as the latter are a specialised activity of the social elites

We may ask at this point that what are the implications and applications of the creation and maintenance of the symbolic universe. There are in fact two features of the symbolic universe maintenance. These are:

1)   Therapy and

2)   Inhalation.

In the case of the therapeutics of symbolic universe maintenance what happens is that the attempt of the concepts that form the symbolic universe are used to re-socialise members so that they can play their role in society. Yet it may be noted that therapy itself does not claim or reclaim all the members. In such a case the symbolic universe and its implications have not been properly understood, if they have been understood at all.

In the case of the concept of inhalation we find that all areas of meaning and existence that are not subsumed under the symbolic universe have to be erased or eliminated so that they do not start challenging the legitimacy of the same.

Thus in both these approaches or applications we find that the aim of the exercise is to ensure integration and incorporation into society. If this is not done the society will undergo anomic disturbances, and the social order will become dysfunctional. Thus a truly representative symbolic universe is one that covers conceptually each and every aspect of reality and leaves nothing out whatsoever. It is obvious that such a system does not exist and in practice each member is basically approximating the concepts of the symbolic universe. In doing this the members of a society come to have many ideas in common but there is still room for individuation of the members.

4.9 Social Reality and The Symbolic Universe

Now what is the implication for social organisation and the maintenance of the symbolic universe? We have already made the point that reality is socially defined, and that it is human beings and human groups that define its contours. Thus we find that the specialists in a society provide complete legitimation of the social reality. Such experts usually hold very different views from lay members on definitions of reality. Thus we may point out again that there can be differences of view and opinion between the experts and the laymen. There is thus a sort of competition on whose definitions and concepts are going to be beneficial and become operative in social interaction.

As we can see there are different ways of apprehending and perceiving social process. Which way is seen as the best course of action depends on the ideology which is invoked and which concepts are used to explain any aspect of the symbolic universe that has become the area of concern, eg. societal conflict over the distribution of resources. Groups often subscribe to an ideology which will benefit them and invoke theories which will help them achieve their goals, social, economic or political.

Box 4.4: Pluralism and Reality

It may be noted that most modern societies are pluralistic comprising many races ethnicities and religions. In such pluralistic societies the room for conflict is much reduced and outright conflict is rare. Pluralism itself arises in times of rapid change and erodes the strong foundations of traditions and make them form new structures and patterns of interaction, and new theories are invented to legitimate the new social structures in society.

Such legitimations are necessary as we have pointed out, because without them no new ideology can be formed or if formed it cannot be successful in maintaining and propagating it. On the other hand we find institutions themselves are changed or altered in some way to fit into the existing social reality, and there is thus a dialectic between institutions and social reality. Again the definition of reality itself projects that reality and these definitions often have a self fulfilling aspect to them and begin to change the contours of reality itself in social process. Thus social change can only be understood as a dialectical process between the new theories that legitimate new institutions.

These institutions are also affected and themselves change to have a closer correlation between themselves and the theories and ideologies used to legitimate them. It may be added here that the social construction of reality is a human product and has been realised by the efforts of human beings alone and is experienced by them as a set of complete experiences. The sociology of knowledge maintains that the existence of the symbolic universe is reflected in the lives of the members of the society. As a corollary to this we may add that the existence of a symbolic universe has its base in individuals and has no existence apart from their lives. In short although we are saying that man produces the reality within which he then lives, procreates and expires, he is not quite capable of altering it alone and requires a group or community to do the same.

Let us now turn to the description of society in relation to subjective reality. We shall first dwell on primary and secondary socialisation as ways

in which human beings create their own reality. Thus society exists both as objective and subjective reality. To understand this fully we need to appreciate that society is an ongoing process which comprises the elements of:

1) Externalisation

2) Objectification and,

3) Internalisation

As the human externalises social reality it acts back upon him and he internalises it. This means that the existing social situation has been apprehended and subscribed to in such great measure that certain actions and interactions become most mechanical and their existence is never called into question. Thus there is a time sequence involved in the imparting of certain basic and essential points of social reference, which means it takes time to become a fully fledged member of any society. Being a fully fledged member of a society means that the member has acquired membership, and is able to make decisions, interpretations and even plan and pursue an objective or a goal over time. Thus as Berger and Luckmann put it that the individual becomes a member "through a temporal sequence" and as the social reality is apprehended more and more the members of a society are able to predict the outcome of certain actions and interactions. This is to say as social reality is apprehended more and more the human being is able to be an aware member of society, being able to realize and live up to his expectations within limits set by society itself.

It may thus be pointed out that primary socialisation comprises the understanding of roles of the personal others and the generalised other. In short such socialisation proceeds from the inner circle or close circle of a human being to wider and wider circles until it encompasses the whole of society. Now this does not happen in a majority of cases and primary socialisation in some cases does fail to bring about the desired uniformity within the society. This type of deviance within the society however is not a matter of alarm but of serious concern. Thus when the gestalt of the generalised other has been learnt we find that both the objective and the subjective sides of social reality balance and successful primary socialisation has been completed.

Secondary socialisation in fact is a necessary aspect of the division of labour, and how knowledge has been distributed within the society. At this point we find that the institutional sub worlds have been internalised and role specific knowledge has been generated, concerning the social activity and output that any role required. Thus secondary socialization adds new layers of data and knowledge which in some cases even supercede some aspects of primary socialisation. However to establish overall consistency we find that secondary socialisation presumes conceptual clarity to bring together different bodies of knowledge under a single umbrella. We may point out here that while in primary socialisation of the members or group that is acting upon a human being is relatively small.

In the case of secondary socialisation the people who act and influence ones mentality and behaviour are very many numerically speaking. One has entered the ocean from the pond and in secondary socialisation one is in the midst of society at large. There is inevitably a formality and lack of personal depth in the secondary socialisation, which is there because of the complex division of labour, which in itself demands that the institutional reality is not disturbed

too much and there are institutions like marriage which have been there in human society since time immemorial and continue to be with us.

As can be readily seen both primary and secondary socialization are delicate procedures and have to be carefully imparted and acquired. Thus socialisation is a process that occurs as part of every human society, but to maintain the objective and subjective structures does not always happen. There is a certain level of deviancy in every community. To contain this deviancy society has to develop some control procedures to protect its disruption and eventual disintegration. Thus reality maintenance procedures such as mass media or mass contact programmes become part of the overall attempt to perpetuate social reality and to make the human perception of it be integrated and coherent.

In this regard it can be pointed out that usually it is primary socialisation which has a greater durability and is much more strongly ingrained than the procedures of secondary socialisation whose layers of gloss of meaning often do not stand up to scrutiny and start breaking apart. Well established rules of conduct may be challenged and a new set of rules may take their place or at least effect some part of their existence. Thus secondary socialisation is more "artificial" by nature, and is less deeply lodged in the human than the primary socialisation. As we shall now discuss it is casual conversation which is what is responsible for the continuation of both the objective and the subjective states of reality.

Thus we now turn to a description of the role language plays in reality maintenance.

4.10 Maintaining Reality and Language

It may be pointed out here that the language that a society uses is a strong foundation and process for the maintenance and perpetuation of socially constructed reality. In language society finds an institution so to speak, and maintains social reality through its incessant use both in formal and informal settings. In fact there are prominent theories which indicate that language itself may be at the base of reality and helps greatly in constructing it. It needs to be indicated just as language is a social fact then the reality and conceptualisation of social reality is an aspect of ongoing social reality.

Box 4.5: Paradigms of Social Reality

Language needs to be modified over time and this itself indicates that social reality is malleable to a certain state and undergoes changes especially in the dominant ideology, as a whole of the society under consideration. This in itself implies that over a process of time new paradigms of social reality emerge and posit their own challenges to the members of society. Such new paradigms of social reality however take time to settle down into the consciousness of the members, and we can have two or more paradigms working at the same time in a society. Thus as we pointed out earlier there is in fact a multiple social reality, rather than one single overarching model of society. It is then obvious that such a complicated and delicate man oeuvre as constructing reality is an ongoing process and can be subverted only to an extent by rival groups in the society or community who give different versions and different choices to the members. In terms of life options and work options so that the relationship is dialectical.

Thus if language structures and usage help construct realty, it is also clear that life experience and life situations also feedback into language structures effectively modifying them and influencing their overall content. It needs to be kept in mind that language is indispensable in creating compatible consensual social constructions, and that it is what connects people. We need to mention here briefly that when we consider language and we are entering into the realm of a vast system of symbols , gestures, hints, clues and even moral prescriptions, and the fields of semiotics and kinesthetics, all of which are an aspect of societal process., and are central to human communication. Thus the role of language in the construction of reality cannot be undermined or minimised. In fact without effective communication, sharing of information, ideas and knowledge, there is no culture in a society. Language in it widest sense is a tool par excellence in the hands of society, and with its help both the subjective and objective aspects of socially constructed reality come together and cohere. It can also provide alternative models for reality construction. And in plural societies different communities or groups do have the capacity to raise appropriate models of reality, which then act back on that community creating a two way bridge for communication.

4.11 Conclusion

The whole question then is that of the internalisation of the social reality, both objective and subjective, and this happens as a dialectic between man and his social structure. In fact the entire idea is to strike a balance between nature and culture if the persistence of the social reality is not to be disrupted. Thus successful socialisation is that in which there is a high degree of consonance or adjustment. Between the outer and inner realities, so that the human is an active participator in social process rather than being simply at the mercy of societal procedures and rules.

At this point we reach a caveat and this is the fact that often socialisation is not effective. This happens when the phenomena of individualism takes root in a society and creates humans who do not subscribe wholly to the social order and social reality. In such instances we find that there are various socially available procedures to bring the deviants from the overall ideology back to the common fold. Such is the role of counselors, psychiatrists, shamans saints and others.

We may ask at this point why socialisation does not work in many cases? One reason could be the fact that the concerned human child is being subjected to two different discourses on the social reality. Thus if husband and wife are not consonant in their behaviour it the child or children which are now unable to adopt in to any existing discourse on reality and may have two or more systems in their consciousness. Such instances may often turn so serious, and the deviance is so disruptive of social process that such members may have to be isolated in a hospital to help them get over their conflict and confusion regarding the apprehension of one single reality, usually backed by the dominant version of reality.

This is a fascinating area of research, and we find that problems of internalising the social structure by members is becomingly increasingly difficult in the modern and postmodern worlds, where the stress on individuality is very great. Individuality implies putting ones own perspective in the place of the given perspective of social reality. This usually causes a rupture in the socially

accepted definition of reality where all members are supposed to be integrated and cohere and cooperate with each other. Instead in present day global society what is valued above all is creative integrity, and this implies evolving some basic model or paradigm which is not really subscribing to the total paradigm but to a very specific and important part of it. This implies that we can study the social construction of reality in different ways, and modern man is realizing increasingly that individual or community interpretations of social reality and social order, are not to be rectified, except in extreme situations, where it is not a dissonance with society but a breakdown of the entire edifice of social reality. However as all plural societies indicate plural versions of reality will dominate so long as the social structure is capable of taking the strain. In fact now-a-days the move is away from monolithic models of societal explanation to micro models of social behaviour.

4.12 Further Reading

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