

## fourth unit : Theories of sociology

### 01-Theory definition

The concerned sociological literature has included several definitions to the sociological theory. **Thomas Ward**, after reviewing twenty-seven definitions, deduced a definition of the theory that reads (**A theory is a logical deductive and inductive system of concepts and statements which gives a relationship between two or more variables and from which testable hypothesis can be drawn**).

Talcott Parsons defines it as “Theoretical schemes are made up of concepts and logically interrelated propositions. To be ca-pable of logical manipulation, such schemes must always be relatively simple and cannot possibly embrace everything empirically knowable about the concrete phenomena at hand”.

Turner adds that theory is the process of developing ideas that allow the scientist to explain events. (Uthman, 2008, p. 16)

Sociological theory performs **fundamental functions** that are:

- ✓ Classification and organization of real-life events.
- ✓ Explanation of the causes of occurring phenomena and prediction of what might happen in the future under certain conditions.
- ✓ Providing a comprehensive scientific understanding of the laws that govern the events’ movement in social reality.

## **02-Traditional, conservative trend**

### **A. Theory of Structural Functionalism**

Roots to this theory extend to Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, and Emile Durkheim who were influenced by the similarity between living organisms and social life, which they expressed in the principle called “**organic similarity**”, which formed the intellectual and philosophical basis of the structural functional trend.

The human body was understood as a “system” consisting of interconnected and interacting organs. Each organ performs a specific and essential function for the survival of the organism or the species. The organs are therefore structures and organizations that ensure survival requirements, and any defect affecting one of these organs will affect the other structures. Based on this understanding, functionalists viewed social systems as similar to organic organisms on the basis that these social structures fulfill and satisfy the survival and continuity requirements of society. Functional scholars classify them into major social systems as the economic systems perform the functions of production and distribution, and the family system performs the function of human production, reproduction, socialization, and inheritance of the social system. The political system performs the function of citizen protection while the religious systems perform the functions of social cohesion and solidarity, and the educational system performs the function of transmitting cultural heritage from generation to generation (Ouda, p. 91).

The axes of structural functionalism that are worth noting are the following:

- **Individual's relationship with society**

According to the functionalist approach, individuals are merely tools and private property of society, which denies individuals' free will and ability to change their reality. Clearly, this axiom extends to "Emile Durkheim's" thought and his realistic sociological tendency. To a large extent, individuals are subject to the pressures imposed by their societies in order to meet the social expectations.

- **Social order concept**

One of the central concepts of the functionalist trend as it understands society as a "system" characterized essentially by **balance, definition, and interconnectedness**. The social system is a balanced, non-conflicting system that is constantly moving towards balance and equality. Any forces that threaten the stability and balance of the system become the subject of an act of inertia to the other parts of the system. As for definition, it means identifying the inner elements from those outside the system's components. In addition to maintaining balance, the boundaries and components of the system must be maintained, and any change must slowly and gradually take place. With regard to interconnectedness, it means that all elements of the social system are linked to each other, and any change happening to any of the elements will lead to the change of all the other elements as a response (Ouda, p. 93).

- **Function concept**

Functionalists believe that the function is the way in which society works and continues to exist through the social system's function. Accordingly, all social system's elements are either functional or non-functional. The vast majority of these elements play positive roles in order to maintain the system and its balance. Non-functional elements either represent useless or unbeneficial or negative and harmful results.

## **B. Symbolic interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism is linked to the American sociology "George Herbert Mead" in the 1930s, and takes the interactions of daily social life as its subject. Individuals interact together according to their wills and personal desires emanating from the mind, and here we find "Irving Kaufman" considering social life similar to the theater where people perform roles through in different chapters depending on their life stages and the impressions they formulate on others (Al-Azzawi et al., 2006, p. 45).

Basic concepts to this theory are as follows:

- **Symbols and meanings**

George Mead trusts that the human species is the one that can transform signs and facial expressions into symbols and sounds and actions into meanings. Symbols gain both importance and significance when they represent to the recipient the same as intended by the initiator or sender. From that point, they become social symbols through social interaction with others. In order for a person to become a human being, he must possess the

ability to think that is the result of a linguistic context. Therefore, humanity is a social phenomenon, people are social beings, and their humanity is the product of their symbolic social interaction.

- **Behavior and expectations**

The process of social interaction takes place through a set of behaviors among group members that are followed by expectations that in turn are created and developed by the other. Through interaction, people learn to behave as expected by others. Then, they consider that their behavior is consistent with the occurring behavioral patterns within the created social institutions and systems, in addition to learning that others have the same expectations. Hence, the patterns of relationships between people and their groups form the social structure. The nature of society is illustrated in the sum of reciprocal expectations and the behavior that fulfills these expectations.

- **Roles and interactions**

Roles (father, mother, teacher,...) are the set of expectations associated with the behavior of certain people that are formed within a culture specific to a certain society at any given time or place. The roles are known to be as the common expected individual behaviors as a member of a specific group, which is known as role expectations. For example, the child during his growth and development within his family learns how to interact and what is expected of him in that specific context.

## **C. Exchange theory**

In comparison with the previously mentioned two theories, it is a modern theory, which basic features are summarized in the following points:

- **Human nature**

Man acts logically and rationally as he sets before him a number of goals and determines the most efficient attainment means within the frame of both society and social life. Since the pursuit of these goals takes place within a social environment, he must take others into consideration because they often influence or even control the goal achievement process. As such, the situation becomes the result of the basic, reciprocal relationship that makes the concerned behavior a social one. Behavior often takes the form of the exchange because social and psychological resources exist within one and the others also. The exchange can be in the form of money for goods and work for money as well as exchange feelings and emotions on the same basis, which means the exchange of sentimental and emotional support.

- **The nature of society**

Fundamentally, society is a group of individuals and a set of interchangeable exchanges. Over time, these exchanges take the form of complex social organizations, such as armies, universities, companies, and institutions. Therefore, the proponents of the exchange theory tend to focus their research on complex social organizations.

- **Society functions**

The process of exchange is a process of harmonization, agreement, as well as values and meanings sharing. According to this theory, people should take from others what they can take within the framework of a certain relationship by giving the others what they ask for. People are also within the ability to reward and punish each other in order to achieve adaptation and harmony where they are found in exchangeable social situations, such as, exchanging goods, services, and sentimental and emotional support.

### **03- Radical trend**

#### **A. Marxism theory**

Marx presented his vision of social reality in many of his works, perhaps the most prominent of which are (The Communist Manifesto) and (Capital). An attempt to highlight the key assumptions that constitute the Marxism vision is as follows:

- **Individual and the social system**

Essentially, human nature is good, but bad social conditions turn it into evil. Marx explains this situation through his distinction between individual behavior and the nature of social relations. The issue is not individual related but rather is an underlying fundament in the social system or social structure that produces poverty and unequal distribution. Hence, solutions to social problems should be sought not in individuals and their behaviors rather in the social system and society itself.

- **Dominant social institution**

Marx pointed the accusation finger at society when he questioned how oppression, injustice, and poverty exist despite the good human nature. The answer lay in the examination necessity of the social system itself. For example, in Western capitalist societies, the reason lay in the nature of the capitalism as a responsible for poverty and inequality.

Therefore, providing any scientific analysis of any society is impossible without understanding and analyzing the structure and organization of the basic relations of its central system, which is the productive or economic system in the broad sense. A logical reality because the structures and relations of this system are linked to the rest of society and social life aspects.

### **B. Critical theory**

The fundamental principle of critical theory is that human behavior is governed by the ways in which people think of things. People's ideas about their situation appear through interaction among themselves, as each member in the interaction process seeks to know things with relation to the other. The critical theory is inclined towards people's ability to rationally and logically treat the situations and change the behavior of others. The Frankfurt School is perhaps the salient representative of this theory, which played a very important role in the student and youth movements in the sixties of the last century in Western Europe and the United States of America.

According to Horkheimer, critical theory aims to achieve three tasks:



- ✓ In every theory, revealing **the social interest** that generated and determined that theory. Just as Marx, Horkheimer seeks to separate himself from German idealism and discuss it in light of the social interests that produced the critical theory.
- ✓ The theory must conceive that it does not represent a doctrine outside **historical social development** as it also does not present itself as an absolute principle, or that it reflects any absolute principle outside the process of reality. The only criterion to which it adheres is that it reflects **the interest of the social majority** in organizing production relations in such a way to achieve conformity between mind and reality as well as conformity between individual and group interests.
- ✓ The defiance of the various unreasonable forms that the dominant class interests have tried to associate it with reason and convince it that they are its embodiment. In fact, these false rationalized forms are nothing but tools that use reason to support existing social systems, which Horkheimer called **the instrumental reason**.

Consequently, critical theory is what achieves the social interest and takes into account historical social development within the frame of historical materialism. A fact that brings critical theory closer to cultural materialism. Critical theory also aims to serve the majority's interests and defy the formal forms and unreasonable trends that serve the ruling regimes.

### **C. Structural theory**

Structural Marxism arose in opposition to humanistic Marxism that prevailed in many Western universities during the 1970s. In contrast to humanistic Marxism, Althusser stressed that Marxism was a science that

studied **objective structures**. He trusted that humanistic, historical, and phenomenological Marxism, which was based on Marx's innovative writings (the early writings of the young Marx) were influenced by a pre-scientific humanist ideology.

The theory's pioneers focused on the international nature of capitalism, and they are known as the proponents of the "**dependency theory**." The theory proponents are those with a vision that considers poor nations or the Third World the focus of revolution and change. A vision that coincides with the political trend that appeared in the sixties of the last century, which considers countries Such as Cuba, Vietnam, China, Mozambique and Algeria are the most advanced countries in view of their revolutionary politicians even if they are at an economic disadvantage (Ouda, p. 112).

Production as "those relations that necessitate the economic cycle of the material production process under certain technical and ecological conditions at a certain stage of the development of the productive forces" according to Friedman who down enumerates the models of things that social production relations necessitate:

- ✓ Taking advantage of the environment within the limits that technical capabilities present.
- ✓ Division of roles in the production process; meaning who does/who does not do the physical labor.
- ✓ Forms of social surplus acquisition and distribution, and how to use this economic surplus.

Thus, **Friedman** argues that patterns of social change cannot be understood nor perceived except by attributing the main causal roles to population growth, ecology, agricultural production, and other elements of environmental technology (<http://www.aranthropos.com>).

Third world (dependent) countries are found facing the countries of the developed world that are draining their resources and energies with no possible way to regain their control and exploit their wealth other than the revolution against these conditions.