
UNIT 7 SOCIAL INTEGRATION*

Contents

- 7.0 Introduction
- 7.1 What is Social Integration?
- 7.2 The Theory of Social Contract: The Beginning of Social Integration Idea
- 7.3 Auguste Comte and the Idea of Social Integration
- 7.4 Herbert Spencer and the Organismic Analogy
- 7.5 Emile Durkheim and the Theory of Social Integration
- 7.6 Anomie and the Idea of Social Disintegration
- 7.7 Durkheim and his Influence in Social Anthropology
- 7.8 Summary
- 7.9 References
- 7.10 Answers to Check Your Progress

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After reading this unit, the learners should be able to:

- define social integration;
- understand the roots of the concept of social integration;
- discuss the Durkheimian theory of social integration;
- locate and appreciate the theory of social integration in social anthropology; and
- understand the concepts of social disintegration and anomie.

7.0 INTRODUCTION

Social integration as a theoretical idea became established in Anthropology around twentieth century. For a very long time before that, evolution was the general theoretical framework that guided anthropological knowledge. Marvin Harris writes that anthropology began as a study of human history. Anthropologists in the mid nineteenth century were much concerned with the stages through which human societies have passed and reached its present form in the modern European societies. They were more concerned with the idea of change in human society and culture. How human society changed over a period of time and what were the characteristics of each stage through which societies passed, was their main concern. However, anthropologists had little evidence to prove the claims they were making. Most of the anthropologists during the mid-nineteenth century were arm-chair anthropologists as they based their arguments and illustrations of each stage of human society on the works of various missionaries, soldiers, and travelers' accounts. They themselves did not go to the field. Their arguments were thus conjectural in nature. It was due to this that the theory of evolutionism in social anthropology came under sharp criticism. Reaction to evolutionism in Britain led to the formation of two camps- one led by diffusionists and the other

***Contributor:** Dr. Prashant Khattri, Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Allahabad State University, Prayagraj. UP.

led by functionalists. The idea of social integration is clearly visible, took shape and became established in the second camp. Functionalism in social anthropology is a broad term and has been further sub-divided into two groups viz- psychological functionalism and structural functionalism. Psychological functionalism is associated with the works of Malinowski and the structural or sociological functionalism (as sometimes it is also called by this name) is associated with the works of A.R. Radcliffe-Brown. He, in-turn, was influenced by the ideas of Emile Durkheim, a sociologist. Social integration as a perspective and as a theoretical framework, although can be located in both forms of functionalism, but it is the sociological functionalism where it is more firmly rooted.

The theory of functionalism in anthropology is associated with several shifts in the discipline. With the emergence of functionalism, anthropology shunned its diachronic character and became a synchronic science. It became interested in the study of the present and abandoned the idea of studying the past in the absence of clear evidence. The idea of in-depth ethnographic fieldwork became established in anthropology. All these changes had important contributions to make towards the idea of social integration (Barnard 2000).

7.1 WHAT IS SOCIAL INTEGRATION?

In our everyday usage, the word social is used as a word to depict our relationships with people. How many times people might have told you to become 'social'? What they mean by this is to go out and socialise with friends and relatives. When we spend our time alone and do not meet with people for a long time we are labeled as 'not being social.' Because of the corona pandemic we all are now familiar with the term 'social distancing.' For a very long time we all were confined to our houses due to lockdown and there were restrictions on our gatherings and movements. Although we met with people online but social gatherings like marriage functions, birthday parties and other such gatherings were prohibited. Thus, we can get a sense of the term social through this experience. It is a term that denotes our ability and need to be associated with others. It denotes a sense of collectivity and cohesiveness. We also use the word anti-social for those activities that go against the collective consciousness and collective nature of human existence.

The word integration on the other hand has been defined by the Cambridge dictionary as an action or a process of successfully joining or mixing with a different group of people. If we can extend this definition then we can also say that integration is a process of joining different units together. These different units can be conceptualised or seen as different aspects or institutions of the society. Society being a heterogeneous unit, in order to stay in equilibrium, different units of the society must have a functional unity between them. Now, clubbing both the words together to reach a meaning of the composite word 'social integration' we may say that it is a process where different units of society or the collectivity that we call as a society is in a state of equilibrium. Different units of a society are so joined or mixed together that we get society as a functioning unit fulfilling various needs of the individual and the collectivity.

Further we may say that individual is a very important unit of the society. It is also true that individual is inseparable from the collectivity and collective identity

of the social groups to which he/she belongs. Keeping individual at the center of attention, social integration has been defined as “strength of social ties connecting individuals to society (Stolley 2005: 250).” Therefore, social integration can be seen as relationships between social groups and also between the individual and society.” In social anthropology, the concept and idea of social integration came up during the twentieth century. As already mentioned, when evolutionism as a theory to understand society, fell out of currency, the idea of looking at the past in order to understand the present came under attack. Instead, it was now believed and thought that in order to understand the society, we need to examine the present only. This was a shift from a diachronic understanding to a synchronic view of society where society was seen as it is ‘here and now.’ Major theme within this thought process was to understand that how society maintains itself and perpetuates. A particular society came to be studied in its totality, that is to say, that various institutions that made-up a society were studied. Society was viewed as a totality with a boundary, with interrelated parts. Scholars tried to understand that how different parts of the society, that is, different institutions like religion, polity, economics etc. function and how they are related to each other to maintain the society as a whole. Although it is true that in social anthropology, this idea gained currency only during the twentieth century, but seeds of this idea were present even before that in social sciences (Stolley 2005).

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Define social integration.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

7.2 THE THEORY OF SOCIAL CONTRACT: THE BEGINNING OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION IDEA

Before we move on to understand the theory of social integration as put forward by social anthropologists and sociologists, a more philosophical way of looking at social integration is much warranted. This all begins with philosophical questions like when and why societies were formed? What was the need to live in a social arrangement? How human beings lived before the existence of societies? Was there a stage in human existence when there was no society or social relationship, in other words, had humans ever lived in a state of nature? If yes, then what was the characteristic of the state of nature? Answers to these questions were attempted by Thomas Hobbes who is associated with the theory of social contract.

Hobbes was of the view that before human beings entered into a social contract they were in a state of nature. This natural state according to him was full of human-human conflict. This was so because everyone was free to do things based on their own will. Human beings only thought about their individual profit and interest. This natural state of human existence was actually a condition of war. If

any dispute arose between individuals then there was no authority that resolved it. Disputes were resolved based on people's own will and ways. Thus, without any overall controlling power, human beings were in a perpetual condition of war. This natural state of human existence therefore, according to Hobbes, was tyrannical. In the natural state, since human beings remained ungoverned, they would terrorise each other as they would only be governed by rules of self-preservation and self-promotion. Thus, in order to bring peace, equilibrium, resolve conflict, and have a peaceful collective existence, human beings entered into a social contract.

Thus, according to Hobbes, the best way of social integration is to enter into a social contract. In this contract, human beings submit to an authority which is sovereign and an absolute ruler having indivisible powers. This prevents conflict and chaos. By investing all powers with the third party, human beings establish the rule of law. Thus, the basic function of the government according to Hobbes was to bring about social integration and social order (Eriksen and Nielsen 2001).

Check Your Progress 2

- 2) The idea of social integration can be traced back to the theory of social contract. Discuss.

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 3) What is the theory of social contract and how is it linked to social integration?

.....

.....

.....

.....

7.3 AUGUSTE COMTE AND THE IDEA OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Auguste Comte, who gave the term, 'sociology' to a body of knowledge that was theorising about society, and who is also regarded as the founding figure of the discipline, was of the view that the nineteenth century would be the century of biology because the idea of evolution in biology was the most powerful idea during that time. He further said that biology will provide the metaphor for the study of society. As biology was regarded as the study of natural organisms, sociology could be regarded as the study of social organisms. Society, according to Comte was more complex than the natural organism and therefore he regarded society as a complex organism. He was of the view that as human organism is made up of cells, the social organism is constituted by families which are the

building blocks comparable to the cells. All other parts in society are just elaborations of the family that is the fundamental unit of society.

He further went on to say that as there are several needs of the human organism, similarly there are needs of the society. If a society wants to persist then series of needs must be met. However, there is one basic need that must be met for the smooth functioning of the society and that is the need for social integration. This need is actually about coordination, regulation and control of different parts of a society. Societies where this basic need of social integration cannot be met are likely to develop social ‘pathologies’ that may be detrimental for the society. According to Comte social integration can be achieved in the following three ways:

- 1) by building a mechanism for mutual interdependence among various parts of the society,
- 2) by creating strong centers of power for political control and regulation of various systems and parts in the society. This is similar to what we have already seen in the social contact theory and
- 3) by ensuring common cultural codes for different units of the society.

This gave rise to Comte’s model of social statics. This means that if the needs for social integration are met then society will be in a state of equilibrium. The model states that when the level of social differentiation increases in the society it gives rise to integrative problems in society. This in turn gives rise to an increasing pressure on the society to come-up with some new mechanisms for integration. With the emergence of new integrative mechanisms in the form of centralization of power, common culture and structural interdependencies, social integration is achieved. Comte’s model however also talks about the situation in which new mechanisms fail to emerge, for example a lack of centralised control over different parts of the society that may lead to non-equitable distribution of resources among different sections of the population. In such a scenario, integrative problems of coordination and control increase, that may lead to social pathologies (Turner 2014).

Check Your Progress 3

- 4) Discuss Comte’s idea of social integration.

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 5) What is Comte’s idea of social statics and how is it relevant to the theory of social integration?

.....

.....

.....

.....

7.4 HERBERT SPENCER AND THE ORGANISMIC ANALOGY

The ideas on social integration are very well entrenched into the works of Herbert Spencer. Following the footsteps of Comte, although he denied it, Spencer also put forward the 'natural science view' of the society. He developed Comte's ideas further. Spencer compared human organism with society and talked about various similarities and differences between the two. This is known as the organismic analogy.

While talking about the similarities he said the following:

- 1) That both organism and society can be distinguished from the inorganic matter as both grow and develop.
- 2) As they grow, they increase in complexity and their structures differentiate. When organisms grow, their organs become more complex and get differentiated by assuming special functions. Same is true for the society.
- 3) As the structure grows and differentiates, functions of different parts also become different.
- 4) In both, organism and society, different parts are interdependent on each other and both cannot function without this interdependence. This interdependence of parts is necessary to maintain both, the organism and the society.

Spencer also came-up with certain differences between the two which are as follows:

- 1) Degree of connectedness and proximity of parts is greater in organism than it is in the society.
- 2) Communication between various parts takes place through different means. In organism, parts communicate through molecular waves but in society, parts communicate through cultural symbols like language.
- 3) In society or the superorganism, as Spencer called it, all the units or parts are capable of decision making but in case of an organism, it is only the brain that is endowed with this capacity.

Spencer further says that as there are certain needs of the organism that should be met in order to maintain the organism, or sustain life, similarly, there are needs of superorganism that should be met in order to achieve social integration or in order to maintain the society as a whole. These could be understood as certain functional requisites that are essential to maintain the superorganism. These functional requisites are:

- 1) Production- this involves accumulation of resources and conversion of raw materials into usable resources that can sustain a population.
- 2) Reproduction- this involves creating structures that can ensure new members are added to the population. It also involves learning the ways of life or ways of living in a group or structure in order to maintain the whole.
- 3) Regulation- this involves the use and consolidation of power and authority in order to control the individuals. This also helps in maintaining the whole as a corporate unit.

- 4) Distribution- this involves creation of infrastructures in order to move people, information and resources in a geographical space.

Thus, the organismic analogy compares the society with the human organism. As in the case of human organism, different organs function in order to maintain the whole, similarly, in society different parts of society function and are integrated and interdependent on each other in such a way that the society is maintained as a whole (Turner 2014).

Check Your Progress 4

- 6) What is organismic analogy in social sciences?

.....

.....

.....

.....

- 7) How organismic analogy is central to the understanding of theory of social integration?

.....

.....

.....

.....

7.5 EMILE DURKHEIM AND THE THEORY OF SOCIAL INTEGRATION

Durkheim, a functionalist, was concerned with how social order is maintained in the society. He uses the term 'social solidarity' in order to talk about social order. For him, institutions in the society function in order to maintain the social solidarity. While writing on the division of labour in society, he put forth the idea that the function of the division of labour is to maintain the social order or social solidarity. Durkheim gave primacy to social facts, and looked for sociological explanations of social phenomenon. There can be several other ways in which we may describe phenomenon, for example, division of labour can be described in economic terms. It can be said and economists have tried to focus on this particular description that division of labour serves economic functions as it increases productivity. Durkheim however gave primacy to the social explanation. For him, division of labour serves a very social function. It helps in maintaining social solidarity as because of the division of labour different units are interdependent and therefore promote social solidarity (Pope 1975).

Durkheim's work on religion is one of the cornerstones in the sociology and anthropology of religion. In his book, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, he talked about an Australian aboriginal group named Arunta. The Aruntas

practiced totemism that involves the collective worship of the totemic ancestor that is often a natural being, like a bird or animal. The Arunta believe that they are descendants of these natural beings and each clan has its particular non-human ancestor. Durkheim asked the question that what religion does for the individual and the society. In other words what is the function of religion? He focused on the functional aspects of the institutions rather than the substantive aspects. He further said that among the Aruntas, whenever there is a religious performance or a festival, they all gather together to sing and dance. This act of gathering together and performing rituals together promoted collective behaviour. This helps in generating collective consciousness. This in-turn promotes social solidarity. Therefore, the main function of religion according to Durkheim is that it promotes social solidarity. In his definition on religion, he writes that religion binds people into a moral community called Church. A Church comprises of all who share the same beliefs and related practices. Thus, religion has an integrative function. It integrates the individual to the society. Religion also helps the individual to imbibe society or internalize the society. According to Durkheim, the moral values imbibed through religion are the ones that contribute towards social integration (Moore 2009).

As already mentioned in this unit, social integration stresses the linkage or relationship between the individual and the society. Social integration is made possible by more conforming individuals who abide by the rules of the society and more integrated the society, the better is the mode of enforcement of rules, for example where family ties are strong, children grow up to be more obedient and conforming. This theory is also an important explanatory device in criminology. According to this view, in a better integrated society crime will be less as people will be sensitive to the needs and demands of the others. The consciousness of the other and the social control exerted by wanting to appear good in the eyes of the others, or the collectivity is the hallmark of the theory of social integration. Individuals that are more conforming to the social norms and rules will be less directed and motivated to commit crime. Higher the level of conformity to social norms more is the level of social integration. People tend to focus their interest within the structure of the society and do not dare to think beyond the societal interests. Children growing up in more traditional families are always tending to please their elders and are also conforming to moral pressures. Thus, Durkheim says that in those societies where social integration is weak, individualism becomes strong and collective rules, norms and values take a backseat. On the other hand, in those societies where social integration is strong, individualism becomes weak and collective rules and norms take the center stage.

Another remarkable work of Durkheim was 'Suicide'. He wrote a book with the same title. In this book, he tried to understand the social conditions that could lead to suicide. Again, in this work he gave primacy to the social factors over individual and psychological factors. Suicide could be viewed as a product of individual and psychological factors, however, for Durkheim, it was more a product of social factors and lack of integration of the individual to the society. He compared suicide rates in European countries and based on statistical data he said that there is a marked difference in suicide rates in protestant and catholic countries. Suicide rates were higher in protestant countries as opposed to catholic countries. He gave sociological explanation for this differential rate. According to Durkheim, catholic countries have a strong foundation of Church as compared

to the protestant countries. Church played a significant role in integrating the individual to the society. He writes: “What constitutes this society is the existence of a certain number of beliefs and practices common to all the faithful, traditional and thus obligatory. The more numerous and stronger these collective states of mind are, the stronger the integration of the religious community, and also the greater its preservative value. The details of dogmas and rites are secondary. The essential thing is that they be capable of supporting a sufficiently intense collective life. And because the Protestant church has less consistency than the others it has less moderating effect upon suicide” (referred from Gupta 2005: 73).

In *Suicide*, Durkheim discussed three kinds of integrations viz- religious, familial and political. Religion, according to him provides an important social context that helps individuals integrate with social norms and values. It provides a background for building strong emotional, psychological and social bonds. At the level of the family, he was of the view that family provides an important context for integration of individual family members with the rules and norms of the family. It also provides a context for social control and order in the society. As far as political integration is concerned, he was of the view that political conflicts and upheavals are functional in a sense that they lead to better integration in the society as they generate collective consciousness and sentiments. Political crisis forces people to recognise common goals. Such crisis also emphasises the role played by political institutions. This leads to stronger ties between the individual and the society.

According to Durkheim, a certain kind of suicide is the result of lack of social integration in the society. He talked about three kinds of suicides- egoistic, altruistic and anomic suicide. The egoistic suicide is a result of excessive individualism in the society and a person believes that he or she has full control over his or her life and is therefore entitled to eliminate it. Such a person is likely to be an agnostic as he or she will not believe that life is a gift of God and any other such beliefs. He labelled a suicide as altruistic when a person kills himself for the sake of honour, for example, committing *Sati* in India or *Hara-Kiri* in Japan or in a war or for an ideology like in the case of the suicide bombers. The third kind of suicide is called as the anomic suicide and according to Durkheim, such suicides occur as a result of social disintegration. It is the last kind of suicide that is directly related to the notion of social integration. Thus, alongside the theory of social integration, he also talked about social disintegration, its causes and consequences (Thorlindsson and Bernburg 2004).

Check Your Progress 5

8) Discuss Durkheim’s view on social integration.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

7.6 ANOMIE AND THE IDEA OF SOCIAL DISINTEGRATION

Anomie refers to lack of control or normlessness in the society that may lead to social disintegration, such as break down of family, increasing rates of divorce, lack of faith and excessive individualism. Anomie is a condition in society wherein there is a breakdown of standards and values in the society. In a state of anomie, common values and norms are no longer accepted in the society and new norms and values are still not formed. This is a condition of normlessness. This results into psychological state in individuals, which is characterised by emptiness, lack of purpose and despair. The society loses common definitions of what is desirable in the society and therefore people tend to lose interest in striving to achieve something. There is a sense of alienation from the society and its norms (Turner 2014).

Anomic suicides are a result of this social disintegration as it leads to alienation of the individual from the society. Scholars studying rapid urbanisation had discussed the concept of alienation, where humans lose touch with each other and the collective becomes shadowy. When humans no longer look towards the other for approval, they may take recourse to any action, good or bad. The solution therefore for Durkheim was to bring social solidarity or work towards it for averting anomie and anomic suicides. But a too rigid society may inhibit the full flowering of individual potential, for example if children only conform to what their parents wish them to be, they can never become inventors or try out different things. Durkheim was of the view that in order to completely realise the potentials of a human being we need a social configuration that helps in such realisations, or that society must be both controlling and liberal. The nature of society therefore becomes a very important part for the realisation of human values. He was against the idea of excessive individualism as promoted in the industrial world. He said that those social circumstances that produce excessive individualism will lack social control and regulation and thus may lead to social disintegration or anomie.

Check Your Progress 6

- 9) What is anomie and how it can lead to social disintegration?

.....

.....

.....

.....

7.7 DURKHEIM AND HIS INFLUENCE IN SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

As already mentioned in the introduction of this unit, it was A.R. Radcliffe-Brown who was influenced by Durkheim to a very large extent. Radcliffe-Brown visualised a kind of anthropology that is capable of generating general laws governing the society. He was of the view that, just like natural sciences, social anthropology should be a law-generating science. He was influenced by the idea of positivism in sociology, of which Comte was the torch bearer. According to

positivism, society should be studied in the same way as natural science research is done that is in objective terms. Whatever is observable is amenable to scientific enquiry. Sociologists and social scientists should be able to generate laws that govern society just like the laws that govern the functioning of living organisms. Organismic analogy therefore became the cornerstone of studies in social sciences. In order to carry out scientific enquiry of society, it was assumed that society is an integrated whole. It is made-up of parts that are interrelated and work together to maintain the society as a whole. Brown considered social anthropology as a branch of comparative sociology where the main aim is to attempt acceptable generalizations (Moore 2009). By comparing the institutions of various societies, one can generate laws that could be applied to all societies, for example, Radcliffe-Brown posited the laws of kinship behaviour.

The idea of society as an integrated whole was so central to the twentieth century anthropology that they overlooked an important dimension of social existence and that is, conflict. Scholars viewed society as made-up of parts that are in harmonious relationship with each other. Each part in a society functions either to fulfill basic needs of the individual or to maintain the society as a whole. Even Malinowski in his early days was influenced by Durkheim. His earliest publication was about family in Australia. The sub-title of this work was ‘a sociological study’. In conclusion to this work, Malinowski writes that social institutions like family have social functions. That is to say that their main function is for the collectivity. They help to maintain the collectivity or society as a whole. It was only later that Malinowski moved away from Durkheim and focused on individual needs (Moore 2009 and Gordon et.al. 2011).

Check Your Progress 7

10) Discuss the idea of social integration is social anthropology.

.....

.....

.....

.....

7.8 SUMMARY

In this unit we have learnt the meaning of the term social integration. We have seen that there are at least two ways in which social integration has been defined in social sciences. On one hand it means a harmonious social system where different parts in the society, that are different institutions, function to maintain the whole. In anthropology this came to be known as sociological functionalism or structural functionalism that came-up and flourished under the influence of Durkheim and spearheaded in anthropology by Radcliffe Brown. Brown based his understanding of the society in terms of organismic analogy. He was of the view that as there are different systems in the organism like reproductive, circulatory, digestive and nervous system, in the same way there are different systems in a society like kinship, religion, economic and political systems. As in the case of organism, these systems work in tandem and maintain the whole, similarly in a society, different systems work together and maintain the society as a whole.

At another level or on the other hand social integration has been seen as attachment of the individual to the social norms, values and rules. We have seen that Durkheim elaborated on this aspect of integration and talked about the consequences of it both, for the individual and for the society. Through his works on division of labour in society, religion and suicide, he talked about a society in equilibrium and various institutions promoting this harmony. Later, he also talked about the consequences of rapid changes in the society that may lead to anomie and social disintegration. We have also seen in this unit that the idea of social integration can be traced to philosophers like Thomas Hobbes. August Comte and Herbert Spencer contributed significantly to the concept and theory of social integration.

7.9 REFERENCES

Barnard, A. (2000). *History and theory in anthropology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eriksen, T.H., & Nielsen, F.S. (2001). *A history of anthropology*. Virginia, USA: Pluto Press.

Gordon, R., Lyons, A.P., & Lyons, H.D. (ed.). (2011). *Fifty key anthropologists*. Oxon: Routledge.

Gupta, A. (2005). "Durkheim, in Anoop Gupta." *Kierkegaard's romantic legacy: Two theories of the self*. Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press.

Moore, J.D. (2009). *Visions of culture: An introduction to anthropological theories and theorists*. New York: Altamira Press.

Pope, W. (1975). Durkheim as a Functionalist. *The sociological quarterly*. 16(3), 361-379.

Stolley, K.S. (2005). *The basics of sociology*. London: Greenwood Press.

Thorlindsson, T. & Bernburg, J.G. (2004). "Durkheim's Theory of Social Order and Deviance: A Multi-Level Test". *European Sociological Review*. 20(4), 271-285.

Turner, J.H. (2014). *Theoretical sociology: A concise introduction to twelve sociological theories*. California: Sage.

7.10 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

- 1) Refer to section 7.1
- 2) Refer to section 7.2
- 3) Refer to section 7.2
- 4) Refer to section 7.3
- 5) Refer to third paragraph of section 7.3
- 6) Refer to first paragraph of section 7.4
- 7) Refer to section 7.4
- 8) Refer to section 7.5
- 9) Refer to section 7.6
- 10) Refer to section 7.7