

Course : M. A (Sociology)

Semester : VI

Course Code : SOCY4106

Course Title : Modern Sociological  
Theories

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Reading : Simmel, George, *On Individuality and Social Forms*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971, (Chaps: 3).

## Chapter III. Social Types

- The Poor (1908)

# The Poor

- The poor as a social category is conceptualized on the basis of obligation and the rights, where it is the obligation of rich to take care of the poor. Consequently, it becomes the rights of the poor to get assistance. For example, countries where begging is a normal phenomenon, the beggar believes that it is his right to get alms, and the denial means the withholding of his entitlement.
- As a result of this, right to get assistance falls in the same category of fundamental rights such as right to life and the right to work.

- The poor person perceives his condition as a result of the ‘injustice of the cosmic order’, which he wants this to be redressed through his claims against the society.
- These claims may lead to certain degrees such as from a delinquent proletariat or lumpen proletariat who can perceive any well dressed person as an enemy or a representative of the ‘exploiting’ class who can be robbed without any guilt, to a class of humble beggar who ask for charity ‘for the love of God.

- ‘Solidarity of mankind’ is the basis for the claims of the poor for the assistance.
- Among the ancients Semites, rights of the poor for the meal is not out of personal generosity, but it is based on social affiliation and the religious custom. The religious premise for their rights is derived from the metaphysical unity or the kinship or tribal basis of biological unity.

- The significance for the 'giving for the giver' is prime motives for the giver to give alms. When Jesus told the wealthy young man to "Give your riches to the poor", it is basically associated with the salvation of the soul of the wealthy man for which this sacrifice was only a means to the end.
- When the welfare of society needs the assistance to the poor, the assistance takes place either voluntarily or imposed by the law keeping in mind that that they will not become "active and dangerous enemy of the society", so as to channelize their energy for the more productive work and prevent the "degeneration of their progeny".

- English trade unions grant assistance to the unemployed members in order to prevent them to work on cheap wage which may result into the overall lowering of wages.
- The goal of assistance is not to change the structure of the society, but instead it is to maintain the status quo of the social differentiation and mitigate the extreme manifestation of the social inequality.

- The meaning of the assistance to the poor is not aimed at equalizing them and suppressing the difference between rich and the poor.
- It is the public goals of assistance to the poor which is attained through the obligation of the State, which is not the right of the poor as such but it is the right of the every citizen who pays taxes for the well being of the poor.

- Simmel observes that the assistance to the poor holds the same position as the protection of the animals. He gives example of the then Germany where no one was punished for torturing an animal, except if one did it publicly in a way that was scandalized.
- Since it is the obligation of the State to assist the poor, “the poor are not only poor, they are also citizens”.

- Poor person belongs to the general segment of the economy as long as he carries out some kind of economic activities.
- Marginalization of poor results from his exclusion from the participation in the economic activities, for example, unemployed, lumpen proletariats.

- Since the 18th century mostly in England, the emphasis has shifted , where the ideal of “humanitarianism and of the rights of man” has displaced the centralist spirit of the Elizabethan Poor Law, in which the work had to be provided to the poor for the benefit of the society.
- The ideal of humanitarianism is based on the principle that “every poor person has a right to minimal subsistence, whether he wants and is able to work or not”.

# Concluding Remarks

- For Simmel, the poor as a sociological category are not those who suffer specific deficiencies and deprivations, but it is because they receive assistance and should receive it by the social norms. Therefore, poverty cannot be defined in quantitative terms, but only in terms of social reaction which results form a specific situation.