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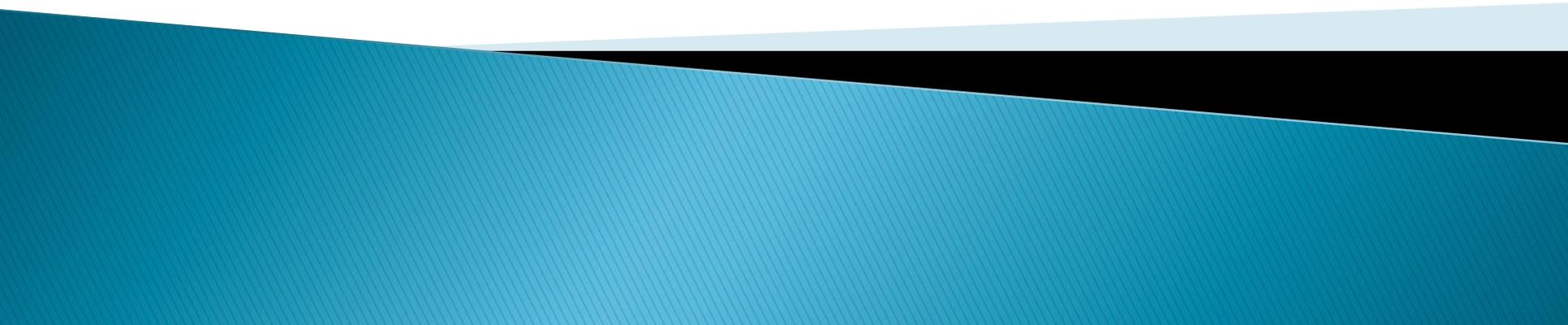
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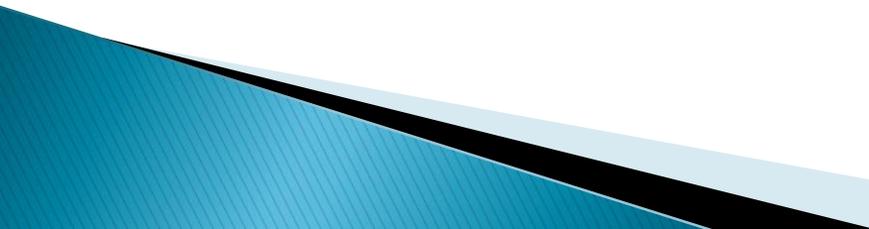
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A.R Radcliff–Brown on the Structure and Function in Primitive Society

- ▶ Reading : Radcliffe–Brown A.R., *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, London: Cohen and West, 1971, (Chaps: 9, 10).
 - ▶ Chapter 9 : On the Concept of Function in Social Science.
 - ▶ Chapter 10 : On Social Structure.
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On the Concept of Function in Social Science

- ▶ Radcliff- Brown abandoned the search for the origin and past of the institutions and the diffusion of the cultural traits from one part of the world to other, he defined society as an “functionally interrelated system in which “general laws or functions” operate.
 - ▶ For him, the first systematic formulation of function was provided by Durkheim, which is based on the ‘organic analogy’.
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- ▶ Radcliff–Brown rejected the use of ‘functionalism’ as a term propagated by Malinowski, for him ‘–ism’ is a kind of ideology and the belief which is not scientific.
 - ▶ A scientist must not have any passionate relation with any kind of method, all are of equal importance which have operational value for the scientific research.
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- ▶ While making a distinction between organism and society, R. Brown argues that the organism may die, but society continues to survive over time, albeit it can be changed and transformed.
 - ▶ For him, structure of the organism can be studied separately from the function, but which is not the case with society as the social structure is observable only when it functions.
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- ▶ Three assumptions of Radcliff–Brown’s structural–functional approach :
 - ▶ Minimal integration of its parts is the necessary condition for the survival of a society.
 - ▶ Functional processes maintain the necessary conditions for the integration or solidarity.
 - ▶ In every society, structural features contribute to the maintenance of necessary solidarity.
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- ▶ Solidarity is the key concept for Durkheim, whereas for R. Brown it is the 'structural continuity' of society.
 - ▶ At each level of the analysis, a part of the social structure makes the contribution for the maintenance of the structural continuity of the whole.
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On Social Structure

- ▶ Although, Spencer coined the term social structure for advancing his analogy between societies and organism, he did not offer a theoretical perspective on it.
 - ▶ R. Brown made a major contribution for defining the concept of social structure, and initiate a debate on it.
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- ▶ According to R. Brown, social anthropology is the “theoretical natural science of human society”.
 - ▶ On the basis of the analogy of the natural science, it is perceived that the “ structure of the universe is revealed to us through our senses”. Thus, the social structure is an empirical reality, which can be subjected to observation.
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- ▶ On a common parlance, structure refers to some kind of an ordered arrangement of parts or components. For example, a sentence has a structure, so does a building.
 - ▶ The basic part of social structure is person. Here, R. Brown made an important distinction between 'person' and the 'individual'. For him, 'individual' refers to carry out the functions of physiological and psychological needs.
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- ▶ Whereas, a 'person', as the human being is a 'complex of social relationships'. Each person is assigned 'a place in a social structure'.
 - ▶ R. Brown refers to 'social personality' as a term for the 'position' a human being occupies in a social structure. In a way, a person is studied in terms of the social structure, and the social structure is studied in terms of the persons who constitute it.
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- ▶ For him, there are two aspects of social structure :
 - i) Interpersonal relations which may consist of a number of 'dyadic relations' e.g. father and son, mother and daughter, etc.
 - ii) Differentiation of social roles e.g. the relation between men and women, employers and employees, etc.
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Concluding Remarks

- ▶ Norms and values control the social relationships. Thus, the society is not the 'haphazard conjunction of persons'.
 - ▶ On the basis of the above arguments, R. Brown concludes that social structure is observable and empirical, which can be studied through the application of the methods of natural and biological sciences.
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References :

- ▶ Radcliffe–Brown A.R.1971, *Structure and Function in Primitive Society*, London: Cohen and West.
- ▶ Radcliffe–Brown A.R.1948, *A Natural Science of Society*. New York : Free Press.

Thank You !

