
UNIT 4 COMPLEX SOCIETIES

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After you have gone through this unit carefully, you should be able to:

- define a complex society;
- discuss the rural-urban dichotomy;
- describe modern employment organisation;
- explain what generates conflict in industry;
- identify the characteristics of the employment of women in complex society; and
- describe the main features of post-industrial society.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In Unit 3 we have indicated various aspects of simple societies. We find that complex societies are not tribal or simple in their organisation. In part, we find, technological advancement is what defines the complexity of modern society. There is however a rural-urban dichotomy, and community life too is not completely removed from that in simple societies. We examine industrial conflict in complex societies and also aspects of employment of women. Finally we turn our attention to post-industrial society, its main features, and some trends.

4.2 DEFINING A COMPLEX SOCIETY

Technological advances from the stage of hunting and gathering to landing on the moon have given birth to a technologically advanced complex society in modern times. Described as 'complex societies', modern industrial nation-states are contrasted with the simple societies in various important ways:

- i) larger territory and population membership;
- ii) greater occupational differentiation, and specialisation of work and social groups;
- iii) advanced technology for production of consumer items, building of houses, work places, etc;
- iv) greater co-ordination in the management of the complex society;
- v) quick rate of change in terms of consumer goods, forms of education, and so on;
- vi) faster modes of mass communication, such as, radio, TV, computers internet etc.

Initially it was technological advances that ushered in change. Huge markets sprang up, occupational opportunities and population increase created the nation-state. This is far more inclusive in organisation than anything in simple societies.



Advanced Technology in Complex Society

4.2.1 Rural-Urban Dichotomy

Sociologists had earlier thought that there is a clear difference between the urban and the rural community. However gradually this concept of rural-urban dichotomy underwent change. Some sociologists found that there was as much individualism, lack of understanding, fear and suspicion of strangers even among the villagers as it existed in the urban life. The 'peaceful village' image of rural life took a severe blow.

These studies indicated that the happy community-type of existence in villages was not a fact. Remarkably the concept of the urban community also underwent change in the 1950's. It was found that family and friends made life close, informal, and secure. That is to say there does exist 'urban villages' in city life as well.

This aspect of complex societies is very puzzling. Moreover there exist people who live in villages and work in towns. Neither the village nor the town can thus be thought of as a stereotype. Close associations or lack of them did not depend on the environment. They were independent.

Activity 1

Closely examine the community in which you live and write a report of about one page on the nature of your community in terms of its level of urbanisation; whether you will call it rural, urban or semi-urban and why?

Discuss your report with those of other students at your study centre.

4.2.2 Aspects of Community Life

One thing is clear from the above is that the rural and urban life in complex society is not the opposite of one another. In fact it could no longer be assumed that environment determined any one type of association. However this is not to say that rural and urban populations do not have any differences.

Later studies stressed that:

- i) social class and
- ii) stage in family cycle were very important factors in the complex societies.

According to the studies, social class influences choice over where a person can stay (live). Stage in family cycle determines choice of area within a social class. Thus young parents in a social class do not have as much to invest as those who are older. There are thus several constraints on where a person can live. The housing market makes a cluster of similar social class and stage in family cycle.

Some sociologists point out that it is the group that is influenced-not the community as such. They argue in favour of studying local social systems. They feel these should be studied with reference to:

- i) maintenance and establishment;
- ii) modifying circumstances; and
- iii) inter-relationships with national systems.

It was suggested that community ties and behaviours are very much linked to national behaviour. Personal ties were believed to be decreasing to a very large extent. Thus vertical links to the central decision makers are replacing the 'horizontal' local ties. Thus the two are deeply inter linked, although community reflects the nation. Again the analysis of economic factors has become very important in urban studies. Further, it was felt that urban problems are not exclusively urban, e.g. slums and poverty. Thus, it may be pointed out that community studies do help in studying social change. However locality study gives more precise data for the same.

4.2.3 Types of Urbanisation

There are three types of urbanisation concept:

- i) Over-urbanisation.
- ii) Under-urbanisation.
- iii) De-urbanisation.

The developing world is experiencing over-urbanisation. Cities are enclaves which are surrounded by villages. They are also considered to be 'beach-heads' from which economic growth and its benefits go out towards rural areas. Our view on over-urbanisation is that metropolitan development is due to foreign capital. Thus, cities are being exploited by the main powers of the developed world.

Such urban centres become exploiters of the rural areas near them. They are, however, themselves dependent on industrial nations—both for economic and political dominance. In this situation, manufacturing industry does not grow strong. The service sector is over-emphasised. What results therefore is urbanisation without proper industrialisation. Thus over-urbanisation implies that cities in the developing world are not industrialised enough relative to population ratios. The picture indicates that the service sector has a deep agrarian root.

Check Your Progress 1

Note: i) Use the space provided below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) What is a complex society? Describe in about five lines.

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2) List the three types of urbanisation. Use about five lines.

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4.3 MODERN SOCIETY

Modern society is basically industrial. In such societies we find that technical skills are valued very much. Unskilled labour is valued but much less so. All this is reflected in the wage structure. Administration and management services are very prestigious. Modern society has several features. These include:

- i) profit-motive production by big capitalists;
- ii) technological advances;
- iii) high rate of urban populations;
- iv) bureaucratic organisation; and
- v) spread of education.

Thus modern societies, large organisations are very important, but they make interaction impersonal. In contrast to **over-urbanisation** in the developing world, there is **under-urbanisation** in Eastern Europe. This is in a sense the opposite case relative to over-urbanisation. While the former is produced by industrialisation and low rural employment opportunities, under-urbanisation is the result of extra or over industrialisation, accompanied by a lack of support systems like housing. Thus, those employed in urban areas could not be given housing by the state. Further, the free market rate was too steep for the average person's budget. Workers thus have to travel a long way up and down to work. Only the higher strata people have chances of possessing a house. The process of under-urbanisation puts the burden of industrialisation on the less well-off sections of society.

The next aspect that we examine is that of **de-urbanisation**. In Britain since the late seventies there has been a movement away from large urban towns to small towns and

villages. There has thus been a ruralisation of urban/industrial relations. This is seen as a result of the economic and industrial policies, which encourage such a process. Such ruralisation is especially evident in advanced technology sectors.

In general therefore community remains an important factor. It helps to study change. Even today the idea of a good community is very strongly present. However, the connection between community and wider society must be kept in mind always.

Again in modern society kinship significance goes down in terms of expectations and obligations. However, there develops a complex division of labour. There is a great deal of specialisation inside a large organisation.

In modern society also there are many varieties of subcultures and counter-cultures, each representing a section of people. These form around music, philosophy, or political beliefs. Further we find that the arena of the sacred is relatively small in modern society. On the other hand folk societies are much smaller and closely knit together. There is little use of technology and the religious ethos is very strong. It presents to an extent a picture opposite to that of modern society.

There are some other aspects to modern society. There is the view that what is emerging is a mass society. That is a society in which small groups have no chance. Psychologically people become superficial, and without any deep commitment. Relationships are insecure and competitive.

In terms of politics that local groups are cut off from the mainstream. Job satisfaction is rare and people do not feel a sense of belonging to the work place. Thus this discontent is manipulated by politicians. Some sociologists however see only pluralism in these situations. They feel that modern society offers unlimited choices to the individual.

Activity 2

Prepare a map of the city/town/village where you live. Identify residential colonies and find out who are the people living in this colony, what is their social background in terms of religion, language, class and caste. Write a report of one page and discuss it with the other students at your Study Centre and also Your Academic Counsellor.

4.3.1 Work in Complex Societies

Work in complex organisations means work that is paid. However work may not earn monetary wage. It may be time consuming and call for skill without being wage productive, e.g. house repairs. In simple societies, the tendency is often to be partial towards leisure. Work is thus mental or physical action that has some end result. Thus work has a wide range of being. In fact, among the complex societies leisure activities have to some extent become a means of work and wage earning, e.g; cricket, football, wrestling and tennis. The players earn their living providing a spectacle to the crowd. Others are willing to pay for their playing. Thus employment or self-employment is the main arena of work. People's leisure activities are also related to it.

4.3.2 Work Structures

Very often in simple societies work is deeply linked with family and religion. Bronislaw Malinowski indicates that in the Trobriand Islands many day to day tasks were overseen by a magician. Again what was produced agriculturally was distributed keeping kinship obligations in mind. In such societies work is not separated from domestic activities. This is true also of pre-industrial France. Here household members helped in every way with the work on the farm. In contrast, complex societies have specific workers or employees. These people have a common work place away from home. Their work uses power and machinery and is supervised. Thus there is little job-freedom. Fixed hours have to be worked without a let-up in effort.

The main attraction for the employees, in a complex society, is the wages they are paid. They have to submit themselves to higher authorities (manager, supervisor, etc.) while at work. All this is quite different from simple societies. Work rhythms that take account of the worker's pace and stamina are almost non-existent. The question of not following the routine doesn't arise. A few provisions are made for emergencies (casual leave, medical leave, etc.) in government organisations. Lax rhythms or personally oriented rhythms are obsolete now. In complex societies commercial offices stress time keeping and ceaseless labour. Time keeping is part and parcel of capitalist and modern work modes.

Gradually, these factors were no longer considered to be imposed upon the workers; they themselves found it convenient. They were willing to work hard and to follow all the rules. This attempt to make workers time conscious and hard working continues till the present day. All these changes have met with some opposition. However, the complex societies do realise that the standard of living has risen greatly. However, some of the work has been both mentally and physically exhausting. Alienation is a modern day fact in social life of the complex societies. This is quite opposite of the tribal situation, e.g. Kalahari Bushmen. Here the material wants were few and easily met with. There was no tendency or opportunity to aggravate wants.

Thus some sociologists have pointed out that simple societies have had a better life. It is not so mechanical and relentlessly time oriented. There is time enough for leisure. However, in complex societies, the concept of 'leisure' time has taken another meaning. Some institutions; eg. Companies, offices etc. give paid vacations to their employees, special leave is given so that the productivity and capacity of the workers may improve.

Work has become a most vital aspect of life in complex societies and wage labour is an important factor in the area of work. To get the work done is also considered a kind of work. Some sociologists think that when work, as an employment-earning wages, a social status and standard of living pervades all areas of life, as it does in a complex society, people's attitudes become exceedingly commercialised. Some sociologists even believe that in contemporary societies class can be understood in terms of consumption. Thus, a person who consumes more or expensive items may be placed in a higher class. The tendency of commercialisation can lead to conflicts among the factors of economy. To illustrate this point we take the issue of conflict in industry.

4.3.3 Conflict in Industry

In industry, the employer has control over the employees' labour over a particular time. The employer would like to use his employee in different capacity. Therefore, he leaves the contract sufficiently vague. Nevertheless, (i) work conditions and effort; (ii) technical qualifications; and (iii) responsibility are areas of management worker discussions, and often disputes. Thus, work effort is always being discussed relative to pay. The worker wants higher pay and facilities. The management however, wants to maximise profits, and this includes keeping low wages and long hours of work for the workers. The same problem exists with technical skill and pay. Again responsible behaviour is sought after by management. The level of responsibility varies with the level in an organisation. Higher positions carry higher responsibility—and higher pay. This too afterwards becomes a bone of contention.

Further conflict areas exist when attempts are made to put machines to work and remove workers. This is also called retrenchment of labour. It also exists when attempts are made to control them very closely. Jobs can often be dehumanising and alienating.

The most visible form of industrial conflict are legal or illegal strikes. However, other methods require co-operation among workers to:

- i) go slow;
- ii) absenteeism; and
- iii) sabotage.

These methods may not show much on surface but cause great damage to management.

Industrial conflict has most meaning when it is recognised by management as a just step. This is rarely the case. Very often trade unions are not recognised by management. The pluralist view of industrial conflict is that various groups may have many complaints. Later, when changes are to be made, they have to participate in decision making. Control over workers is a controversial issue as well. Further this control is established through bureaucratic rules and regulations. Thus choices are extremely limited and the feelings of being hemmed in are very strong. Industrial conflict is a worldwide fact and injustices are in it. However, it is important to provide solution to this area.

4.3.4 Employment and Women

In complex societies appreciable headway has been made on employment of women. Women however remain separated from men in the work spheres. There is “horizontal” segregation in that women are mostly in clerical jobs, catering, receptionists, nursing, school teaching and so on. There is ‘vertical’ segregation also—for example relatively few women reach top managerial positions, or skilled manual jobs. As such their wages too are lower than those of men. As matters stand today anti-women job discrimination is on the way out. It is no longer felt that a woman must stay at home and only do domestic work.

Further the concept of two incomes has gained popularity, since it raises the standard of living. The responsibility of raising the young however remains vested with women. This is also true of domestic work. However, in most nuclear families in urban areas, men do contribute to the domestic work in one way or the other out of choice or out of compulsion. As such maternity leave is provided for in most jobs. Women also often spend time with their young. Even there is a provision for paternity leave which can be availed by the would be father. But still, women as workers are taken less seriously than men by employers. They are not often delegated to workshops, which increase their skill. It is often felt that they have domestic interests which reduce work—seriousness. This need not be true, however, that union meetings etc. are not conducive to women’s participation although communication and technology advancement is bringing more and more women into the work force. In general work is still more male oriented.

Check Your Progress 2

Note: i) Use the space provided below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

1) Write a brief note in five lines on conflict in industry in modern societies.

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2) Provide a picture of women and employment in complex society, in about three lines.

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4.4 POST-INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY

Post-industrial society is a combination of various dimensions or features. These features separate it from the modern society. We will examine three of them here and two more in the next section. The first important feature is:

- i) **Service Economy:** In post-industrial society, agriculture and manufacturing do not absorb a majority of the work force. Services and trade are the major avenues of employment and the governments are major employers. Today only the U.S.A. shows indications of this stage. There are over 60 per cent work force engaged in services. This is expected to go even higher.
- ii) **Professional and Technicians:** In industrial societies blue collar and semi skilled labour predominate. However in post-industrial societies professional and technical operators grow to dominate. A new class structure begins to form the basis of post-industrial society.
- iii) **Theoretical Knowledge:** In post-industrial society, theoretical knowledge has a crucial value. Scientific knowledge along with mathematics based social science become very significant. In fact a shortage of scientifically trained professionals is felt. In providing this need universities gain a great deal of importance.

4.4.1 Further Features

Post industrial societies manifest two more features:

i) Technology Planning

In modern society, use of some technologies has proved to be harmful e.g. DDT is affecting crops, birds, wild life. Nuclear energy generating plants are creating nuclear wastes and accidents risks as in Chernobyl. USSR. Post-industrial societies have technology assessment to prevent any harmful effects of the technology. Thus, the government and people are much more aware of the possibility that the advance of technology can often lead to harmful side consequences.

ii) Intellectual Technology

A new intellectual technology will be crucial to post-industrial society. It is not the machine technology of the modern age. Intellectual technology comprises management and other techniques needed to organise. Vast use of computers and super computers and new mathematics is crucial. Decisions regarding the actual use of advanced technology rest with the politicians and not with the technicians. In this situation, the economy may feature an all-out exploitation of the less-developed population. This may lead to a revolution on the part of those exploited. Thus, the post-industrial society may not last long or else societies, both the developed as well as the developing, may take conscious steps to protect themselves from over exploitation of natural environment and pollution.

4.4.2 Some Trends

Post-industrial society depends for its emergence on the persistence of the present trends. What happens if this does not happen? Let us consider some of these aspects below:

- i) **State Tasks:** These include saving and distribution of wealth equitably. Both these are contradictory - for the latter means expenditure not saving of capital. Higher taxes do not solve the problem. Education, medicine, insurance, all needs great expenditure. Saving is not enough to meet them and a fiscal crisis arises.
- ii) **Cultural Change:** Change may come culturally - not only in the economy but all aspects of social life. The new young may find fulfilment outside their careers as well as inside them.

- iii) **Ideologies:** Post-industrialism regulates the big corporations strictly. It is a type of 'state capitalism'. In other countries state socialism exists. Socialism should lead to communal society, which eventually makes the state obsolete. However this is not borne out by trends in modern communism. It is also felt by some sociologists that bureaucracy needs to be replaced by communal structures.

Thus there is much speculation about future trends. Recently, however it is being questioned whether progress alone is the future. Cannot there be devastation in a global sense or regional nuclear holocaust? This factor has come in to create much sobriety and stops utopic visions of the future from being readily accepted.

In the 21st century, we have entered yet another era of social existence. This era is referred to as the "information age" where global communication through radio, T.V., Computer networks, satellites has changed the very notion of social group or community. People from different regions, societies, languages etc. can be part of an Internet group, constantly in touch with each other and so on. Sources of knowledge and its accessibility through improved communication technologies has taken such a significant shape that we can talk about a 'global' world today where development of any kind, be it social cultural, political or economic; it affects all societies throughout the world in different ways and different proportions. One example is the post September or 9/11 event in America when in 2002 the World Trade Center (WTC) building was destroyed by two aeroplanes carrying passengers. Thousands of people were killed. The tragedy was immense but its socio-political implications are still being felt everywhere in the world.

Check Your Progress 3

Note: i) Use the space provided below for your answers.

ii) Compare your answers with those given at the end of this unit.

- 1) List three features of post-industrial society. Use about four lines.

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4.5 LET US SUM UP

In this unit we have examined the notion of complex societies. We began with a discussion on the features of complex societies. This involved taking into consideration rural and urban aspects of community life. It also included a look at various forms that urbanisation takes.

We studied modern society as a major form of complex society. We examined work and its aspects within such societies. Industrial conflict and women's employment were two important issues that we explained. Finally, we studied post-industrial societies and what they are comprised of. This included studying the features and various possible trends that complex societies might take in the future such as, the media revolutions which has really made the world a global world. We have thus provided a rounded view of complex societies.

4.6 FURTHER READINGS

- 1) Bell, Daniel, 1973. *The Coming of post-industrial Society*. Basic Books: New York.
- 2) Worsely, Peter (ed.), 1987. *The New Introducing Sociology*. Penguin Books Limited: Middlesex.

4.7 KEY WORDS

Absenteeism	: When workers are not in the work place without being on any leave.
Alienation	: A feeling of dissatisfaction and dislike for the job that the worker is doing.
Contention	: A dispute over something, e.g. wages for work, with the management.
Horizontal Segregation	: Keeping one particular group apart within the similar wage and status level.
Medicare	: Medical treatment available to workers and others.
Obsolete	: No longer in use; out moded.
Stereotype	: A generally held idea about something e.g. villages are beautiful and peaceful places.
Vertical Segregation	: Separating people at the top (or bottom) level from others, e.g. owners, managers, and supervisors.

4.8 MODEL ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) A complex society is one, which has high technological developments. Its organisations are formal and its' complicated bureaucratic set-up is an important feature of a complex society.
- 2) The three types of urbanisation are:
 - i) over-urbanisation;
 - ii) under-urbanisation; and
 - iii) de-urbanisation.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Conflict and disputes arise in industry in modern societies over
 - i) working conditions;
 - ii) required technical qualifications; and
 - iii) responsibility relative to pay.
- 2) A large number of women are employed in complex society. However, most of them are in low-level jobs—clerical, receptionists, etc. Very few reach high positions.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Three features of an industrial society are:
 - i) basically, a service economy, e.g. trade;
 - ii) dominance of professionals and technicians; and
 - iii) vast scientific knowledge.

REFERENCES

References cited in Block 1 (These are given here for those students who wish to follow up certain points in detail.)

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