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COVID-19 AND SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY: THE MODERN AND POSTMODERN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT
The study of social relationships that arise from human interactions and processes is the primary purpose of Sociology. It provides a diverse range of theories and perspectives to perceive, understand and analyze various social phenomena with scientific insights. COVID-19 pandemic was also such phenomena which need to be analyzed, sociologically. Therefore, the present study tries to establish the relevance of modern and postmodern sociological theories in the time of pandemic, with the help of their notable thinkers' concepts and perspectives. This paper inducted the various sociological literatures that revolve around the themes similar to pandemic-uncertainty, unpredictability and mega crisis. Along with the establishment of relevancy, there is a comparative analysis of both the theories in the understanding of pandemic. However, this paper tries to highlight the extent of significance and applicability of sociological theories in perceiving the ongoing transformative phenomena of society.
KEYWORDS: *COVID-19, Sociological Theory, Pandemic, Social Relationships.*

INTRODUCTION

The sprouting of intellectual prepositions always takes place at the backdrop of any social settings (Ritzer, 2011). As the society advances in its forms, so does the intellect or vice-versa. These opening lines were lingered in the mind of **AUGUSTE COMTE** which gave him a food for thought to develop a discipline called **SOCIOLOGY**. This discipline provides the fundamental understanding of society with the help of its diverse range of sociological theories and concepts designated by the eminent sociologists in different time period. Broadly, we classify sociological theories into three categories, namely- Classical, Modern and Postmodern. In this article, we will try to comprehend the relevance of modern and postmodern theories with the help of their respective thinkers in the time of pandemic.

Modern Sociological Theory exhibits the understanding of working mechanism of society along with its dynamism and equilibrium restoration in contemporary period. The basic postulate of this theory imbibes the idea of society as a system which constitutes of social structure (institutions like family, religion, economy, etc) fuelled by social interaction and behaviour resulting in the manufacturing of social relationships. This theory delineates the use of scientific and empirical methods to comprehend the social reality and renounce the early philosophical speculation based apprehension. This theory places a strong emphasis on quantitative research technique as it thrives to make sociology more scientific and empirical in nature.

Postmodern Sociological Theory emerged as a critique of modernity and its associated universal understanding of society. The basic postulate of this theory imbibes the idea of rejection of grand narratives. It constitutes the plurality of truth (which means the truth is socially constructed as per the given culture, context and perspective, hence, exhibits differences or varieties of truth), fragmentation of social life (which means there is presence of fluidity in identities, cultures and social structures). It also talks about hyperreality, power-knowledge relationship and the deconstruction of fixed meanings attached to understand society. This theory places a strong emphasis on qualitative research techniques. Basically, it challenges the idea of modernism along with offering an innovative perspective to observe, comprehend and analyze the diverse, fragmented and fluid social realities.

MODERN SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY: PARSONS, MERTON AND GIDDENS

Parsons (structural functionalist) His concept of **SICK ROLE** and **AGIL MODEL** can be taken into account to understand the relevancy of sociological theories in the time of pandemic. He explained the sick role as a means of outlining the specific rights and obligations of the sick (Parsons, 1951). He developed the sick role mechanism

to describe the ideal relationship between a patient and a doctor. Both patients and doctors had to abide by a number of rights and obligations associated with their respective roles in order to keep access into the sick position closely regulated. This concept of sick role is still relevant in describing and addressing the corona virus disease pandemic of 2019. Social isolation and improved hand hygiene have been the major tools in the fight against the pandemic.

As per the Parsons' model, both those with a COVID-19 diagnosis and those who are not yet infected must abide by the rights and obligations of the sick role. These rights and obligations include maintaining personal hygiene, covering a cough or sneeze with a tissue or hand elbow and, as a necessary, isolating physically and socially excluding the person. These interventions may help the infected recover and the uninfected avoid becoming infected, allowing both groups to resume their expected performances and customary social roles. His AGIL model can be inducted to understand the paradigm shift of educational system from offline to online model of learning during COVID-19. He asserts that the AGIL model is a strategy that can be used to achieve equilibrium in society (Parsons, 1951). a) **Adaptation**- An adaptation to the COVID-19 pandemic is online education. Stakeholders in educational units have decided that the conversion of the educational system from offline to online learning is necessary to save the educational system. It can be achieved through proportionate cooperation from both educational institutions and parents by modifying tasks and requirements in online learning. b) **Goal Attainment**- A variety of objectives were pursued with online learning, including the preservation of education and its associated units from the COVID-19 and provision of psychological support was also required. Online education was viewed as the greatest way to guarantee that student's rights to receive educational services were upheld throughout COVID-19 emergency.

The objective of online learning is to maximize the parental involvement in their children's education. Parents can improve the intellectual development of their children along with addressing their emotional needs. c) **Integration**- According to Parsons, internalization and socialization are crucial for preserving integrity. Internalization of information on how to learn at home is encouraged in the context of online learning. In the meantime, socialization focused on crucial facts about children's academic growth. The three educational centres (family, school and society) must be integrated harmoniously in order to make online learning more successful. It makes online education productive, efficient and joyful for the students. d) **Latency-** It implies that each component of the system should improve and maintain their cultural patterns. Therefore, schooling is still provided despite of pandemic. This is how internet education is important for preserving cultural norms. This social transformation ushers in a brand new cultural paradigm of online learning within the backdrop of COVID-19.

Merton (Functionalist) The concept of **ANOMIE** and **STRAIN** Theory propounded by Merton can be included in understanding the COVID-19 situation. As per Merton, Anomie refers to a situation in which members of a particular community are no longer able to pursue culturally mandated goals through socially acceptable means as a result of current changes (Merton, 1938). The societal repercussions of COVID-19's spread are an illustration of anomie, a progressive social disintegration and the escalation of many issues like the unemployment, inflation, economic crisis and the adoption of behaviours stemming from atavistic life protection impulses.

The findings of research have exhibited a favourable correlation between emotional distress and functional impairment, alcohol or drug misuse, unhealthy religious coping mechanisms, excessive hopelessness and passive suicide ideation. Cybercriminals prey on psychological weaknesses in their victims, exploiting COVID-19 related anxiety by manipulating emotional instability to commit online fraud. Cybercriminals (Merton, 1949) may also use pleasure as an emotional lure to persuade victims to pay for entertainment services or to take advantage of people's altruism by asking for donations for the less fortunate. The theory of anomie and strain are well known criminological theories that can be believed to be most relevant to the cyber fraud trends occurred during pandemic.

Giddens (Structuralist theorist) He defined **Globalization** as 'the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities' (Giddens, 1990). However, the praise of globalization gradually replaced by scepticism towards globalization because of worldwide terrorism, global economic crisis, climate change and global health dangers like COVID-19 pandemic. Globalization appears to be reducing the world and making it easier for deadly infections and terror to spread. His work '**The Transformation of Intimacy**' (1992) also relevant at the time of pandemic. There is an increment in digital communication in this time. This is demonstrated by the growing number of family members and friends who communicate virtually rather than in person. Therefore, COVID-19 has impeded the social rituals that serve to denote intimacy. As outbreak progressed, there

is a transformation in how we project our intimacy towards our people like physical touch turned to be of virtual nature.

POSTMODERN SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY: FOUCAULT, BAUDRILLARD AND BAUMAN

Foucault (Post- Structuralist) His idea revolves around the interaction between power and knowledge and how societal institutions employ them to exert social control. His concept of '**Biopolitics**' and writing titled- '**History of Madness**' demonstrates the relevance of postmodern sociological theory in the examination of pandemic situation. Foucault refers Biopolitics as the modern transformation in power from sovereign 'right to kill' to a positive 'administration of life', where the state manages population through health, hygiene, fertility and longevity related statistics. It provides biopower to the state machinery. But he was concerned with the dubious character of this concept. As state can exhibit its discriminatory attitude in order to optimize the life of the healthy population by justifying the exclusion of those deemed a threat to that life.

The government's biopolitical practices are more exposed during the time of pandemic, involving the methods like social isolation and it also opened up new opportunities for greater technological surveillance and control, especially when those methods are differentiated as per the specific population segments.

The central theme of the book- 'History of Madness' implies that madness is not only a medical condition but also shaped by social, cultural and political factors. It is the society that decides what is 'normal' and what is 'mad' and these definitions tends to change over the course of time. This book also presents the dynamic relationship between power, knowledge and social control. Governments imposed lockdowns, quarantine and travel restrictions in the time of pandemic which shows how authorities manage populations during crises, similar to Foucault's idea that institutions discipline society through social control and regulation.

As Foucault discussed about how people considered as 'different' and 'dangerous' decided by the society. Now, if we see during pandemic, the suspected individuals were quarantined to prevent the spread of disease. His emphasis on the relationship between knowledge and power can be seen during pandemic in the form of how medical experts and health organizations acquire authority because they produce knowledge about the disease. There is an occurrence of stigma and labelling towards infected individuals, certain communities and frontline workers depicting how societies create labels and social boundaries during pandemic.

Baudrillard (Postmodernist) His theories of **Simulation**, **Simulacra** and **Hyperreality** helps us to analyze the experiences of pandemic. He argued that modern society is dominated by simulations which means representations that distort reality. The representation of COVID-19 through media images, statistics and news coverage sometimes became more powerful than the actual experience. Regular infection related data, death counts and visuals of hospitals became symbols of the pandemic reality. Particulars like masks, vaccines and sanitizers became symbols of safety and responsibility which is known as **symbolic consumption** in the theory of Baudrillard. His concept of Hyperreality refers to a situation where the boundary between reality and representation disappears. The continuous media coverage produced an intensified sense of crisis during pandemic. Social media was flooded with the viral videos, misinformation and dramatic reporting which amplified this hyperreal environment. People were living in a media-constructed pandemic reality.

Bauman (Postmodernist) His concept of **Liquid Modernity** is very essential for comprehending social life during COVID-19 pandemic. He argued that the social structures, relationships and institutions have become fluid, unstable and constantly changing (similar to liquid) in modern society. The pandemic evidently unwrapped and intensified these features. He argued that modern society is marked by uncertainty and unpredictability and we know that pandemic is embellished with such experiences such as constant changes in rules, lockdowns, health risks, etc. The daily routine of public became unstable in nature which clearly depicts the Bauman's claim that modern life lacks long term security.

Bauman considered consumer culture as central to liquid modernity. Consumption patterns shifted dramatically towards online shopping, home-based consumption and digital entertainment, highlighting the liquidity and rapid transformation of consumer behaviour.

There is a developing theory of '**Jagged Love**' that is heavily influenced by Zygmunt Bauman's idea of **Liquid Love** manifested during the pandemic era. Bauman opined that the stability and security offered by romantic relationships and family structures were liquefied by the twin forces of individualization and societal change that fabricated modernity. The phenomena of jagged love featured participants' use of dating apps and this appeared

cyclically as participants turned to dating apps desperately seeking the security offered by the romantic master plot (swiped-matched-send direct messages). Population especially Youth get trapped into this vicious cycle of jagged love and tends to bond firstly, followed by exchanging messages, reached the epitome of sharing everything and then snapped out from the plot, lost faith, felt lonely and then again returned to app to repeat the cycle. This creates mental frustration, emotional drainage and numbness.

Consequently, the relationships become fractured and frantic in nature. Therefore, we can admit that there is a need to bind bonds while keeping them loose and fluid in nature is the prominent feature of jagged love, intensified by the COVID-19 pandemic.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: MODERN VERSUS POSTMODERN

This section demonstrates the comparative analysis of modern and postmodern sociological theory in understanding of COVID-19 pandemic. It incorporates various dimension for comprehensive assessment-

a) Nature of Knowledge- Modern sociological theory (MST) considers the knowledge which is based on scientific temperament, rationality and empirical research whereas Postmodern sociological theory (PST) considers the knowledge based on social construction including different narratives of media, culture and politics.

b) Understanding of Reality- Pandemic is considered as an objective biological crisis as per the understanding of MST whereas PST describes it as media construction reflected through symbols, discourse and simulations.

c) Role of the State- Under the modern sociological perspective, there is a strong presence of state in managing public health via lockdowns, vaccinations and health regulations whereas postmodern sociological perspective questioned the power of state as it was perceived as form of biopolitics and surveillance.

d) Social Order- MST regarded social order as institutionalized and organized in nature whereas PST considered it as fluid and uncertain.

e) Role of Media- Under modern perception, media acts as a channel for disseminating information and public health guidelines whereas postmodern perception evaluate media as a channel for constructing hyperreality and misinformation.

f) View of Individual Behaviour- According to MST, individuals are expected to behave rationally and follow the guidelines whereas PST infers individual behaviour to be diverse as it was influenced by culture, identity and social media narratives.

g) Globalization Perspective- Globalization seen as a process of co-ordinating scientific measures and policy responses to restrict the spread of pandemic for Modern Sociological Theory whereas PST understands it as a process that spreads both disease and information rapidly generating disintegrated global experiences and interpretations.

CONCLUSION

The above mentioned modern and postmodern sociological theories along with their respective eminent thinkers projected the comprehensive, analytical and behavioural causes, consequences and perspectives of COVID-19 pandemic. This diverse nature of sociological theory exhibits an academic tool to not only comprehend this mega crisis but also delineates the working mechanism behind it as well as how it engulfed and influenced the population, state apparatus (in general) and individual (in particular) that overall constitutes the society. For gaining an enriching experience of learning, this article presents a comparative analysis between modern and postmodern understanding of pandemic. It also shows that theories and concepts travel through the purview of time to prove their immortality and usage in inculcating and developing innovative outlook to understand the complexities as well as potentialities of any contemporary sociological phenomena.

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