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SOC 326: RURAL SOCIOLOGY

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What is the relevance of the study of rural societies?

1. What is rural sociology?
2. What is the view of evolutionary theory on rural sociology?
3. What do you understand by ‘the field of sociology’?
4. How relevant is the structural-functionalist theory to the field of rural sociology?
5. What is Emile Durkheim’s typology of society?
6. What is the position of the conflict theory in the discourse of rural sociology?
7. What do you understand by a theory?
8. Present a tabular explanation of Ferdinand Tonnies typology of society.
9. What is Max Weber’s typology of society?
10. What is the comparison between the consensus and the conflict theory?
11. What is Talcott Parsons’ typology of society?
12. Present a tabular explanation of the comparison between the consensus and the conflict theory.
13. What is the contribution of Ferdinand Tonnies to rural sociology?
14. Enumerate some differences between rural and urban societies in Nigeria.
15. Does rural/urban continuum existent in Nigeria?
16. Explain five differences between rural and urban societies in Nigeria.
17. What is your understanding of the effects of migration on rural settlements?
18. Discuss the impact of rural migration on the Nigerian population.
19. What is your assessment of Government’s Policies to Influence Migration in Nigeria?

ANSWERS

What is the relevance of the study of rural societies?

The importance of rural sociology in Nigeria can be understood under the following:

- 1) It brings to light the main characteristics and problem of rural areas for which an understanding is required so as to deal appropriately with the rural dwellers.
- 2) It provides direct change programmes such as rural development programmes with relevant information about the needs of rural people and the appropriate strategies to accomplish them.
- 3) It provides a feedback mechanism to change agents involved with rural development in terms of progress made and modifications needed.
- 4) It helps to educate agents of change with sociological knowledge especially with regards to an understanding of the culture and environment they find themselves.

In conclusion rural sociology is interested in rural areas; it examines problems in such areas and tries to proffer adequate solutions to meet them. It also studies rural man as he functions in rural group situations.

The three key models to be examined here include:

- Evolutionary model
- Structural/functionalist model
- Conflict model

A theoretical model involves a broad system of explanation which is often regarded as the foundation upon which a given phenomenon is situated. All theoretical models in sociology are interested in explaining the ways in which social life is organised and ordered as well as the ways in which change comes into the society. In explaining social order and social change, the models have asked similar questions but the different answers they have given have helped to divide them into different groups. These models have also provided thinking tools in the study of rural sociology.

20. What is the view of evolutionary theory on rural sociology?

This can be traced to early 19th century sociologist such as Auguste Comte, William Graham Sumner and Herbert Spencer. Their emphasis was on how society has changed over the course of time rather than on how it tried to achieve order and stability. August Comte stated that societies have developed over three (3) stages (Theological, metaphysical and scientific stage). Each of these stages represents advancement in men's knowledge of their world.

To Herbert Spencer, the development of human society can be likened to the evolutionary development of biological organisms from simple to complex as earlier stated by Charles Darwin. According to him, just as biological organisms are made up of different interdependent organs, the interdependence of which is indispensable for the holding together of the organism, so also is the society made up of institutions. Such institutions include the family, economy and polity which help to discharge the vital functions of regulation, production/distribution and sustenance.

Later evolutionist like Ferdinand Tonnies saw society from Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (urban society). Emile Durkheim saw society as evolving from small communities with minimal division of labour in which members are held together by a mechanical solidarity (solidarity based on sameness) to larger more differentiated societies in

which members are held together by an organic solidarity (solidarity based on differences and interdependence).

In present day society the evolution theory is still very much important because it has in a way metamorphosed into the diffusion theory which divides societies on the degree of the application of modern technology into traditional and modern sectors and how society has transformed from preindustrial to industrial society. Experience today has shown that all societies need not pass through the same process of development as explained by the theory of modernization for which the starting point is the evolution theory.

21. How relevant is the structural-functionalist theory to the field of rural sociology?

Structural/Functionalist theoretical model likened society to a living organism where each part is seen as indispensable to the survival of the system. Each part of structure is expected to perform certain functions. The society is also interested on how to maintain some level of stability or equilibrium through constant exchanges with specialized structures involving institutions and some other sub-structures.

To Talcott Parsons, the society is a social system with four basic functional imperatives which can also be seen as instrumental and expressive functional imperatives. The instrument involves issues arising from external or exogenous (external) factors and they include those of adaptation to the environment and goal attainment while the expressive involves issues arising from endogamous or internal factors and they include pattern maintenance or tension management and integration. It is expedient to know that tension leads to anarchy or chaos. To solve the problems of society and persists, Parsons stated that society must have four (4) major structural features and they include

- 1) Economy
- 2) Polity (political structure)
- 3) Kinship and family ties
- 4) Community and cultural organization

For Talcott Parsons and Emile Durkheim the society is essentially a moral entity that involves norms, values, statuses and roles. The specific norms such as the rules which guide and influence peoples' behaviour are supported by the general system of values which characterize a particular society. By implication therefore different societies have different value systems which therefore go to explain the differences in their social structure and their way of life. To the structural functionalist therefore the sharing of societal values is very essential for social order to be maintained.

This model has been criticised on the following points

- 1) The idea of attributing function or purpose to institutions is improper because social institutions are not conscious beings and so cannot on their own perform functions.
- 2) It assumes a commonness of interest in society. This means that what might be functional to one group might be dysfunctional to another group.
- 3) It places less emphasis on the actual dynamics of social change as it tends to favour issues related to status quo. It further emphasizes the harmony and equilibrium of the society and tends to play down the conflict and contradiction inherent in social relations. Nevertheless the theory still remains a useful one in an understanding of society and social relations.

In conclusion, it is clear, despite the criticisms that the structural functionalist theory still helps in the understanding of the dynamics in the society today.

22. What is the position of the conflict theory in the discourse of rural sociology?

The emphasis of the conflict model is on the dynamics of social change than on the consideration of the problem of social order. Conflict is everywhere and its resolution gives rise to other forms of social relationship. Karl Marx with whom the conflict school of thought has come to be closely identified viewed society as progressing inevitable through a series of stages leading ultimately to communism. To him, a society is an arena of class struggle. The two major classes in society according to him are the bourgeoisie and proletariat but he had a belief that in the dialectical process from affirmation (thesis), to negation (antithesis) and to reconciliation (synthesis), society would arrive at a classless society.

Karl Marx while looking at the relations of production stated that men do not only labour with other men but also labour for other men and are eventually alienated from the products of their labour. According to him, society's changing economic structure as a whole affects the consciousness of the people within it. A social system based upon inequality of members makes the exploited and deprived conscious of their deprivation which will eventually lead to a revolutionary struggle.

The Marxian theory of conflict has been criticized on the following points:

- 1) It over-emphasizes economic determinism at the expense of other strategic means of dominating and controlling men. Max Weber for instance maintains that control over key economic resources is not sufficient for the understanding of the power in the society. To him control over political power is extremely essentially. Experiences across some African nations have shown how important political power is especially through military rule and sit-tight political leaders in governance.
- 2) The envisaged change is just one form involving the dialectical pattern of action and reaction with a synthesis which did not see change in a retrogressive form rather in a progressive form.
- 3) His expected revolution of the oppressed against the oppressors which he thought will transform the society from capitalism to socialism through communism has not occurred or at least not in the manner he predicted.
- 4) Sociologically, Marx is criticised as viewing society as inherently conflict generating rather than conflict reducing and for introducing a metaphysical concept called classless society into his theory.

5) Present a tabular explanation of the major features of Ferdinand Tonnies typology of society.

FEATURES	GEMEINSCHAFT	GESELLSCHAFT
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Basis of social relationship	Kinship, fellowship, neighbourliness	Exchange, rational calculation and contract
Perception of benefits and goals in social interest	Shared goals and mutual benefits	Antagonistic goals, individual or joint benefits
Dominant forces of group relation	Solidarity and accommodative forms	Symbiotic forms involving formal relationship where people depend on each other for particular advantages
Principal form of wealth	Land	Money
Ranking of social institution relations	Family, village and town life	City life, cosmopolitan life and Natural life
Central institutions and forms of social control	Family norms, Kinship group, strict adherence to folkways, morals and taboos	The state, political and legal legislations, conventions, public opinions and contracts
Status and roles	Ascribed status and fully integrated roles	Achieved statuses with roles based on specific relationships

6) What is the comparison between the consensus and the conflict theory?

The consensus model assumes that social interests are generally shared and therefore have a uniting effect on society. Also social relations are ultimately advantageous to all concerns, while society is united by the concerns on the values that members hold. It sees society as a system with needs and also goes further to say, because man is naturally wicked, every society requires restraining institutions so as to guarantee conformity. In addition social inequality is inevitable in society and the state exists because it is interested in the common good of all.

On the contrary, the conflict model holds that there is no single interest but a variety of interest amongst people in society. Social relations involve the exploitation of one group by another. Also that social unity is maintained through coercion just as society is a stage for class struggle that man is naturally good but social institution have distorted the basic nature of man. Inequality promotes conflict and that class interest is mainly economic in Nature where the state is seen as an instrument of oppression.

A comparison of the two models shows that these views of the society are not mutually exclusive rather can the two be seen as genuine alternatives. This is because one can hardly find a society that exclusively typifies either of the two models. Real societies therefore are characterised by attributes of the two models in varying degrees sometimes some of these opposing characteristics may be even co-occur, for example, a society may be interested in the good of all its citizens but may also be interested of the few. With regards to the study of rural areas therefore, these two theories are important in understanding the various structures in our rural areas. They are important so that we can have a balanced realistic and more objective analysis of the situation in rural Nigerian.

7. Present a tabular explanation of the comparison between the consensus and the conflict theory on specific issues.

ISSUES	CONSENSUS MODEL	CONFLICT
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Social Interest	Uniting	Dividing
Social Relations	Advantageous	Exploitative
Social Unity	By consensus	By coercion
Conception of Society	System with needs	Stage for class struggle
Nature of man	Requires restraining institution	Institution distort the basic nature of man
Inequality	It is a social necessity	Promotes conflict
State	Promotes common good of all	Instrument of oppression
Class	Heuristic device which involves social learning where experiences gained are for greater performance	Involves social groups with different antagonistic interest

8. Enumerate ten differences between rural and urban societies in Nigeria.

- a. Size of place
- b. Population density and composition
- c. Occupation
- d. Closeness to Nature
- e. Simplicity of Culture
- f. Social interaction
- g. Social differentiation
- h. Social Stratification
- i. Social Mobility
- j. Social Control

9. Explain five differences between rural and urban societies in Nigeria.

- a. Size of place: Rural communities are usually smaller than urban societies. Size, here refers particularly to areas actually inhabited rather than the total area of land available. In terms of total area of land available, some rural areas are by far larger since a great expanse of land is generally required for farming. Thus, rural areas have a greater portion of their land area open and uninhabited whereas most urban areas choke for lack of open space.
- b. Population density and composition: as rural areas have larger expanse of land with relatively small population, the population density (i.e. the number or persons per unit area of land) is rather low. This is in contrast to urban areas where a larger number of persons occupy relatively small unit area. Hence, high rise buildings are more evident in urban than in rural areas. Usually in Nigeria, when someone puts up a storey building in a rural community, it is more of a status symbol than a result of lack of land space. Conversely, storey buildings and skyscrapers are the only way of optimizing space in urban centres.

Low population density means that the area is relatively quiet, the air is less polluted, people are closer to nature and there is lower psychological isolation than in an urban area which is

congested, noisy, lacking in privacy and sanitation. On the other hand, low population density and the relative smallness of rural communities make it difficult for social amenities like water, light, medical facilities, schools etc. to be supplied economically to such areas. The area tends to be culturally and geographically isolated and people there tend to become more perspicacious, nose and prone to gossips.

On the other hand, the high population density in urban areas makes for high level of social contacts, greater opportunities for advancement with greater opportunities for social amenities to be provided. Apart from the density of the population, rural population tends to be more homogenous than urban population. Homogeneity here refers to the degree to which strangers or non-natives are present or absent. Most Nigerian rural areas tend to be homogenous because the inhabitants tend to come from the same ethnic group and also speak the same language. Strangers are therefore easily identified.

- c. **Closeness to Nature:** People in rural areas are directly in contact with the elements in their physical and biological environment. The physical environment here includes all physiographic factors like soil, inorganic elements, natural forces such as wind, radiation, gravity etc. The biological environment includes all micro-organisms, insects, parasites, wild plants and animals. The rural people are directly exposed to these elements whereas people in the urban areas tend to be artificially shielded or protected from them. One hears of snake bites and attack by wild beasts may not have where to hide. Similarly, although mosquitoes infest humans in rural and urban areas urbanites have knowledge of and ready access to mosquito nets, insecticides etc. while rural people are largely ignorant of these things or cannot readily afford them and are therefore at the mercy of these insects.
- d. **Occupation:** Farming, Pastoral and Gathering activities form the basis of rural economy. Although some ruralites are engaged in retail and petty trading, arts, craft, weaving, pottery and other primary industries, though only a few tend to take these as sole occupations. In contrast, people in urban areas are mainly engaged in commercial, manufacturing and administrative occupations. In fact, Max Weber defines a city as ‘a settlement, the inhabitants of which live primarily off trade and commerce rather than agriculture’.
- e. **Simplicity of Culture:** culture involves shared ideas, norms, values and beliefs of a people – the material and non-material aspects of the culture in rural areas are relatively simple. This is because, the legends, proverbs, folklore, fashion etc of the ruralites are based on their local experiences. Also, their tools, utensils, furniture and other material inventions are relatively simple. In contrast, the culture of urban areas is more complex and varied. The fact that the urban area is usually heterogeneous ethnically makes it the melting pot of various cultures. Hence, the latest in fashion, literature, music etc are first found in the urban areas. Consequently or similarly, any form of new technological innovation coming into the country first appears in the major urban centres from where it trickles down to the rural areas.

10. Discuss the impact of rural migration on the Nigerian population.

Like any other social phenomenon, migration has its positive as well as negative consequences or effects both on the source or donor region and the destination area. On the negative side, it is often held that migration from rural into urban areas tend to deplete the agricultural labour force as it is the able-bodied young men who usually move. With

no commensurate substitute, agricultural productivity tends to fall in the source regions as low productivity is observed. However, the effect of this is more evident in rural-urban migration.

It is often said that the out-migration of the skilled and the educated from rural areas deprives those areas of the human capital so badly needed for socio-economic development. In Nigeria, this may not be so severe because no one ever completely cuts his links with his place of origin either socially or developmentally.

Migrants occasionally go 'home' to spend their holidays or leave periods; attend and celebrate major religious, social and cultural festivals and may return for local and national elections to vote and to be counted during census. Some go 'home' to register their motor vehicles and obtain births and birth certificates for their children.

On negative effects of migration on urban areas, it could be stated that there is the strain it puts on existing urban services such as water supply, transportation, health facilities and general sanitation, housing and employment opportunities.

On the positive side, migration affords the opportunity for the migrants to acquire new skills and broaden their intellectual and social horizons. Return migrants often stimulate cultural innovations and technological changes in their home communities.

Migrants also provide labour (often cheap labour) to a wide variety of economic activities in their destination including serving as house helps, daily paid casual labourers at construction sites and even as prostitutes. Also, migrants also pay taxes to the local government areas in which they live and work voluntarily or by force. Migrant farmers also pay rents to their landlords thereby contributing to the revenue of the area which are further used for development purposes. Some of them after making their fortunes return home to build houses, establish some business enterprises and contribute generally to the development of their home communities.

Perhaps the other very important effect of migration is that of mutual cultural diffusion which takes place between the migrants and their hosts. In Nigeria, most migrants (women and children) learn the language of their hosts locality and styles of dressing.