

GATE SOCIOLOGY XH C6 NOTES

B : Structural-Functionalism and Structuralism

B.2 A.R. RADCLIFFE-BROWN

Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (17 January 1881 – 24 October 1955) was an English social anthropologist who developed the theory of structural functionalism. He was educated at King Edward's School, Birmingham, and Trinity College, Cambridge (B.A., 1905; M.A., 1909).

He studied psychology under **W. H. R. Rivers** who, with A. C. Haddon, led him toward social anthropology. Under the latter's influence, he travelled to the Andaman Islands (1906–1908) and Western Australia (1910–1912, with biologist and writer E. L. Grant Watson and Australian writer Daisy Bates) to conduct fieldwork into the workings of the societies there.

His time in the Andaman Islands and Western Australia were the basis of his later books *The Andaman Islanders* (1922) and *The Social Organization of Australian Tribes* (1930).



Radcliffe-Brown: Concept of Social Structure

1. Meaning of Social Structure

According to A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, social structure refers to the **arrangement of persons in relation to one another** within society. It is an empirically observable aspect of social life.

For example, caste represents a structural feature of Indian society, while relationships among parents, children and grandparents form part of family structure.

2. Social Structure and Social Organisation

Radcliffe-Brown distinguishes between:

- **Social Structure:** Arrangement of persons and their relationships.
- **Social Organisation:** Arrangement of activities of two or more persons to produce a coordinated activity.

For example, in a cricket team, players occupy different positions and perform different activities that together make the game possible.

3. Social Structure and Institutions

Social institutions consist of established norms and behaviour patterns governing social relationships. They define how individuals are expected to behave and how they can expect others to behave.

Thus, social structure can be understood through the institutions that regulate relationships between individuals and groups.

4. Structural Continuity

Individuals within society continuously change. People are born, die, enter groups and leave them. However, the social structure continues because new individuals occupy existing social positions.

For example, members of the Lok Sabha may change, but the institutional structure of the Lok Sabha continues.

5. Structural Form

Radcliffe-Brown distinguishes **social structure** from **structural form**. Social structure is constantly changing, whereas structural form is comparatively stable.

Structural form is reflected in persistent social usages and norms. Its stability depends upon the integration of different parts of society and their performance of necessary functions.

6. Structure and Function

Different institutions perform specific functions necessary for maintaining social life. For example:

- **Family:** Rearing and socialisation of children.
- **Educational system:** Training and education.
- **Political system:** Governance.

The effective performance of these functions contributes to the stability of the social system.

- **Social Structure:** Arrangement of persons and social relationships.
- **Social Organisation:** Arrangement of activities.
- **Institutions:** Norms and behaviour patterns regulating relationships.
- **Structural Continuity:** Structure persists despite changes in membership.
- **Structural Form:** Relatively stable pattern of social usages.
- **Function:** Contribution of social institutions or parts to the maintenance of the social system.

Radcliffe-Brown viewed social structure as an **empirically observable network of social relationships**, regulated by institutions and maintained through the functions performed by its various components.

The Structural System in Western Australia

Radcliffe-Brown used the tribes of Western Australia to demonstrate how social structure is organised through **territory, clans, hordes, tribes, kinship, moieties and totemic groups**.

1. Territorial Basis

The basic foundation of Western Australian tribal society was the division of land into distinct territories.

- Each male was associated with a particular territory from birth.
- This territorial identity was passed through generations.
- Men associated with a territory formed a **clan**.
- **Clan exogamy** required women to marry outside their own clan.
- Men of a clan, together with their wives and children, formed a **horde**.
- The horde was an economically self-sufficient and politically autonomous unit.
- Elders exercised authority within the horde.
- A horde generally had a small population, usually not exceeding 50 persons.
- The horde was divided into nuclear families.
- The **clan was relatively permanent**, whereas the **horde was continually changing** because women married into and out of it.

Clan = men associated with a particular territory.

Horde = men of a clan together with their wives and children.

2. Tribe

Several clans sharing similar **customs and language** constituted a linguistic community or tribe.

These tribes were not necessarily politically united. Their major connecting mechanism was the **kinship structure**.

Kinship consisted of numerous **dyadic, person-to-person relationships**. An individual could maintain relationships with:

- Mother's clan
- Grandmother's clan
- Wife's clan
- Clans into which sisters had married

Thus, kinship created an extensive network of social relationships among different groups.

3. Moieties

Western Australian tribal society was divided into two broad divisions called **moieties**.

Each clan belonged to one of the two moieties. Society was also divided into two alternating generation divisions.

This produced four sections:

1. **Ix**
2. **Iy**
3. **Ilx**
4. **Ily**

Marriage rules required a man to marry a woman from the **opposite moiety within the same generation division**.

For example, a man belonging to **Iy** had to marry a woman belonging to **Ily**.

In the Kareira tribe, a man belonging to the **Banaka** section could marry only a woman belonging to the **Burong** section.

4. Totemic Group

The **totemic group** was another important basis of social structure.

- The totemic object was regarded as the common ancestor of clan members.
- Each clan possessed its own sacred totems, centres, myths, rites and ceremonies.
- Totemism strengthened **clan solidarity and continuity**.
- Totemic ceremonies could involve the cooperation of several clans.
- Such ceremonies created relationships based on **mutual trust and friendship**.
- Religious cooperation could also contribute to a degree of political unity.

5. Structural Description

Radcliffe-Brown's structural description goes beyond studying individual social groups such as the **family, clan and horde**. It also examines the wider network of socially established **dyadic relationships**.

His study of Australian Aboriginal society demonstrates that social structure is constituted through interconnected relationships between persons, groups and institutions.

Radcliffe-Brown focused on the **formal organisation of social life**—how social relationships and groups are structured and interconnected. His structural approach provided a systematic description of society and complemented Malinowski's more individual-centred ethnographic approach.

Radcliffe-Brown's Study of the Andaman Islanders

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown conducted extensive fieldwork among the **Andaman Islanders** and presented his findings in *The Andaman Islanders* (1922). His study is important for understanding his development of **structural-functionalism**, particularly his emphasis on social structure, social institutions, ritual and social solidarity.

1. Focus of the Study

Radcliffe-Brown studied the organisation of Andaman society by examining:

- Kinship and social relationships
- Marriage and family
- Social organisation
- Ceremonies and rituals
- Religion and beliefs
- Totemism
- Social sanctions
- Customs and traditions
- The role of rituals in maintaining social solidarity

His approach focused less on individual psychology and more on the **relationship between social institutions and the maintenance of society**.

2. Social Structure

For Radcliffe-Brown, society consists of a network of **social relationships**.

Among the Andaman Islanders, these relationships were organised through:

- Family
- Kinship
- Marriage
- Local groups
- Age relationships
- Ceremonial relationships

These relationships regulated the behaviour of individuals and helped maintain social order.

3. Kinship and Marriage

Kinship was an important component of Andaman social organisation.

Marriage established relationships not only between two individuals but also between their respective families and kin groups.

Kinship relationships involved **rights, duties, obligations and expectations**, thereby contributing to social integration.

4. Ceremonies and Rituals

One of the most important aspects of Radcliffe-Brown's study was his analysis of **ceremonial life**.

Ceremonies were not simply religious activities. They also performed important **social functions**.

They:

- Brought members of the community together.
- Expressed common sentiments.
- Strengthened social relationships.
- Reinforced social norms.
- Created a sense of collective unity.

Thus, rituals contributed to the **integration and continuity of society**.

5. Religion

Radcliffe-Brown examined religious beliefs as part of the wider social system.

He argued that religious practices should be understood in relation to their **social effects and functions**, rather than being explained only through individual psychological beliefs.

Religious ceremonies helped reinforce the collective values of the community.

6. Totemism

Totemism was another important subject in his study.

A totem could represent a relationship between a social group and a particular natural object, animal or phenomenon.

Totemic beliefs and practices helped create a sense of **group identity and solidarity**.

7. Social Sanctions

Andaman society maintained conformity through social expectations and sanctions.

Individuals were expected to follow established customs and norms. Violation of these expectations could lead to social disapproval or other forms of sanction.

Therefore, customs functioned as mechanisms of **social control**.

8. Social Solidarity

The central significance of Radcliffe-Brown's Andaman study lies in his explanation of **social solidarity**.

Common ceremonies, rituals, kinship relations and collective activities helped generate and maintain shared sentiments.

Therefore: **Rituals → Common sentiments → Social solidarity → Social integration**

9. Structural-Functional Interpretation

Radcliffe-Brown's Andaman study helped establish the foundations of his later **structural-functional approach**.

He examined how different elements of society were interconnected and how institutions contributed to the continuity and integration of the social system.

Radcliffe-Brown's study of the Andaman Islanders demonstrates that social life is organised through interconnected systems of **kinship, marriage, ritual, religion, custom and social relationships**. He emphasized that ceremonies and religious practices contribute to **social solidarity and integration**. The study became an important foundation for his later development of **structural-functionalism**, where society is understood as an interconnected system whose institutions contribute to its continuity and stability.

PYQs CONNECT

GATE 2024 XH C6 Q : A.R Radcliffe-Brown is associated with fieldwork in which of the following region(s)?

(A) Papua New Guinea

(B) The Trobriand Islands

(C) The Andaman Islands

(D) Highland Burma'

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