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## **UNIT 3 FOUNDING FATHERS-II**

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### **3.0 OBJECTIVES**

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After studying this unit you should be able to

- outline the biographical details of the early sociologists, Georg Simmel, Vilfredo Pareto, and Thorstein Veblen

- describe the socio-historical background of these early sociologists
- explain their central ideas
- discuss the impact of their ideas on contemporary sociology

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## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous unit you learnt about the major ideas of the two founding fathers of sociology, Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer. You learnt the reason why Comte developed the ideas of establishing a science of society, which he named sociology. You learnt about the seminal ideas of Herbert Spencer, who viewed society as a superorganic system. Of the founding fathers of sociology, the most crucial thinkers, such as, Karl Marx, Max Weber and Emile Durkheim will be discussed in Blocks 2, 3, 4 and 5 of ESO-13.

In this unit, we will explain to you the central ideas of three of the most important early sociologists, Georg Simmel (1858-1918), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929). There are several other sociologists whose contributions are very significant to the growth of the sociology as a scientific discipline but you will learn about them in your later studies. However, we chose these three thinkers because each of them has given a new perspective to the scientific study of society. Georg Simmel was one of the first sociologists to consider the positive aspects of conflict. Vilfredo Pareto's theory of elite and circulation of elites is still a guiding force to students of political sociology. Thorstein Veblen's books might not be read so much today but his highly critical analysis of modern culture and his use of terms to describe social phenomena in capitalist societies like "**conspicuous consumption**", "trained incapacity", "**predatory classes**" etc. are used again and again not only by sociologists but also other social scientists.

Section 3.2 of the unit explains the central ideas of Georg Simmel; 3.3 describes the views of Vilfredo Pareto, 3.4 outlines the basic ideas of Thorstein Veblen, and finally section 3.5 gives the summary of this unit.

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## 3.2 GEORG SIMMEL (1858-1918)

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Goerg Simmel (1858-1918), a German sociologist born of Jewish parentage, brought a new perspective to the understanding of society. He made an attempt to understand sociology from a different approach. He rejected the earlier existing organicist theories of Comte and Spencer about which you learnt in the previous unit. He also rejected the German historical tradition of his own country, which gave value to the historical description of unique events. Instead he developed the sociological theory, which conceived society as a web of patterned interactions. He believed that the task of sociology is to study the forms of these interactions as they take place and are repeated over time in different historical periods and cultural settings.

In the following sub-sections (3.2.0, 3.2.1, 3.2.2 and 3.2.3) we are going to describe to you the biographical sketch of Georg Simmel, the socio-historical period to which he belonged, his central ideas and the impact of his ideas on contemporary sociology.

### 3.2.1 Biographical Sketch

Georg Simmel was born on March 1, 1858, in the very heart of Berlin. He was born in a place in Berlin, which can be compared to our Connaught Place in New Delhi or Ameenabad in Lucknow. This curious birthplace is symbolically suited to a person who, according to Coser (1971: 194), throughout his life lived in intersections of many intellectual movements. He was a modern urban man with almost no roots in traditional folk culture.

Ferdinand Toennies, an eminent sociologist, wrote to his friend after reading Simmel's first book that, "the book is shrewed but it has the flavour of the metropolis" (Coser 1971: 194).

Georg Simmel's parents were Jews who later converted to Protestantism. In fact, Simmel, who was the youngest of seven children born to his parents, was baptized as a Protestant. His father died when Georg Simmel was very young. A family friend, who was the owner of a music publishing house, was appointed as his guardian. It was from his guardian that Simmel inherited a lot of wealth and thus he did not have to suffer economically throughout his life. His relations with his mother were distant since she was a very domineering person. As a result Simmel did not have a secure family environment. It was this sense of insecurity and marginality which characterised most of his writings.

In 1876 Georg Simmel joined the University of Berlin as an undergraduate student. Initially he joined history but later switched to philosophy. He received his doctorate from Berlin in 1881 for his dissertation on Kant's philosophy of nature. During this period he came in contact with such important academic figures of the day as, Mommsen, Treitschke, Sybel and Droysen, and so on.

He became a Privatdozent (an unpaid lecturer dependent on student fees) in Berlin in 1885. He lectured on such diverse and wide ranging topics as, logic, history of philosophy, ethics, social psychology, and sociology. He spoke about the ideas of Kant, Schopenhauer, Darwin and Nietzsche among many others. The range of topics that he used to cover was exceptional and he proved to be a very popular lecturer. His lectures became leading intellectual events not only for the students but for the cultural elite of Berlin.

But in spite of his immense popularity as a lecturer, Georg Simmel's academic career proved to be failure. One reason was the anti-Semitism i.e. feelings against the Jews were bad which adversely affected Simmel's career. He received shabby treatment from the academic powers in Germany in spite of receiving support and encouragement of eminent academics like Max Weber, Heinrich Rickert, Edmund Husserl and so on. He remained a Privatdozent for fifteen years. In 1901 when he was 43 years old, he was finally accepted as an Ausserordentlicher Professor, a purely honorary title

which did not give him any role in the permanent academic world of Berlin. He remained an outsider to the established academic world.

The second reason for being treated as a virtual pariah by the academic powers was due to his non-confirmity. Simmel, unlike the conventional professors, did not confine himself to the development of one discipline or to catering to the academic world alone. His originality and sparkling intellect allowed him to move effortlessly from one topic to another. He could talk in one semester about such serious topics, like Kant's epistemology, i.e. theory of knowledge, and also at the same time publish essays on such topics as sociology of smell, sociology of coquetry and fashion, and so on.

In spite of being an outsider to the academic field, he enjoyed the company of the great intellectuals of his time. His worth was recognised by all intellectuals. He was a co-founder, with Weber and Toennies, of the German Society for Sociology. He and his wife Gertrud, whom he married in 1890, lived a comfortable bourgeoisie life.

Georg Simmel's lectures fired the imagination of a variety of people, let alone academics. This was also one reason for the antagonism of the academic powers. However, Simmel finally attained his academic goal when he was given the full professorship at the University of Strasbourg in 1914, during the First World War. It was a quirk of fate that when he attained an academic position, he lost his most valued academic role of lecturer. When he came to Strasbourg all the lecture halls were converted into military hospitals. Georg Simmel died before the end of the war, on September 28, 1918, of cancer of the liver.

### 3.2.2 Socio-Historical Background

The period in which Simmel came of age in Germany were the early years of the unified German Reich. The reich was established by Bismarck after the successful war of 1870 against France. It was from this time onwards that Germany saw tremendous change. Berlin, the capital city, became a world city. The pace of industrialisation and economic development increased to a great extent. But in spite of changes in the economic field, the political field remained the same. In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Germany had become a capitalist country run by a political system that was semi-feudal.

In the intellectual field, the university professors enjoyed a place of honour. But unlike the intellectuals in liberal societies of France and England whose ideas revolutionised the way of thinking of the people of their country, in Germany nothing of this sort happened. This led to the backwardness of this country in social and political areas. The middle classes of Germany remained weak and disheartened and were too much in awe of the disciplined, ordered and specialised learning of the university professors.

As a contrast to this intellectual field, there existed, especially in larger cities like Berlin, a class of unattached intelligentsia. This intelligentsia was highly active, innovative and irreverent of established conventions, unlike their counterparts in the universities. This class constituted the journalists, playwrights, writers, bohemian artists who all lived in partially



**Fig. 3.1: Georg Simmel (1858-1918)**

overlapping circles exchanging ideas with more daring than it ever occurred in the academy i.e. the universities (Coser 1971: 207). This class, which represented the “counterculture” of Germany, was more politically alive and had several adherents of socialist ideas, materialism, social Darwinism, etc., which were looked down upon or rejected by the university professors.

Georg Simmel, who remained an outsider to the academia due to persecution practiced in both the university culture as well as in the Berlin’s counter culture. But, in both cases he remained a marginal person i.e. person participating in a group without ever becoming a member of that group. Because of his marginal status Georg Simmel was able to acquire the intellectual distance that made it possible for him to study and analyse society objectively. In other words, he did not become biased by any set of ideas or opinions or values of any intellectual group as he did not belong to any of them completely.

This was an outline of the period to which Georg Simmel belonged. Now, let us examine his central ideas.

### 3.2.3 Central Ideas

Georg Simmel, as we have already mentioned, rejected the organicist theories of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer and German historical tradition. He did not believe that society can be viewed as a thing or organism as Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer did. For him society is “an intricate web of multiple relations between individuals who are in constant interaction with one another: society is merely the name for a number of individuals, connected by interactions” (Coser 1971: 178).

Simmel introduced the term *sociation*, which he believed to be the major field of study for the students of society. *Sociation* implies the particular patterns and forms in which human beings relate to each other and interact. According to him society is nothing more than all the individuals who constitute it. But here he has also drawn attention to the fact that people in groups of different sizes – dyads, i.e., two persons, triads i.e., three people, or groups with more than three persons, interact differently from each other. A qualitative change in terms of organisation takes place with the increase in number of persons in a group.

According to Georg Simmel there cannot be a totalistic social science, which studies all aspects of social phenomenon, for even in natural sciences there is no one “total” science of all matter. Therefore, he states that science must study dimensions or aspects of phenomena instead of global wholes or totalities. In this context he believes that the task of sociology is to describe and analyse particular forms of human interaction and their crystallisation in group characteristics, such as, the state, the clan, the family, the city etc. He says that all human behaviour is behaviour of individuals but a large part of this human behaviour can be understood if we understand the social group to which the individuals belong and the kind of constraints they face in particular forms of interaction. He emphasised the study of forms of interaction and this approach gave impetus to rise of formal sociology. Let us discuss this point further.

### 3.2.3.1 Formal Sociology

Georg Simmel, like Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, believed that we can discover the underlying uniformities in social life. In other words, one can discover social laws. These uniformities for Georg Simmel exist in the forms of interaction, such as the relation of superordination i.e., domination over others and subordination i.e., being dominated by others. It is this pre-occupation with the forms of interaction which underlie all social, political, economic, religious, sexual activities that characterise Georg Simmel's sociological approach. This approach is, therefore, known as formal sociology. According to Georg Simmel one can find in distinct and sometimes even contradictory phenomena a similar interactive form. For example, the interaction pattern between the leader of a criminal gang and its members and that between the leader of a scout group and its members will be similar. If we analyse the forms of interaction at the court of Akbar, in medieval India and the forms of interaction underlying a village panchayat today, we might find similarity between the two.

It is not the unique events in history or specific individuals who matter, but it is the underlying pattern of social interaction, such as subordination and superordination, centralisation and decentralisation, and so on that counts. Georg Simmel has made it very clear that it is the form of social interaction, which is the special domain of sociological inquiry. His insistence on studying the forms of social interaction was a response to the beliefs of historians and other representatives of humanities. They believed that a science of society could not explain unique historical, irreversible events in history. Simmel showed them that such unique historical events, such as, the murder of Caesar, the accession of Henry VIII of England, the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, may be events in history but will not happen again. If we examine these events from a sociologist's point of view, we can discover the underlying uniformities in these historically unique events (Coser 1971: 179).

According to Georg Simmel there are no "pure" forms existing in any social reality. All social phenomena consist of a number of formal elements. These formal elements are like those of cooperation and conflict, subordination and superordination etc. Thus, there is no "pure" conflict or "pure" cooperation found in society. The "pure" forms are only abstractions which are not found in real society but have been created by Georg Simmel to study the real, existing social life. There is, therefore, a similarity between Georg Simmel's "forms" and Max Weber's concept of "ideal types" about which you will learn later in this course. Complementary to the concept of social form, Georg Simmel discussed the concept of **social types**.

### 3.2.3.2 Social Types

In the study of society, Georg Simmel made an attempt to understand a whole range of social types such as "the stranger", "the mediator", "the poor", and so on. His social types were complementary to his concept of **social forms**. A social type becomes a type because of his/ her relations with others who assign a certain position to this person and have certain expectations of him/ her. The characteristics of the social type are, therefore, seen as the features of social structure.

To explain his social type, Georg Simmel gives the example of “the stranger” in his book, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (1950). The stranger has been described by Simmel as a “person who comes today and stays tomorrow”. This stranger is someone who has a particular place in the society within the social group which he has entered. The social position of this stranger is determined by the fact that he or she does not belong to this group from the beginning. It is this status of the stranger which determines his or her role in the new social group and also the interaction that takes place. As a stranger, a person is simultaneously both near to one as well as distant. Not being part of the social group the stranger can look at it objectively without being biased. Thus, the stranger can be an ideal intermediary in any kind of exchange of ideas or goods. In this way, the position of the stranger is fixed in a society and defined. This is only example of Georg Simmel’s social types. He has discussed several others too, such as, “the poor”, “the adventurer”, etc. (Cosser, 1971: 183).

### 3.2.3.3 Role of Conflict in Georg Simmel’s Sociology

Georg Simmel has, in all his works stressed both the connection as well as the tensions between the individual and society. In his opinion an individual is both a product of society as well as the link in all social processes that take place in society. The relationship between an individual and the society is, therefore, dual in nature. Individual is at one and the same time within the society and outside it. He/ she exists for society as well as for herself or himself.

Social individual, as Georg Simmel points out, cannot be partly social and partly individual. In fact, social individual is shaped by a fundamental unity in which we find a synthesis of two logically opposed elements. These elements are that an individual is both a being and social link in himself as well as a product of society (Cosser 1971: 184). In Georg Simmel’s sociology we find this dialectical approach, which brings out the dynamic-interlinkages as well as conflicts that exist between social units in society.

According to Simmel empirically i.e., in real life no society can exist with absolute harmony. Conflict is an essential and complementary aspect of consensus or harmony in society. He maintains that sociation or human interactions involve contradictory elements like harmony and conflict, attraction and repulsion, love and hatred, and so on. He also made a distinction between social appearances and social realities. There are certain relationships of conflict which give the appearance of being negative to both the participants, as well as the outsiders. But, if we analyse these conflictive relationships we may find that it has latent positive aspects. For example, take the institution of blood feuds in some tribes in Africa where if a person of tribe A murders a person of tribe B, all the members, especially the kinsmen of the person of tribe B try to take revenge by murdering a person of tribe A. In this relationship which appears to be totally negative we can, on analysis, discover that it leads to the further cohesion of members in tribe A against tribe B. Thus, a negative social relationship leads to social solidarity.

### 3.2.3.4 Georg Simmel's Views on Modern Culture

According to Georg Simmel, in the pre-modern societies the relationships of subordination and superordination between master and servant, between employer and employee involved the total personalities of individuals. As a contrast, to this in capitalist modern society, there is a progressive liberation of the individual. The concept of freedom emerges and the domination of employer on employee, master on servant, becomes partial. For example, a factory worker outside the factory does not remain the subordinate of the factory owner.

In modern societies segmentation of roles and relations occurs. An individual plays multifaceted roles and in this process escapes domination of the total kind found in pre-modern societies, such as the relationship between the lord of the manor and his serf in feudal European society. Thus, individualism emerges in societies which have an elaborate division of labour and a number of intersecting social circles. But along with individual freedom in modern societies human beings get surrounded by a world of objects which put constraint on them and dominate their individual needs and desires. Thus, according to Georg Simmel, modern individuals find themselves faced by another set of problems. In modern societies, Georg Simmel predicts, "individuals will be frozen into social functions and in which the price of the objective perfection of the world will be the atrophy of the human soul" (Coser 1971: 193).

These are some of the major ideas developed by Georg Simmel. Now in the next section (3.2.3) we will describe the impact of Georg Simmel's ideas on contemporary sociology. But before going on to the next section, let us complete Activity 1.

#### Activity 1

You have read in this unit about Georg Simmel's concept of social form, which refers to the uniformity underlying the pattern of individual interactions, for example, interaction amongst the members of a panchayat, or a corporation etc. has the underlying element of subordination and superordination, conflict and harmony and so on.

Now you, as a member of your family, or workgroup, find out at least one element of uniformity underlying the individual interaction in your family or workplace.

Write a note of about one page on the form of uniformity underlying the pattern of interactions among the members of the particular group (your family or workplace). Compare it, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

### 3.2.3 Impact of Georg Simmel's Ideas on Contemporary Sociology

Georg Simmel was so preoccupied with identifying and explaining the subject matter of sociology, and the concept of sociology itself that he never wrote a systematic treatise on sociology. Besides his preoccupation



with the subject matter, he also believed that it was premature or too early to write such a treatise. He believed that to be a science sociology must have a well-defined subject matter which can be studied by scientific methods (Tiansheff 1967: 102). He made an attempt to draw the boundary of the discipline of sociology and distinguish it from other social sciences like psychology, history, social philosophy, etc.

According to Coser (1971: 215), in terms of scholarly significance Georg Simmel's sociological method and programme of study can be compared with that of Emile Durkheim. Durkheim focused his attention on the study of social structure, within which he studied larger institutional structures, religious and educational systems, and so on. Georg Simmel has focused his attention on forms of interaction which is quite similar to social structure. But in contrast to Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel engaged in mainly a "micro-sociological enterprise". In other words, he did not believe in studying larger institutions but wanted to study the "interactions among the atoms of society". Here atoms are the individuals in society. He basically studied fundamental patterns of interactions among individuals that underlie the larger social formations. In Gerog Simmel's contribution to sociology, we therefore find a distinct attempt to outline the subject matter of sociology. This subject matter is distinct from the subject matter of all other disciplines like, history, political science, economics, etc.

Georg Simmel's sociology may lack systematic foundation yet we cannot ignore his contributions. In fact, Coser has summed it up very well when he writes that whether we read him (Georg Simmel) directly or see his ideas filtered through the minds of Robert Park, Louis Wirth, Everett C. Hughes, T. Caplaw, Theodore Mills, and Robert K. Merton, he continues to stimulate the sociological imagination as powerfully as Durkheim or Max Weber (Coser 1971: 215).

In this section, you learnt about the contributions of Georg Simmel, a German sociologist who gave a new perspective to the study of society. In the next section (3.3), you will learn about another founding father of sociology, Vilfredo Pareto. It is now time to complete Check Your Progress 1.

**Check Your Progress 1**

i) Explain Georg Simmel's concept of social forms.

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ii) Fill in the blanks in the following sentences.

a) Forms found in social reality are ..... pure according to Georg Simmel.

- b) In his description of social ..... Gerog Simmel has talked about, “the stranger”, “the poor” etc.
  - c) There is no society, where ..... plays a positive role in society.
- iii) Write a short note about one aspect of modern culture described by Georg Simmel. Use about ten lines for your answer.

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### 3.3 VILFREDO PARETO (1848-1923)

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Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), a distinguished Italian sociologist was born in Paris. His approach to sociology is distinct from that of other sociologists of his time due to his insistence on its being scientific or empiric in nature. In his major sociological work, *The Treatise on General Sociology*, published in 1915 and which later appeared in English translation as *Mind and Society* in 1936, he criticised Comte and Spencer because they have not considered empirical social reality but rather given a grand secular “religion” of progress, humanity and democracy (Timasheff 1967: 161). Let us first describe the biographical sketch of Pareto and then discuss his socio-historical background.

#### 3.3.1 Biographical Sketch

Vilfredo Pareto was born in Paris on July 15, 1848. He was the son of an Italian aristocrat and his French wife. He had two sisters. He was trained as a civil engineer at the Turin Polytechnical School. He began his career as an engineer in the Italian Railways. After a few years he left state employment to become a managing director of an important group of iron mines, located in Florence.

Vilfredo Pareto, at this period of his life followed in his father’s footsteps and was a supporter of democratic, republican and pacifist ideals. These ideals he had imbued from his father. However, very soon due to certain political and personal reasons Pareto rejected these ideals and came to hate them fervently. He developed a cynical attitude towards such democratic values as humanitarianism, idea of progress etc.

Due to the inefficiencies and disorder created by the new regime after the fall of the rightist regime in 1876 in Italy, Pareto came to dislike this political system. He became an opponent of the new government and even contested for a post in the government in 1882 as an opposition candidate. But he was beaten by the government supported candidate. His failure in politics and inability to affect the state of affairs in Italy made him very bitter. The new ruling elites in Italy were in his opinion, a “band of corrupt contemptible and self-serving careerists who used the levers of government to enrich themselves...” (Coser 1971: 403). They were like the foxes whom he described in his theory of elites.

Vilfredo Pareto’s father died in 1882 leaving an inheritance of enough wealth which enabled him to leave business life and concentrate on his academic pursuits. In 1889 he married a young impoverished Russian girl, Alessandrina Bakunin and moved from Florence to a villa at Fiesole. Here he devoted himself to the study of economics. He also continued to attack the government.

His interest in pure economic theory arose due to his involvement in the controversies relating to free trade present during his time. As against the cause of protectionism, Pareto favoured free trade and took active part in public debates for this cause. In his study of economics he found that most of the economic thinking of his day was of an unscientific nature compared with the nature of the physical sciences. Thus, he devoted himself to the study of a new kind of economics based more securely on scientific methods that could provide more accurate and reliable guide to action.

By 1893 he had achieved enough recognition to be invited to the chair of economics in the University of Lausanne. He held this post till his retirement and established himself as an authority on theoretical economics. By this time Pareto had become a cynical, disillusioned loner who was at variance with all the tendencies of the age such as liberalism. He became a pathological hater of the left. All this affected his writings. Another factor which added fuel to his cynicism and lack of trust was the running away of his wife with his cook. Being an Italian citizen, he could not divorce his wife under Canon law.

It was around this time in 1898 that he inherited a considerable amount of wealth from the death of an uncle. This made him an independent person who did not depend on his academic salary alone. He started living a life of luxury and built a house for himself at Celigny, near Lausanne. With him lived his companion, Jane Regis who took care of him and his numerous Angora cats. Vilfredo Pareto retired from regular university teaching in 1907 but continued to give lectures on sociology on ad hoc basis. During the last period of his life he suffered from heart disease. Insomnia, i.e., sleeplessness made him read a lot. He lived a life of a recluse, surrounded by his cats and renowned wines, of which he used to boast a lot.

However, during the fascist regime of Mussolini, the dictator, Vilfredo Pareto again came to public life. He was made a Senator of the Kingdom of Italy, designated an Italian delegate to the Disarmament Conference at Geneva, and so on. To a certain extent Mussolini seems to have

implemented some of the programmes suggested by Vilfredo Pareto. However, Pareto saw only the beginning of Mussolini's rule. In 1923 he finally married Jane Regis by acquiring a divorce from his wife under a different law. On August 19, 1923, he died after a short illness at the age of seventy five.

### 3.3.2 Socio-Historical Background

Vilfredo Pareto, whose full name was Marquis Vilfredo Frederico Damaso Pareto, belonged to that period of European history when major changes were taking place in socio-political structure of Italian society. Initially he was influenced by the old fashioned liberal democratic views of his father and his friends but slowly with age he turned against these ideas, which represented the values and ideals of Mazzini, one of the great political leaders of Italy, who helped in the process of unification of Italy. Pareto rejected the values of humanitarianism, republicanism, and democracy of the kind found in France and Italy of his times and as Coser writes, "like a spurned lover he turned against the political system of Italy during this period, i.e. around the middle of the nineteenth century. The reason for his rejection of these ideals was that the government did not heed his advice and suggestions. In his book, *Treatise on General Sociology*, he has criticised democracy which later led Mussolini, the fascist ruler of Italy, to offer Pareto a seat in the Italian Senate. However, it goes to the credit of Pareto that he refused to accept this offer (Timasheff 1967: 161).

It was the disenchantment with the liberal democratic ideals, that perhaps led Pareto to say that the task of a social analyst is to unmask the real nature of values and theories like "equality", "progress", "liberty", etc. According to him these are vacuous or empty words which human beings use to rationalise or justify their actions. Now in the light of Vilfredo Pareto's socio-historical background let us examine some of his central ideas.

### 3.3.3 Central Ideas

Vilfredo Pareto, in order to avoid being non-scientific, stated that sociology should use a logico-experimental method. By experimental he actually meant something which could be empirically observed. This method was based solely on observation i.e., to study social reality which exists in real life, and then draw logical inference. By logical inference he meant to study several social phenomena and derive a conclusion in a logical, ordered manner. In his book, *The Treatise on General Sociology*, Vilfredo Pareto made it clear that he wanted to study social reality by applying to the social sciences the methods, which have been used in natural sciences, like physics, chemistry, astronomy etc.

Borrowing from the natural sciences, Vilfredo Pareto came to believe that society is a system in equilibrium and that any disturbance in one part of the system leads to adjustive changes in other parts of that system. Like the "molecules" in physical matter, the individuals in social system have interests, drives, and sentiments. Social system for him is a framework for analysing mutually dependent variations among a number of variables which determine human behaviour.



Fig. 3.2: Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923)

But Pareto was not interested in all kinds of variables. He wanted to study the non-rational variables. His earlier study of economics revealed to him that the rational variables of human action studied by economics do not cover the whole gamut of human behaviour. There are many kinds of human behaviours which are non-rational and **non-logical**.

### 3.3.3.1 Logical and Non-logical Action

As mentioned earlier, society for Vilfredo Pareto is a system in equilibrium. This equilibrium implies that in all societies there are certain forces which maintain the form or structure of that society. Outward forces change society and inner forces push towards restoring its equilibrium. According to Pareto, the inner forces are mainly composed of the sentiment of revulsion against any disturbance that affects the equilibrium of society. The validity of the theory of restoration of equilibrium is in the fact that a society even after undergoing a revolution or war readjusts itself and attains an equilibrium (Timasheff 1967: 162).

Vilfredo Pareto's concept of logical and **non-logical** action is related to the analysis of the inner forces in society. He has drawn a distinction between the two types of action. **Logical actions** are those "which use means appropriate to ends and logically links means with ends". These actions are both subjectively (i.e., the person who performs it) and objectively (i.e., from the point of view of the other persons) logical. Non-logical actions (which do not mean illogical or contrary to logic) are simply all actions which do not fall into the category of logical actions. Thus, non-logical action is a residual category.

The study of non-logical actions is important since it explains the inner forces, such as sentiments of actors. Vilfredo Pareto says that non-logical actions originate in the mental or psychic states, sentiments and subconscious feelings of human beings. But unlike the psychologists our task as social analyst is to treat these sentiments, etc, as data of fact without going deeper than that (Cosser 1971: 389).

### 3.3.3.2 Residues and Derivatives

It is the non-logical actions which are related to his theory of residuals and **derivatives**. **Residues** and derivatives are both manifestations of sentiments which are according to Pareto instincts or innate human tendencies. The study of these residues and derivatives can be used to unmask non-scientific theories and belief systems. By derivatives he means the changing elements or variables accounting for these theories. Residues as a contrast are the relatively permanent elements.

To explain these concepts of residues (which are basically constant elements) and derivatives (which are changing variable elements) further, let us take an example. We find in all societies a great variety of religions – polytheistic (which believe in the worship of many Gods or more than one God), monotheistic (believing in the doctrine that there is only one God), atheistic religion (which do not believe in the concept of God, such as, Jainism, Buddhism). These religions may take any form. However, in all these religious doctrines there lies a residue which remains constant everywhere and in all times. Thus, here we find that the changing forms

of religion found in many societies at various times are the derivatives while the constant common factors in all religions is the residue.

Vilfredo Pareto has described six classes of residues which have remained almost constant throughout the long span of western history. Out of these six classes of residues, the first two are important to us since they are related to Vilfredo Pareto's theory of elites and circulation of elites. These two classes of residues are i) Instinct for combination, and ii) Group persistencies (Persistence of Aggregates). Pareto's theory of residues helped him to explain various theories and belief systems. It also enabled him to explain social movements, social change and the dynamics of history (Coser 1971: 392). Let us now discuss Vilfredo Pareto's theory of elites and circulation of elites.

### 3.3.3.3 Theory of Elites and Circulation of Elites

Vilfredo Pareto firmly believed that human beings are unequal physically, as well as mentally and morally. In all social groups there are some people who are far more intelligent and capable than others. It is these people who become the elite in any social group or society as a whole. Pareto defined elite as "a class of the people who have the highest indices (or scores) in their branch of activity" (Coser 1971: 397).

He distinguished between the governing elites and the non-governing elites. Both these belong to the class of elites. However, the governing elites are those individuals who directly or indirectly play an important part in the government, while the non-governing elites comprise the rest of the elite population. In his work, Vilfredo Pareto has focused his attention more on governing elites.

In spite of defining elites as the most intelligent and capable people in a society, Vilfredo Pareto has many times failed to distinguish between elites who inherit their status due to inheritance of wealth, good connections, etc. and those who achieve their elite status on the basis of their merits. However, Pareto is clear about the fact that in cases where the majority of the elites occupy their status not due to their own achievements but due to their ascribed status, the society becomes degenerate. It is replaced by elites who have the first kind of residue, that is, instinct for combination. The new elites have vitality and imaginativeness which is lacking in the elites who derive their elite status on the basis of ascription.

Thus, according to Vilfredo Pareto it is not only the intelligence and capability but also the residue of class I that affects society. The ideal governing elite must have a mixture of residues of class I and class II kinds (class II stands for group persistence) for its proper functioning. These two residues correspond to two different types of individuals – the lions and the foxes. In this way Vilfredo Pareto's concept of circulation of elites is also related to his distinction between two types of human beings, the lions and the foxes. Pareto borrowed these concepts from Machiavelli.

The lions have the class II type of residue. They are conservative in ideas and represent social inertia i.e., the element of stability, persistence in societies. Such type of individual harbour strong feelings of loyalty to family, tribe, city, nation etc. They reveal in their behaviour class solidarity,

patriotism, and religious zeal and are not scared of taking strong action when a need occurs.

The foxes are characterised by residue of the class I, of instinct for combination. These people are involved in system making, manipulating various elements found in experience, such as in large scale financial manipulations. In other words “foxes” are responsible for the changes, experiments, innovations in society. They are not conservative and faithful or stable.

In Paretos’s opinion, the governing elite must have the mixture of lions and foxes for it to form an ideal governing class. He described the political system but the same rule follows for the economic system as well. In the ideal economic system a mixture of “speculators” who are foxes in this situation and “rentiers” who are the lions, is required. In society both lions capable of decisive and forceful action, as well as, foxes imaginative, innovative, and unscrupulous are needed.

Thus, in his theory of circulation of elites, from lions to foxes and vice-versa, Vilfredo Pareto has given a theory of social change. His theory of change is cyclical in nature. It is not linear like Marx’s theory in which the process ends with the coming of a communist society. In Pareto’s views all societies move from one state to another in a cyclical manner, with no beginning or end.

These are some of the major ideas of Vilfredo Pareto that we have described to you. Now let us examine the impact of his ideas on contemporary sociology.

### **3.3.4 Impact of Pareto’s Ideas on Contemporary Sociology**

Pareto’s sociological theory has enduring significance. He was one of the first social scientists who gave a precise definition of the idea of a social system. A social system can be analysed in terms of the interrelations and mutual dependencies between the constituent parts. His contribution to the study of elites, his theory of elites and circulation of elites is of crucial significance. It continues to inspire political scientists and sociologists even today. Even today, investigations into the functioning of the upper strata of governing, as well as, non-governing elites are carried out with reference to Vilfredo Pareto’s ideas.

Like Durkheim, Pareto too has stressed the need to consider the requirements of the social system and had rejected utilitarian and individualistic notions. But unlike Durkheim, who stressed the objective nature of social facts, he emphasised the need to consider the desires, sentiments and propensities of human behaviour. In his works we find the influence of such thinkers as, Max Weber, Durkheim, Mosca and several others.

Impact of Vilfredo Pareto’s ideas can be seen in the works of political scientists like Harold Lasswell. Lasswell was one of the earliest proponents of followers of Pareto in America. He was inspired by Vilfredo Pareto’s theories of elite formation and circulation of elites. Other social scientists like C. Wright Mills, T.B. Bottomore, Suzanne Keller, Raymond Aron, all reflected the influence of Pareto’s ideas in their work.

You have learnt about the central ideas of Vilfredo Pareto and their impact on contemporary sociology. Now let us discuss the third founding father, Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), but first complete Check Your Progress 2.

**Check Your Progress 2**

i) Distinguish between logical and non-logical action given by Vilfredo Pareto.

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ii) What are the two classes of residues mentioned in this unit? Describe.

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iii) Distinguish between the “lions” and the “foxes”, discussed by Vilfredo Pareto.

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**3.4 THORSTEIN VEBLLEN (1857-1929)**

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Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) was born in the state of Wisconsin, United States of America. He studied at John Hopkins, Yale and Cornell Universities in America. His parents were Norwegian immigrants who settled down in the mid-West just ten years before his birth. In his sociology we find the reflection of the kind of changes that were taking place in America during his time as well as, the personal experiences and trait of personality of Thorstein Veblen himself.

Thorstein Veblen’s sociological theory deals with technological evolutionism. He was influenced by the evolutionary doctrine of Herbert Spencer which (as you have already learnt in unit 2 of this course) believed in the evolution of societies. Like Spencer, Thorstein Veblen believed that there is a process



of selective adaptation of societies. Like Spencer, he believed that there is a process of selective adaptation to the environment. But unlike Hegel and Marx, he did not believe that there is a goal or end to this process of historical evolution. Besides his technological evolutionism Veblen also gave a theory of **leisure** class for which he became very famous. He presented this theory in his book, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). This was his first and the best known book. In this book he has presented his basic theoretical views on sociology. But before we begin to discuss these views let us first discuss the biographical details of Thorstein Veblen and then appreciate the socio-historical background of Veblen which shaped his ideas.

### 3.4.1 Biographical Sketch

Thorstein Veblen was born in the state of Wisconsin in U.S.A. on July 30<sup>th</sup>, 1857. His parents were Norwegian immigrants, Thomas Anderson Veblen and Karl Bunde Veblen. Thorstein Veblen was the sixth of twelve children. His parents came to America from Norway just ten years before his birth. They were of old Norwegian peasant stock. They settled in Wisconsin first and then moved to Minnesota. They had a very hard time in their old country and in the new country too, they encountered many problems regarding land and its ownership.

Veblen's parents had developed a hatred for land speculators, tricksters, shyster (tricky) lawyers, etc. who had cheated them time and again. It is this hatred of tricksters and speculators, who were present in great numbers during Thorstein Veblen's time, that is reflected in his later writings. His parents were very hard working and due to their consistent hard work they managed to move to a larger farm in Minnesota. They lived in a community which was exclusively of Norwegian stock. Therefore, the culture to which Thorstein Veblen was exposed for at least seventeen years of his early life was mainly Norwegian. The only exception was that he attended an English school.

Thorstein Veblen's father was well respected in his community. He was a man of judgment and intelligence and minded his own business, unlike many other of this community. This characteristic was inherited by Thorstein Veblen who proved to be a very precocious (prematurely developed) and intelligent child. As a child, he used to pester his elders, beat up the other boys and tease young girls as a child. He grew up to become a sarcastic person who translated his early aggression into biting witticism and skepticism. He became a misfit in his traditional community and also remained a stranger to the wider American society.

He was sent to Carleton College where he was exposed to the American English culture for the first time. Here emphasis was given to the teaching of classics, moral philosophy, and religion. The established doctrine in this academic environment was of Scottish common sense.

Veblen did not take very kindly to the ethos of the Carleton College. He remained a sceptic. Although he graduated from this college in 1880 and remained its most famous alumnus, no honour was accorded to him i.e. no plaque commemorating him on the campus exists. When he graduated from

Carleton most of the knowledge he had acquired was due to his own voracious reading. It was here that he developed a long lasting love for a fellow student, Ellen Rolfe, the niece of the president of the college, whom he married later in 1888.

Veblen left Carleton to become a teacher at a Norwegian school in Madison, Wisconsin. Here, too, the atmosphere was not suitable to him. Therefore, he left this job and went to Baltimore to John Hopkins with his brother to study philosophy. Thus, he moved from the mid-West to the East of America. But in spite of the great opportunities he felt an alien in this leisurely culture of the South, found in Baltimore. He was basically an egalitarian and a radical while southern society was based on hierarchy of traditional classes not much different from our caste system.

Here Veblen got the chance to read such authors as Kant, Mill, Hume, Rousseau, Spencer, etc. But he was not impressed by his teachers and very soon became homesick and lonely. He could not receive his scholarship here, therefore, he went to Yale. He was an agnostic (one who does not believe in God) but here he found himself among the students of divinity. So his sarcastic and sardonic attitude and distance-creating mechanism, which were a self-defense method, increased here. However, he came into contact with such teachers as W.G. Sumner, an authority in sociology, who impressed him a lot. Although Veblen criticised Sumner, as Dorfman, one of his contemporaries, pointed out, Sumner was “the only man for whom he expressed ....a deep and unqualified admiration” (Coser 1971: 279).

Thorsteion Veblen specialised in his work on Kant and the post-Kantians. He was much admired by his teachers and academic colleagues. However, in spite of his completing his doctorate i.e. the research degree of Ph.D., he was not given any academic position. No one wanted a Norwegian and especially one who did not believe in God.

Thorstein Veblen started studying economics and become interested in the volatile agrarian scene of his time around 1888. He felt that economics might provide an answer to the agrarian crisis. Therefore, he went to Cornell and registered himself there. Here he managed to impress his teachers through his papers, such as, “Some Neglected Points in the Theory of Socialism” and several others. From here he went to the University of Chicago where he stayed from 1892-1906. Here he worked with such noted scholars and thinkers like John Dewey, William I. Thomas, and so on. He wrote profusely in several journals. Most of his writings are characterised by wit and sarcasm. In Chicago University he was promoted to the post of instructor at the age of 38 and his promotion to the post of assistant professor took place after five years.

Veblen died on August 3, 1929 of heart disease. Till the end of his life he remained a lonely and sad man whose defense mechanism to face life was to be critical and sarcastic or to remain silent. He remained a stranger to the life of his Norwegian community as well as to the American culture which he criticised in his works. He was a marginal man in true sense of the word.



Fig. 3.3: Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929)

His unorthodoxy and strange ways, as well as his origins, affected his career and his work. It is sad but true that people use Thorstein Veblen's concepts like, "conspicuous consumption", "trained incapacity" (i.e. a person becomes such an expert in one field that the wider knowledge of that subject declines), quite frequently even today; but very few people read his books, the most popular of which is *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899). He was a poor teacher but a very critical author.

### 3.4.2 Socio-Historical Background

The period in which Thorstein Veblen grew up saw tremendous industrial development in America. Prior to this development America was basically an agrarian society. This period in America is, therefore, called the Gilded age (i.e. age of gold). It is, however, also known as the Age of Protest.

A class of capitalist buccaneers or adventurers emerged during this period in America. They were also known as the Robber Barons who became extremely rich at the expense of the industrial poor, who laboured in the factories doing back breaking jobs. These industrial capitalists were hard headed, determined, vulgar and nouveau rich, that is, they had acquired their wealth recently. They were as Vernon Parington, another American thinker of this period, describes, "primitive souls, ruthless, predatory, capable, single-minded men" (Coser 1971: 293).

The domination of this industrial class led to the uprising of Midwestern farmers. These farmers were the first to mobilise force to fight the predatory classes of capitalists.

Thorstein Veblen's ideas reflect some of these upheavals and conflicts that were taking place in his society. It was the class of Robber Barons who inspired him to develop the theory of the leisure class. The technological changes, which brought about such immense changes in the structure of American society and the emergence of the classes of capitalists, industrial poor, etc., appear to have shaped his theory of technological evolutionism.

The description of the socio-historical background to which Thorstein Veblen belonged is just an outline of the changes that took place in American society in his time. It has been discussed here to explain to you the context in which Thorstein Veblen presented his ideas. Let us now discuss the central ideas of Veblen.

### 3.4.3 Central Ideas

The central ideas of Thorstein Veblen, as developed in his sociological works, consist of basically his theory of technological evolutionism and his theory of leisure class. Related to his theory of the leisure class is his theory of socially induced motivation for competition. His search for latent functions of social activities outlines his functional analysis. He has also given a theory of the lag between technological and institutional development.

#### 3.4.3.1 Theory of Technological Evolutionism

As mentioned earlier, Thorstein Veblen was influenced by Herbert Spencer's ideas on social evolution. But, for him human evolution took place along

with the invention and use of new and increasingly more effective technologies. He said that social change in any society could be explained through the changes in the methods of doing things, such as methods of dealing with the material means of life. In other words, the “industrial arts” or the technologies of a society determined the nature of adaptation of human beings to their natural environment. It also determined their adjustment to the social environment (Coser 1971: 265).

According to Thorstein Veblen “man is what he does” or to explain it further human beings and their social organisations are dependent on their technological and economic spheres. Human thought in his view is a reflection of the way in which their community is organised. Social institutions embody the habits and customs of the people, their ways of acting and thinking in their struggle to survive in nature.

The process of social evolution according to Veblen reflects essentially the pattern of institutional changes. These institutional changes are themselves due to the changes in the technology of the society. In his writings Thorstein Veblen has described four main stages of evolution. However, Thorstein Veblen’s significant contribution to sociology is found in his study of the contemporary or near contemporary societies.

#### 3.4.3.2 Theory of Leisure Class

Thorstein Veblen has drawn a distinction between two opposed categories, such as between those who make goods and those who make money, between workmanship and salesmanship. In the capitalist world, he says, there is an unresolvable opposition between business and industry, ownership and technology, those who are employed in monetary employment such as the business classes, finances etc. and those who work in the industries, the industrial workers. This distinction helped Thorstein Veblen to explain the prevailing development in American society. It also helped him to attack the earlier conception of evolution.

Unlike his teacher W.G. Sumner, who influenced his work a great deal, Thorstein Veblen did not believe that the leading industrialists and financiers in America contributed much to the production system. They were no the “flowers of modern civilisation” as believed by Sumner. In fact, in Thorstein Veblen’s opinion these industrialists and men of finance were “parasites growing fat on the technological leadership and innovation of other men” (Coser 1971: 266). Veblen writes that the leisure class to which the industrialists, men of finance who are involved in **pecuniary** activities belong, lives by the labour of the industrial poor. They themselves make no industrial contribution and in this sense they have no progressive role to play in the process of evolution.

He states that the people involved in pecuniary are in their thought style or way of thinking “animistic” or “magical”. In evolutionary sense they are left-overs of an earlier period. The industrially employed people, as a contrast, have rational minds and are matter of fact. According to Thorstein Veblen this rational reasoning becomes a must for them because of the “machines” which they use. The machine technology acts as a disciplining agent to the people who use them. In Veblen’s opinion future evolution of

mankind depends on these minds which are disciplined and rational as against the “predatory life styles and magically oriented minds” of the people employed in money making.

### 3.4.3.3 Leisure Class and Conspicuous Consumption

Thorstein Veblen’s analysis of competitive behaviour in modern capitalist society is very significant. He has analysed the habits of thought and the ways in which social actors behave in modern industrial societies. He has provided a very sophisticated theory of the social sources that underlie competitive behaviour in human beings.

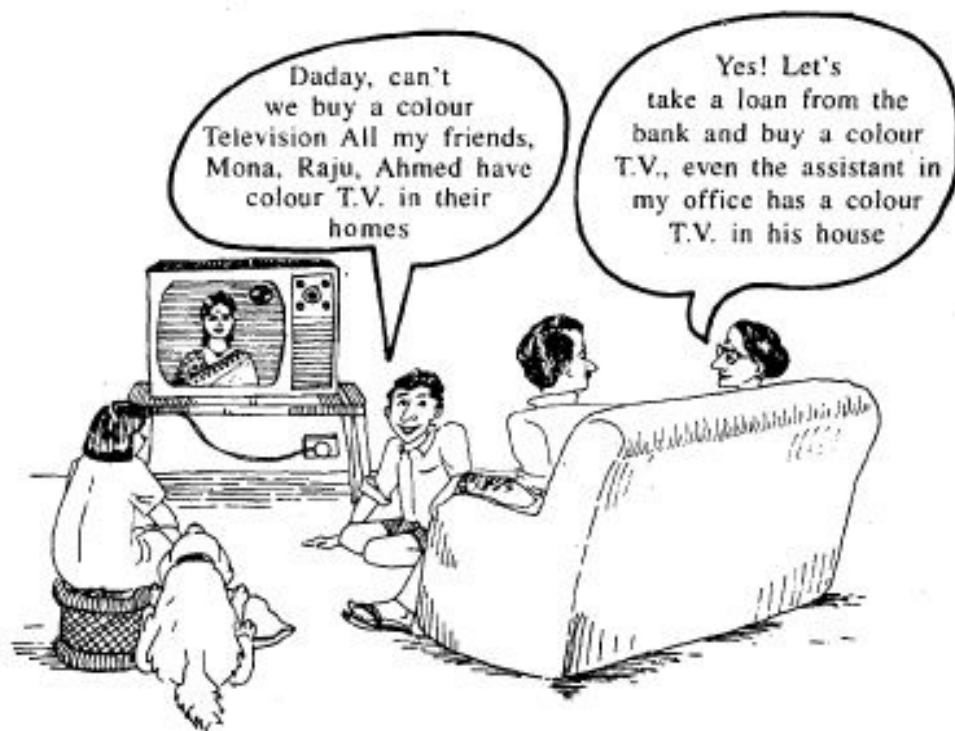
According to him, the self-esteem of people depends on the esteem accorded to them by others in the society. In a competitive materialistic culture such as American, the worth of a person is judged by the worth of others in the system. Thus, there develops a vicious circle of “one upmanship” that is, doing better than your neighbours or friends.

In his book, *The Theory of Leisure Class* Veblen (1899: 30-31) wrote, “As fast as a person makes new acquisitions and becomes accustomed to the new standard of wealth, the new standard forthwith ceases to afford appreciably greater satisfaction than the earlier standard did....the end sought by accumulation is to rank high in comparison with the rest of the community in point of pecuniary strength”.

It is in the context of this vicious circle of accumulation and competition with others that Veblen talks about the concept of conspicuous consumption. Related to conspicuous consumption is the notion of conspicuous leisure and conspicuous display of high standing or position in society. These are all a means to excel one’s neighbours and gain their esteem (See Figure 3.1: Competitive Behaviour in Modern Societies).

Conspicuous consumption is that behaviour of social actors in which they utilise goods and services not just for the sake of utilising these goods and services but for the sake of showing off to others and maintaining a distance between themselves and their neighbours. For example, in our own society we find that rich people own several cars, servants, pet dogs, etc. and flaunt their material possession to establish their higher social status. People show off their wealth through the dress they and their family members wear. The more rich a man is, the more gold and diamond jewellery will his wife wear. Wearing jewellery serves two purposes, one to make the person wearing it look nice and the other to show off to others one’s wealth and success in life.

Sometimes, conspicuous behaviour can have no utility at all except to show to others one’s high position. For example, in Chinese society the Chinese Mandarins (officials in any of nine grades or party leaders) used to sport long fingernails which was a custom for them. But a social analyst can quite easily work it out that a man who has long fingernails cannot work with his hands and must therefore occupy a high rank and prestigious place in his society.



**Figure 3.1: Competitive Behaviour in Modern Societies**

In American society the rich people go for holidays, a practice which is found in our society too. The trips to sea beaches or mountain resorts which only the rich can afford are some examples of conspicuous leisure.

As Thorstein Veblen points out, in the aristocratic age the “wasteful” life style was followed by only a small section of the population. But in modern capitalist countries the competitive display has permeated to the whole social structure. Each class copies the life style of the class above it to the extent possible. Veblen writes that it is this acquisitiveness which results in the perpetual sense of “deprivation” felt by the poor in modern societies. He says that the industrial system does not make the poor poorer in an absolute sense but it makes them relatively poor in their own eyes which is just as important. In this analysis Thorstein Veblen has come very near to describing the concept of “relative deprivation” later developed by R.K. Merton (Coser 1971: 269).

Before moving on to the next sub-section, complete Activity 2 and find out the nature of competitive behaviour in our own society.

**Activity 2**

Read the section on the competitive behaviour in modern capitalist societies given by Thorstein Veblen in this unit. Select five families in your neighbourhood and find out from their members

- i) the latest technology items, which they have bought within last five years, such as, radio, bicycle, car or T.V., refrigerator, washing machine, personal computer, mobile phone
- ii) why they have bought these items.
- iii) How many of these five families possess these items.

Now write a note of one page. Give your conclusion whether you find (or do not find) a sense of competition in these five families regarding the purchase of technology items. Keep Thorstein Veblen's description in mind. Compare your note, if possible, with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

#### 3.4.3.4 Functional Analysis

Thorstein Veblen found that there is a latent function behind conspicuous consumption, which a social analyst can discover. Why do people prefer to buy a posh Rolls Royce car when they already have Ambassador cars, why do people (who have money) buy imported goods when these goods are produced in one's own country? The real reason or function of these activities lies in the honour that possession of such articles bestow on them. Even good manners, pronunciation, high bred behaviour, etc. are conspicuous styles of living, which in turn reflect the high standing of the people who have them. This idea too is further developed by Robert K. Merton in his functionalist theory. Thorstein Veblen's ideas helped R.K. Merton to formulate his concept of latent and manifest functions.

#### 3.4.3.5 Concept of Social Change

Thorstein Veblen's concept of social change is related to the technological evolutionism that he discussed in his writings. It is about the distinction he drew between the "predatory" class of people employed in pecuniary activities and the class of industrial workers.

For him the technology available to a society determines its culture. The social institutions found in a society represent the adaptation of that society to past technologies and are, therefore, never in full accord with the present needs. He says that the class which benefits from the persistence of the old order resists further technological changes. The former class believes in, "whatever is, is right", whereas the **law of natural selection** in the process of evolution rests on the notion of, "whatever is, is wrong" (Coser 1971: 272).

Thus, according to Thorstein Veblen, social change depends on the conflict that exists between the class which has vested interests in maintaining the old system and the class which brings about the new technological changes. But unlike Karl Marx, Thorstein Veblen did not believe that history of all societies is the history of class struggles. In his view, social change occurs due to the conflict that arises between advancing technology and the existing social institutions which tend to retard this change. Therefore, there is a lag between the social institutions found in a society and the technological developments that take place in that society (Coser 1971: 273).

Given above are some of the central ideas developed by Thorstein Veblen. Let us now discuss the impact of Veblen's ideas on contemporary sociology.

### 3.4.4 Impact of Thorstein Veblen's Ideas on Contemporary Sociology

Thorstein Veblen's contribution to sociological theory lies not so much in his own sociological works as it does in the kind of influence it had on

other social scientists. His caustic and critical comments about his society and his cynical outlook both made him a good judge of social reality, not just as it appeared but what it really was. His central ideas have continued to influence the minds of contemporary sociologists.

His attack on American culture, of the kind which was present during his time but does not exist now, has provided the perspective, which still remains valid to study society. His study of the social-psychological roots of competitive life styles can explain such behaviour as found in today's life styles. For example, the fashion of wearing torn, faded jeans but with a designer label revealed to a critical analyst the fact that wearing torn faded jeans did not mean that the wearers of such jeans were poor, but it meant that these people could afford to look poor. The faded jeans with designer labels were not cheap commodities but were available sometimes only in foreign countries and therefore not accessible to ordinary citizens of developing countries.

Thorstein Veblen's contribution to the theory of "relative deprivation" and analysis of the latent function (later developed by Robert K. Merton) are very significant contributions to sociology.

**Check Your Progress 3**

i) Describe Veblen's theory of technological evolutionism. Use five lines for your answer.

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ii) Fill in the blanks:

- a) Unlike W.G. Sumner, Thorstein Veblen believed that the industrialists and the men of finance were ..... growing fat on the efforts of the industrial workers
- b) In a competitive materialistic culture the worth of a person is judged by the ..... of the others in the system.
- c) In modern capitalist countries the competitive display of wealth and high rank has permeated the whole .....

iii) What is Veblen's view on social change? Describe it using five lines.

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### 3.5 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, we have discussed the contributions of three founding fathers of sociology, Georg Simmel (1858-1918), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929).

We have first given a short description of his biography and details of the socio-historical background to which Georg Simmel belonged. Then we have presented to you some of the central ideas of Simmel, such as his formal sociology, his description of the social types, his ideas on the role of conflict in sociology, and finally his ideas about modern culture. We have also discussed the impact of his ideas on contemporary sociology.

Secondly, we have provided a short description of the biographical details of Vilfredo Pareto and the socio-historical background to which he belonged. We have discussed some of his seminal ideas, such as logical and non-logical actions, his concept of residues and derivatives, his theory of elites. We have described the role of the governing and the non-governing elites and about the Machiavellian concepts of the “Lions” and the “Foxes” borrowed by Vilfredo Pareto to explain two types of characters. Finally, we have discussed the impact of Vilfredo Pareto’s ideas on contemporary sociology.

Finally, we have described the biographical details of Thorstein Veblen and his socio-historical background. The central ideas of Thorstein Veblen have been discussed, such as his theory of technological evolutionism, theory of leisure class, leisure class and conspicuous consumption, functional analysis and his theory of social change in society. We have discussed in the end the impact of Veblen’s ideas on contemporary sociology.

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### 3.6 KEY WORDS

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**Conspicuous Consumption** It is the use of goods and services which makes the person who used them noticeable by others and raises their esteem in the eyes of others in a materialistic culture, such as wearing diamond studded shoes.

**Derivatives** A concept given by Vilfredo Pareto to explain the variable or changing aspects of a social system. For example, there are and there have been several systems of medicine in this world, such as Ayurvedic, Homoeopathic, Allopathic, etc. These various systems of medicine are in Pareto’s terms derivatives.

**Law of Natural Selection** It is a part of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution. Herbert Spencer too has talked about this law of natural selection in social

evolution. It means that in the struggle for survival in both the physical world, as well as, the social world there exists an automatic process of selection. Only those who are the fittest or best suited to their physical or social environment survive and those who are weak die.

**Leisure**

It is the time free from work when a person does what he or she wants to do, such as going for a holiday or on a trek, read novels or do painting.

**Logical Actions**

A concept given by Pareto which means that those actions which use means that are appropriate to ends and in which means and ends are logically related. For example, if it is raining a person carries an umbrella. Here means is the umbrella and the end is to protect oneself from getting wet in the rain. The means and the end are logically related.

**Non-logical**

Another concept given by Pareto to explain all other behaviours which do not fall into the category of logical action. It is these kinds of actions which are in his view subjects for sociological concern. For example, the act of burning valuable goods during the potlatch ceremony by the Indian tribes in America.

**Pecuniary**

It is any work or business related to money and money-making such as, finance, banking, profiteering etc.

**Predatory**

One who lives by plunder or on preys. For example, the tiger or lion who lives by hunting other animals. In the context of Thorstein Veblen's ideas, predatory refers to those people who do not contribute to the production system but live on the efforts of others.

**Residues**

A concept given by Pareto to explain the constant aspects of a social system. For example, there are several systems of medicine found in this world but behind all these various kinds of medicine there is a constant element of trying to cure a sick person. This element remains constant in all these kinds of medicine. This constant element is called residue by

Vilfredo Pareto and he has given six classes of residues out of which we have mentioned two in the unit. Class I residue relates to the instinct for combination, while the class II refers to the instinct for persistence.

### **Social Forms**

This is a concept given by Georg Simmel. It refers to the underlying uniformities of patterns of interaction of individuals, social actors in social, political economic fields. For example, if we analyse the form of the activities taking place in a corporation we will discover the underlying form of subordination and superordination in the structure of the organisation, besides other forms.

### **Social Types**

This concept too has been given by Georg Simmel and is related to his concept of social forms. He has described a whole range of types from “the stranger”, “the adventurer” to the “the renegade”. According to such concept as “the stranger”, a person is a stranger not because he/ she wanders from one place to another but because of the special status enjoyed by that person as one joins a social group in which he/ she is not originally a member. Thus, a stranger has a fixed social position in society and due to this position is not biased and can perform certain roles special to a stranger alone, like acting as an intermediary.

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## **3.7 FURTHER READING**

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Coser, L.A. 1971 *Masters of Sociological Thought, Ideas in Historical and Social Context*. Under the General Editorship of Robert K. Merton. Second Edition. Harcourt Brace Javonovich Inc: New York

Timasheff, Nicholas S, 1967. *Sociological Theory. Its Nature and Growth*. Third Edition, Random House: New York.

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## **3.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

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### **Check Your Progress 1**

- i) According to Georg Simmel social forms are kinds of abstracts drawn from the pattern of individual interactions. However diverse the nature

of interactions in terms of interests and purposes might be, there is an underlying form which can be identical in both. Thus, the form of interaction between the leader of a criminal gang and his gang members can be identical to the form of interaction between the leader of a scout group and the other members of his group.

- ii) a) never
- b) types
- d) conflict, never
- iii) Georg Simmel talks about modern culture of industrial societies. He says that in today's world, as compared to the traditional feudal world, human beings have increasingly become more free. The concept of individual has developed due to the existence of intersecting circles of social existence. A factory owner does not have any authority over the factory worker outside the time for factory work, thus, in modern culture human beings enjoy more freedom.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) Logical action, according to Vilfredo Pareto, are those actions which use means that are appropriate to ends and in which means are logically related to the ends. While non-logical actions are those which do not fall into the category of logical actions. It is these non-logical actions which are subjects for sociological inquiry.
- ii) The two classes of residues mentioned in the unit are Class I Instinct for combination; and Class II Group Persistence (Persistence of Aggregates).
- iii) "Lions" and the "Foxes" are types of personalities which Pareto has borrowed from Machivelli, the "Lions" belong to class II residue who are responsible, stable conservative, forceful in action. The "Foxes" belong to class I residue because they are imaginative, innovative and unscrupulous. According to Pareto, the governing elite of any society should have a mixture of these two types of people i.e., the "Lions" and the "Foxes" for its proper functioning.

### Check Your Progress 3

- i) According to Thorstein Veblen the process of social evolution involves the invention and use of new and increasingly more efficient technologies. The social institutions of a society change along with the changes in technology. The technology or "industrial arts" of a society determines the nature of adaptation of human beings to their natural and social environment.
- ii) a) Parasites
- b) Worth
- c) Social structure
- iii) In Veblen's view social change takes place in society due to conflict. The conflict arises when technology of a society becomes advanced while social institutions of that society remain backward.