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The consensus view stresses the social nature of man.

It believes that the individual becomes truly human through socialization and through membership in society. It stresses the co-operative nature of society itself. Co-operation makes possible the completion of complex and elaborate tasks. Men appreciate the company of others, their approval, and want to participate with them on common enterprise. The unity of society arises “naturally” from the relations among men. It is through interaction that people develop sets of rules and values which they come to share with one another. These shared rules and values stabilize their relationships. The unity of society emerges from commonly held beliefs and sentiments.

The exercise of social control sustains the solidarity or unity of society and maintains stability of relationships. Social control also indicates the response of the whole united group or society against the individual who violates its shared rules. The conflict model or view is also based on the belief that man is an essentially social creature. But it asserts that not all societies are equally suited to “the realisation of man’s human nature”. Societies that are divided into exploiters and exploited do not allow a sizeable number of people to realise their human capacities, to the fullest extent. They do not allow such people to derive full benefit from their membership in society.

Co-operation, by itself is not virtuous. Even within the cooperative process some people may exploit an advantageous position at the expense of the others. “Differences of ‘interest’ are just as important as agreements upon rules and values”. A given arrangement of relationships in such societies which benefits some will deprive and discomfort others. In such a society “

any action or policy intended for the benefit of the group or category will threaten the well-being of others". It is quite natural that people who occupy different positions in such society have different interests, share different sets of rules and values, undergo different experiences and develop divergent outlook of the world.

Thus, Peter Worsley remarks: " The unity of any particular society is, therefore, to be seen as an outcome of the struggle by those with an interest in the status quo to maintain their advantage against those whose interests lead them to desire change". The exercise of social control then, does not express the will of the whole community nor its moral unity. It only expresses the will of the group to keep society in status quo despite the desire of others, for change.

The group with its interests in ' status quo', that is, the dominant group may resort to the use of naked force to maintain their position. Arguments in favour of both the theories

1. (a) Consensus View: Reciprocity and Interdependence: The consensus view of society places much emphasis on the reciprocity of relationships between one part of society and another. Society consists of various institutions, organisations and groups each specialising itself in some activity. Groups exchange the ' output' of their activities with one another. Each group depends upon other groups. The relationships between them are virtually the relations of interdependence.

(b) Conflict View: Exploitation and Unilateral Relationship: The conflict view recognises the fact of exchange and interdependence but it stresses that the parties involved in exchange are unequal.

Hence there is 'exploitation' in the relationship. As Marx said the labourer does not receive the full worth of his labour. He only receives such rewards as enable him to keep himself alive and at work and the remaining things are exploited by his employer. The relationship is unilateral because it is characterised by one-sided dependence. The subordinate party in this kind of relationship is dependent upon the dominant one for his livelihood, promotion, and increases in income. But this party has no control over other things, neither on the process of production nor on exchange. 2. The consensus view is more concerned with the society as a whole.

Each society faces problems as a society. Each society for its existence has to meet certain requirements called "functional prerequisites". These ensure its survival. The society must 'produce members to fill the roles that are available within society; that is, to produce food, clothing and shelter, some kind of family system to produce and to socialize new members and so on. The conflict view looks at the ways in which the functional prerequisites are met. It wants to know how the benefits derived from a 'solution' are distributed.

It states that the same problem can be solved in many different ways and each solution has its own consequences for the people. A 'solution' which is in line with the interests of one group and satisfactory to the group's members may be thoroughly damaging to the interests of another group. The solutions arrived at are normally supportive to the interests of the ruling party. 3. From the standpoint of consensus view, the stratification system is essential for social organisation. It believes that inequalities of power and wealth are inevitable because they enhance the adaptive capacity of the

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society. Further, the system resolves the problem of “ role allocation”, of getting people to fill available social roles. The unequal distribution of rewards is essential because social roles are of differential importance and require differential level of skill.

Those who are allotted ‘ Key roles’ naturally must get higher rewards as an incentive. The supporters of conflict view do not consider the stratification system as very much inevitable. They see it as “ one of the basic sources of division and conflict in, society”. This system always favours the ruling group or the dominant group for it secures the maximum rewards out of it. The disadvantaged group hence always demands and struggles for the redistribution of rewards in their favour. The true explanation for the power of ruling group is not to be found in its contribution which it makes to the well-being of the society, but it is to be found in their monopolisation of power itself.

4. The consensus theorists try to justify their power by making an appeal to beliefs and values about what is ‘ right’, and ‘ who deserves’. These beliefs and values are shared in common with these that they dominate.

There would be no discontent and opposition in society if the power of the powerful is accepted as legitimate. Discontent occurs only when the actions of ruling groups go against the values and beliefs of those they dominate. The conflict theorists though conceded the importance of shared rules and values, have, raised the doubts whether such beliefs are ‘ really’ shared. “ The dominant beliefs in society are those of the politically dominant group: they are expressed on behalf of that group by the major institutions of

society...” Those who possess power over society also possess power over the machinery for the creation and dissemination of their ideas and values. Hence they are able to ensure that their own ideas and values are made acceptable to all the members of society. Thus the shared beliefs and values represent nothing but one more technique adopted by the ruling group to gain the implicit support to their own wishes and policies. 5.

The consensus theory states that the political institutions “ exercise power within society on the basis of the mandate from the members of society to implement the collective goals of the society”. They “ seek to realise the goals of all the members of society, acting within the broad framework of common values...” To organise activities in pursuit of these goals these institutions must command special use of some of the societies’ resources — time, labour, wealth and so on. Power is to be found at all levels of society and is possessed by groups and institutions other than the political ones.

“ Power, here, is a matter of degree each group in society has power, but some have more and some less than others...”. The conflict school does not believe in the workings of democracy, and in the distribution of power. It says that the political institutions always work for the ruling group. They make legislations to further and protect the interests of the ruling group.

Power can never flow directly from the large mass of the public; on the contrary, it is exercised by those who are in the commanding position. Even the ‘ public opinion’ is not the spontaneous voice of the people themselves; it is to be seen as a product of the mass media and their opinion forming activities. “ Power, here, is conceived much more in terms of a division

between the 'haves' and 'have nots'. Power is limited in society and it is largely monopolised by elites. The existence of political parties and political competition is all a matter of formality. It only serves to mark the political realities and grant the people illusory share in power. 6.

The consensus view admits that conflict will be there in every society.

Because no real society can meet the conditions of the ideal model, and every existing society will be imperfectly integrated. But it is misleading to say that conflict is 'endemic' in society itself. "Conflict is not rooted in the society but occurs because of 'readjustments' which the society undergoes as a result of radical technical changes.

For the conflict theorists consensus is a temporary state, but "conflict is endemic in society because of deep-rooted differences of interest among the various groups and because of the unequal distribution of resources. The presence of consensus, if it is there, only indicates that the ruling group is successful in imposing its ideas on the ruled. The stresses and strains of social life cannot be ended by this. Conflicts inherent in the social structure will rise to the surface again when time is ripe. "Conflict will re-emerge, and eventually a revolution or internal war will lead to the establishment of a new balance of power and the emergence of a new ruling group". 7. The consensus view has been charged by the conflict theorists that it is incapable of explaining social change adequately. Still, the supporters of the consensus view have been trying to handle the issues of social change comfortably.

They have argued that conflict and violence must be understood as a "response to disturbance in the society, disturbances created by the

readjustment of relationships between family and economy. These conflicts, however, could be “ handled and channelled by social control mechanism...”

The consensus theorist can deal with the long-term trends but finds it difficult to explain the processes of radical and rapid or revolutionary change. The conflict model can better handle the phenomenon of change; that is, change of both kinds; the gradual kind and of the rapid or revolutionary kind. It never assumes the consensus view that societies tend towards stability, but it begins with the idea that society is inherently changeful. It states that “ social structures are inherently unstable and will tend to change unless such tendencies can be stayed by the exercise of power”. It stresses “ the role of conflict of groups struggling for advantage; and much social change is an outcome of shifts in the relationships between such groups. This theory is well equipped to explain those fundamental changes which involve the alteration of society’s basic values”. Consensus theory is not in a position to do so. Conclusion A glance at these two theories would make it clear that they occupy two extreme positions.

As Peter Worsley has pointed out that these represent two “ visions” of society. Each view tries to justify its own assumptions and is not prepared to look into evidence which contradicts them. But if we can consider them as two visions then we can understand them as two ways of looking at social organisation. Both the perspectives are equally important in getting a clear understanding of society. Conflict theorists have not refused the existence of any consensus.

They have recognised that some amount of consensus is necessary among group’s members so that they can develop a sense of solidarity among

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themselves. Consensus is necessary for the members of a class to realise its identical interests and to develop class-consciousness which is vital for them to have a common plan of action to realise their interests. This actually heightens the solidarity within classes. Thus, Marx who championed the theory of conflict was vitally concerned with aspects of consensus also. Conflict need not necessarily be disruptive.

It can promote unity in the manner in which it contributes to class solidarity. It throws light on some open discontents and disagreements which are present now, but which have not previously been recognised and removed. Hence it may help to remove such relationships which have been a source of tension and lead to the formation of new relationships. Consensus theorists do recognise that conflicts are bound to be there even in stable societies. But they assert that the promised proletarian revolution has not occurred. It means the social conflicts that take place in a basically stable society, can be treated as mild, insignificant, and of short duration.

They may not produce change of any great importance. The theorists have stated that it is within the capacity of the developed societies to provide all their members with secure and decent lives. The Pluralist Model? These two view points or perspectives are equally powerful. It is difficult to choose between these views points, for each can provide evidence to support its own case. “ The fact that there is evidence for each view, but also evidence against it, shows that neither adequately accounts for the facts”. One can recognise that both have their uses, that for some purposes it is best to use one perspective and for other purposes to use the other perspective.

What is more important is that “ one should recognise that while both have their own virtues, neither has a monopoly of truth”. There is scope for a more comprehensive theory which will encompass both the phenomena of conflict and that of consensus. Hence this combination of conflict and consensus views would represent a third model—The Pluralist model.

It is true that in no social organisation individuals can carry on their everyday life activities without some measure of consensus. Without shared rules and values it would be impossible to concert and co-ordinate the actions of individual members. Society hence involves some moral order. “ But what is an open question is how much consensus is necessary for more complex forms of social life to operate? — Peter Worsley.

The three models — the consensus model, conflict model and the pluralist model— are quite influential and impressive, no doubt. But no single of the first two models can account for all the facts about society. Still it can be stressed that each of them does have its uses and enables us to obtain some understandings of some problems. The third model which is having the least popularity cannot also said to be the most satisfactory theory.