

Q. What is the meaning of Anomie. Discuss Robert Merton theory of Anomie in detail.

Ans. INTRODUCTION:

During the Enlightenment period various criminologists began to identify the cause behind criminal behavior. Post Enlightenment period criminologists, including Robert Merton emphasized that a person's criminal behavior is the result of sociological pathology and disorganization among its inhibitions, which exert strain on an individual to adopt unlawful means to fulfill the goal to achieve success.

1) Origin of Anomie:

Anomie is a concept which is derived from Sociologist Emile Durkheim. Anomie can be defined as a state of lawless. It generally refers to a state of normlessness and a lack of moral standards among people. According to Merton the key to understand crime is anomie, as a person involved in criminal act become normless.

## 2) BACKGROUND of Theory of Anomie:

Before Robert Merton's work, theorists largely focus on individual characteristics, or personal pathology, as a main reason of committing crime. These theories were based on classical school of thought; theories of choice in 17<sup>th</sup> century or then individual positivism; Trait theories in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Both put focus on the individual personal traits as cause of crime.

## 3) ROBERT MERTON THEORY OF ANOMIE:

Sociological positivism



Dysfunction in Social Structure



Unequal Distribution of Resources / Opportunities



Lack of means to achieve success



Strain on Individual



Adopt unlawful means



Achieve the goal of success

3.1

### Sociological Positivism:

Robert Merton's theory is based on the framework of sociological positivism, which asserts that not all the time individual traits influence a person to commit crime, rather there is social structure dysfunction which prohibits an individual to achieve the goal of success, which is legitimate cultural need.

3.2

### Social Inequality and Strain:

Robert argued that, despite achieving the goal of success is part of culture of a society, but society does not provide equal opportunities to everyone to achieve the cultural goal of success. Social inequality and lack of adequate means to achieve success legally, will push people to adopt illegal means, that is what Anomie is. Thus, the pressure to achieve societal goal will exert strain on individuals.

### 3.3 Adaptation to Strain:

According to Merton there are four ways to adapt and respond to strain.

	Endorses the cultural goals	Uses the means to achieve goals
i) Innovation	+	-
ii) Ritualism	-	+
iii) Retreatism	-	-
iv) Rebellion	-/+	-/+

#### i) Innovation:

The first way is innovation. People who use this strategy endorse the cultural goal, the goal to achieve success and enjoy wealthy lifestyle, but they do not have means to achieve it. This may include lack of education or job, thus this can become these motivation to commit crime, mainly to achieve wealth and success.

#### ii) Ritualism:

The second adaptation to strain is ritualism. Ritualists are people who have given

up on the goal of society, but still stuck to the conventional way to achieve the goal, even if the goals themselves are out of reach. For example, people who are stuck in dead-end jobs, they only pay the bills, don't have chance of promotion. They get stuck on the loop. Considering this, they give up their goal and focus on surviving the next day.

### iii) Retreatism:

These are the people, who have given up both the cultural goals and the conventional means to achieve the goals. Robert Merton has described them as Psychotics, drug addicts etc. The reason is that they simply withdraw from society.

### iv) Rebellion:

The fourth adaptation is rebellion. It includes people who reject both the cultural goals and means to achieve it. They simply replace these

goals by something different from the societal notion of success. They do not like Rehabists, give up - rather they change the goals and the means which become suitable for them. For example, they become political activists, wanting to facilitate equality, or become hippies or terrorists.

#### 4) CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE:

Robert Merton's theory can be related to contemporary situation of Pakistani society. The current dire economic situation is contributing towards surge in poverty, unemployment and inflation. Such grave social crisis is influencing people to adopt illegal means to fulfill their goal to have basic needs fulfilled, thus causing increase in street crimes in Pakistan.

According to UNDP 2023 Report 12.5 million people have slipped below the poverty line. Increase in poverty decreases the availability of means to

achieve the goals to fulfill their basic needs, which results in motivating them to indulge in unlawful means to achieve the goals.

**According to CPLC 2023 Report,** Over 1000 street crimes cases have been reported in the month of September in Karachi. These cases include theft and robbery, mobile snatching etc.

So, Merton's theory is relevant in terms of lack of means to fulfill basic needs and increase in property crimes.

## 5) **CRITICISM ON ROBERT MERTON THEORY:**

Though Merton's work was of great significance in understanding the rise in deviance despite economic growth in America in 19<sup>th</sup> century, but it has been criticized on following aspects.

- 1) The focus of Merton's theory was narrow.
- 2) Focuses on financial crimes, and members of lower socio-economic class.

3. The theory only explain reason of individual behaviors and ignores causes of those behaviours.
4. Also it only focuses on the cultural background of society.

#### 6) CONCLUSION:

Robert Merton's theory of Anomie was significant in understanding flaws in the social structure of the society. It helped to understand the reason behind deviant behaviors of a specific cultural background society.

Though, his theory was being criticised, but it helps in understanding reasons of crime causation beyond biological and psychological backgrounds, while focusing on nature of society.