

Applying functionalist perspective, discuss the interdependence of social institutions and their role in maintaining social equilibrium in society. Give examples from Pakistani society to elaborate your answer.

1) Introduction:

Structural functionalism is one of three main perspectives of sociological thought that aims to explain the dynamics of society and role of humans in it.

According to functionalist perspective, society is an amalgam of interconnected parts, all of which work together to achieve an internal harmony and equilibrium. This is evident in the institutions of Pakistani society where one institution supports the other to form a unique sense of unity that is functional and harmonious. It is as Radcliffe Brown says:

"Society constituted a separate level of reality, distinct from biological and inorganic reality."

2) Assertions of Functionalist Perspective about Societal Interdependence

It makes the following assertions about the society:-

i) a social system has a functional unity where all parts work together to achieve some degree of internal stability.

ii) all cultural and social phenomena has a positive function and all are indispensable for society's survival.

iii) Social change is an adaptive response where institutions adapt to ensure continued stability.

3) How Functionalist Theorize Interdependence of Institutions:-

To explain their theory, several theorists have made various assumptions, let's take a look:-

a) Durkheim's Mechanical vs. Organic Solidarity

Durkheim has used these concepts to explain the differences

in the forms of interdependence that exist between the people of rural societies and the people of urban modern societies. Although the pattern of communication, nature of power and level of dependency has changed, the interdependence still stays strong.

b) Merton's Manifest vs. Latent functions of religion

R. Merton uses these concepts to highlight how religion hold the society together by its manifest (obvious) and latent (hidden) functions.

c) Parson's Instrumental vs. Expressive roles of Gender System

Talcott Parsons uses these terms to explain and legitimize the dual gender roles of men and women, postulating that the role of both is indispensable for smooth functioning of the society.

4) How various institutions depend on each other and maintain social equilibrium

a) Government

According to functionalists, government maintains social equilibrium by

- planning and directing society
- managing international relations
- maintaining law and order.

It depends on other institutions like religion and economy to gain legitimacy and support.

Example:-

National Action Plan proposes the use of religious leaders to rein in extremism in Pakistan. This exemplifies the use of religion to maintain and law order by government.

b) Religion

Religion is the institution to

- promote social solidarity
- sanctify social norms
- socialize new norms

Example
The madrassah system in Pakistan educates millions of children supporting both the education system and the family structure in Pakistan. (by teaching them about the sanctity of family life and gender roles).

c) Education

The institution of education maintains social cohesion by socializing the children, providing skills and knowledge to survive in the society.

Example :-

Education supports economic growth by disbursing skills that are in demand in the industrial sector.

d) Health

Health is also instrumental for smooth functioning of the society. Parsons uses the term 'sick role' to explain how healthcare system restores order in the society.

by legitimizing illness and guiding recovery

Example :-

The role of healthcare may not be apparent directly but it plays a crucial role in ensuring community health thus promoting its smooth operation and function.

Institution	Role in Maintaining Equilibrium	Interdepends on
Government	Law and order, Managing IR, & Planning society	Religious and Educational Institutions
Religion	Sanctified norms, Socializes children, Promotes unity	Education & Family Institution
Education	Socializes, Teaches skills, Promotes unity	Economy & Family Institutions
Health	Ensures community health, sustains economic growth	Economy & Family Institutions

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Conclusion :-

The focus of functionalist perspective is to highlight the functional role of each and every component of the society. As is evident ^{from} ~~in~~ the examples of Pakistani society, several institutions work together in an interdependent fashion to maintain social equilibrium. However, this perspective fails to account for the dysfunctional aspects of the society that are evident in the frictions that exist between various institutions.