BSOC-113 : SOCIOLOGICAL THINKERS-II

Programme : BASOH/ BAFSO
Course Code: BSOC-113
Assignment Code: ASST/BSOC 113/ 2026-27
Total Marks: 100

There are three Sections in the Assignment. You have to answer all the questions.

Section I

Answer the following Descriptive Category questions in about 500 words each.

1. Discuss Parsons' action approach. 20

2. Explain the Looking Glass-self Theory with examples. 20

Section II

Answer the following Middle Category questions in about 250 words each.

3. Critically evaluate Goffman's notion of impression management. 30

4. What according to Adorno is Culture Industry, explain with examples. 30

5. What is governmentality in Focault's work? Explain. 30

Section III

Answer the following Short Category questions in about 100 words each.

6. Back stage 06

7. Social Capital 06

8. Homo Consumens 06

9. Generalized others 06

10. Mass culture 06

1. Discuss Parsons' action approach. 20

Answer

The action problem

Talcott Parsons tried to explain social life without treating human beings as either completely free individuals or passive products of external forces. His action approach asks how meaningful individual conduct becomes orderly social interaction. In The Structure of Social Action (1937), he developed a voluntaristic theory of action by bringing together insights from Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Vilfredo Pareto and Alfred Marshall. The word "voluntaristic" does not mean that people can act without limits. It means that actors make choices among possible means and ends while their choices are shaped by shared values, rules and circumstances. This places purposeful action at the centre of sociological explanation.

The unit act

Parsons identified a "unit act" as the simplest analytical element of action. It contains an actor, an end or goal, a situation and a normative orientation. The situation includes conditions which the actor cannot directly control and means which the actor can select or employ. Norms and values guide the actor in deciding which goal is worthwhile and which means are legitimate. For example, a student aims to pass an examination, uses books, class notes and study time, and faces given conditions such as the examination schedule. The student's conduct is also shaped by rules against cheating and the wider belief that education matters. The action cannot be understood simply by observing the student reading; it has a purpose, available resources and a moral setting.

Ends, means and norms

Parsons rejected an exclusively utilitarian picture in which every choice is merely a calculation of personal advantage. People often want approval, fulfilment of duty, professional recognition or moral respect rather than only material gain. A doctor who treats an injured stranger may expect payment in some situations, but professional ethics also require care according to need. Thus action is oriented toward ends, yet it is never detached from standards of right and wrong. An actor has some freedom to choose but usually chooses within culturally recognised alternatives. Parsons also distinguished the actor's subjective understanding from the sociologist's analytical reconstruction: motives must be interpreted in relation to the social context rather than simply guessed.