

## SOCIAL THEORIES

### MOVIE: SHAW SHANK REDEMPTION

I chose the movie the Shaw shank Redemption to scrutinize and explain the concepts and to apply social theories reviewed and learned throughout this class. Shawshank Redemption is a story of innocent person Andy. Andy Dufresne (in 1947) is a banker in Maine. He is wrongly accused and convicted of murdering his wife and her lover-who was a tennis instructor .He stayed in Jail and finally escaped after a lot of struggle and despite tremendous obstacles in his way. Andy Dufresne was convicted for the murder of his wife and its lover. He was sent to Shaw shank prison for life sentence after being convicted for that crime. The prison called Shawshank was well known institution for fierce and brutality. Andy met another person in jail who was also convicted for the smart crime if murdering his wife. One of the older prisoners 'Brooks' committed suicide after being released from the imprisonment since he could not adjust to the external environment due to living in jail for quite long period. This movie is about these characters along with some other individuals whose lives were institutionalized at Shawshank. Red quotes that, "These walls are funny; first you hate them then you love them. Enough time passes, you depend on them-that is institutionalization."(Shawshank Redemption,1994). We will be analyzing and applying different sociological theories on different themes in this movie and try to understand the purpose and lessons from this movie in sociological perspectives.

#### **Socialization:**

Socialization eloquently refers to the movie the shawshank redemption. The prison or outside the prison walls consists of inevitable social interaction. Characters in the movie are

charged with life sentences for the crime they convicted in community. Thus each criminal had to adapt the prison environment. The imprisonment led them acquire and create their self-identities and certain social skills to survive within new social system of prison.

Socialization is a process of learning and absorbing the characteristics of group they are living with. Some essential connection between individual and its surroundings (Society) is created by knowledge, norms and values. "Socialization is the process through which we become human". Social Darwinism is applicable in this movie completely. It states that, "Those with the ability to adapt to the changes in their environment survive, while those without such adaptability perish." (Rogers, 1972). Red's quote about the life within prison walls depicts this theory given Darwin. He said that, "These walls are funny; first you hate them then you love them. Enough time passes, you depend on them."(Shawshank Redemption, 1994).

All the prisoners that are convicted at Shawshank prison live a life by experiencing socialization during their serving period at Shaw shank. Andy quoted that, " The funny thing is on the outside I was an honest man, straight as an arrow, I had to come to prison to learn how to be crook." (Shawshank redemption,1994 ). All the prisoners who were living there had to learn the norms of the environment. They had to learn that blasphemy and past acts that were allowed outside are no longer acceptable here. Red also changed a lot in Andy's company. Hence all the prisoners started adapting the environment of prison and learned the norms that were respected and followed within the confinement of prison walls.

### **Deviance:**

Deviant individuals who commit any crime in our society are sent to imprison in our time. When our society abandons the person due committed crimes, the prisoner starts to absorb the social changes in prison. As time passes, the prison makes the person more institutionalized.

Criminals then start to absorb their identity as criminals and change their previous status by developing new identity. According to Durkheim, the possible cause of suicide of Brooks is social disintegration. Prison environment disintegrated brook from the society. That is why he felt lost and alone when coming out of the prison due to disintegrated forces of society and committed suicide. (Thorolfur Thorlindsson, SEPTEMBER 2004 ).

This film shows the impact of prison on the identity of person when he enters in the jail. Brooks when discharged from sentence was lost in outside world and could not adjust in the environment. He lost himself so incisively that he finally committed suicide due to the insanity of world. This shows that when a person enters the jail he becomes dissociated due to changes in his life routines and environment. After living in the jail for years he relearns the new identity of prisoner. So when he gets discharged than outer world seems alien to him. His restlessness to re-socialize affects his life. Brooks could not bear the upheaval of re-socialization hence committed suicide.

### **Social conflict theory:**

Sociology, discusses many types of social conflicts directly or indirectly. Many social conflicts are arisen due to social hierarchy. Some involves complex issues while others are trivial. Sociology owes a lot to Karl Marx when defining the social conflicts. He mentions that highest forms of conflicts are due to class struggles. Class struggles in an organization, bureaucracy or in a primitive society play a vital role in creating social hierarchy. Hence social group that comes as dominant group influence the society or culture a lot. (Wieviorka, 2010)

The shawshank Redemption is extensively seen as conflict between powerful upper class and powerless lower class. Both internal as well as external conflict is depicted in this movie. External conflict is shown between powerful warden and powerless inmate Andy. This struggle for

power is also prominent in our society. Power struggle has been the root cause of disasters in the form of world wars. Greedy warden in this movie kills inmates in the pursuit of power. Andy proved very fruitful for warden due to his banking skills. Andy's abilities brought power shift in the prison. Andy got the power to overthrow all the instruments.

The Shawshank Redemption is more about social class. All the dominant inmates, ill will guards, and warden were showing the elements of racism and segregation. There was certain hierarchy of lower and upper class within shawshank prison. Conflict theory resonates with shawshank redemption in many ways. Prison is viewed as institution that exhibits tensions between prisoners and guard's class. Both classes were not on accepting terms towards each other. This theory states that, the group that is more powerful and has influence will inevitably deter other less powerful group. Such small groups were being considered as threat to influential groups. Hence they will consider it paramount to crush lesser groups to protect their self-interest.

This theory is displayed in this movie because guards of prison use their power to establish harmony and order in the prison. Unexpected events or any disturbance raises violence. Guard beats the prisoner to death when he cried on first day of imprisonment. Prisoners create a community where they live. They get totally cut off from the outside world. Every prisoner in the jail plays a unique role. Different roles played by different prisoners create a culture where power struggle start to develop like normal communities. Weak is ruled by strong inmates in the prison. The group that is assertive and hold more power will eventually suppress the other group who are conceived as threat. (Coser, 1957)

This social conflict theory is vividly depicted in this movie. Andy and prison warden relationship can easily be characterized as social conflict. Warden seems to attack verbally or physically to exert its power over inmates. Warden as dominant group maintains its control over

the prisoners by discouraging them. They are treated as rejected and apartheid members of community who have no longer acceptance and dignity in the community.

### **Structural Functionalism:**

Structural functionalism, or simply functionalism, is a very broad perspective in sociology. It addresses that society is a whole whose parts are interrelated. This whole (society) is a function of norms, customs, and institutions etc. Herbert spencer presented that these parts (organs) work so that the whole body function properly. In simple terms it says that "the effort to impute, as rigorously as possible, to each feature, custom, or practice, its effect on the functioning of a supposedly stable, cohesive system." (Turner, 2002)

This theory says that every inmate is responsible for a certain role in prison. Some play more vital role as compared to others. Andy when entered was surrounded by different people in jail whose different functions smoothed the functioning of jail-an institution. Some people had prisoner's role while others were playing their role as guard and warden. Andy played multiple roles including prisoner and certain roles in library. He helped the warden to pay the taxes and save the money simultaneously. Structional Functionalism, also, could be viewed in this movie from a variety of aspects. Inmates are in prison and treated as lower class of human. They were treated like sub human due to their crimes and abandonment from society. Such criminals are treated with impunity in our society. They are believed to have lesser rights than other citizens. Prison and all the punishments are enforced to provide the example to the people who are living in society so that they develop and learn certain humanly norms and values. Law breakers were ensured that this could be their end if they dare to diminish the norms. So structural functionalist see the disintegration of classes in the prison institution as necessary and essential to maintain law and order and refrain from any possible chaos. Absence of discipline would on the other

hand raise riots due to unruly and aggressions from prisoners. If the class difference were abolished in the prison, possible chaos had created even more suffering on the behalf of warden and the team. So functionalist will see this brutal and unruly class differences in the confinement as essential and integral part of prison to keep people alive and maintain order.

### **Symbolic Interaction:**

Symbolic interaction is one of many remarkable theories in social sciences that explain the human interaction and its possible dynamics. This theory says that sometime facts are based upon symbols. They are directed by the way human interact with other human. This interaction could deliver different meanings based on the symbols while interaction. We focus on the possibility of emergence of meanings and symbols that is depicted by human interaction. (Nilgun Aksana, 2009)

Symbolic interaction is widely applicable theory in the movie given the imperfect humanistic characteristics of prisoners. All the people living in prison had different levels of power. But brutality by guards is not an attempt to influence greater level of fear for prestige and power but is important to create an environment they all the prisoners could live peacefully. Guards were not solidifying their power by fierce responses and brutality. Sometime interaction between guards and inmates transcended more power. Each of character tried to strengthen or break the connection with other person. Some of these were not interested in power and had just to do with humanity. Andy gave financial advices to guard not to solidify his power but just to get some beer and strengthen relationship with him. Andy, according to Red, did it just to feel human. So the brutality is important in the prison so for greater good to deter the crimes in society. The abused people in confinement of prison walls will become living example for many who don't.

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