

Master in Sociology

Semester-3

Unit-1

CC-10

Major schools of sociological thought

Functionalism

Functionalism is a sociological theory that originally attempted to explain social institutions as collective means to meet individual biological needs. Later it came to focus on the ways social institutions meet social needs

The central concern of functionalism is the explanation of the apparent stability and internal cohesion of societies necessary to ensure their continued existence over time. Many functionalists argue that social institutions are functionally integrated to form a stable system and that a change in one institution will precipitate a change in other institutions. Societies are seen as coherent, bounded and fundamentally relational constructs that function like organisms, with their various parts or social institutions working together to maintain and reproduce them. The various parts of society are assumed to work for the overall social equilibrium. All social and cultural phenomena are therefore seen as being functional in the sense of working together to achieve this state. These components are then primarily analysed in terms of the function they play. A function is the contribution made by a phenomenon to a larger system of which the phenomenon is a part. Functionalism addresses society as a whole in terms of the function of its constituent elements; namely norms, customs, traditions and institutions. Important sociologists associated with this approach include Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Herbert Spencer, Talcott Parsons, and Robert K. Merton. A common analogy, popularized by Herbert Spencer, presents these parts of society as "organs" that work toward the proper functioning of the "body" as a whole

Structuralism

Structuralism is a theory of humankind in which all elements of human culture, including literature, are thought to be parts of a system of signs. Structuralism was heavily influenced by linguistics, especially by the pioneering work of

Ferdinand de Saussure. Later the contributions of Levi-Strauss also contributed to the school of thought. The major propositions of Structuralism are listed below. The first is that the underlying elements of the structure remain constant, and it is the varying relationships between them that produce different languages, systems of ideas, and types of society. Secondly, there is the implication that what appears to us as solid, normal, or natural, is in fact the end result of a process of production from some form of underlying structure. Thirdly, structuralism transforms our commonsense notion of individuals: they too are seen as the product of relationships, rather than as the authors of social reality. Finally, structuralism holds the view that history is discontinuous and marked by radical changes.

Conflict theory

Conflict theory is used to understand war, wealth and poverty, the haves and the have nots, revolutions, exploitation and such conflict-related social phenomena. Conflict Theory claims that society is in a state of perpetual conflict and competition for limited resources. Marx and Weber were the major proponents of conflict theory. Conflict Theory assumes that those who have wealth perpetually try to increase their wealth at the expense and suffering of those who have not. It is a power struggle which is most often won by wealthy elite and lost by the common person of common means. Power is the ability to get what one wants even in the presence of opposition. Authority is the institutionalized legitimate power. The Bourgeoisie, or wealthy elite have the most power. Bourgeoisie exploit the Proletariats to maximize their profit. The Proletariats are the common working class, lower class, and poor members of society.

The following are three primary assumptions of conflict theory:

Competition over scarce resources is at the heart of all social relationships.

Competition rather than consensus is characteristic of human relationships.

Inequalities in power and reward are built into all social structures. Individuals and groups that benefit from any particular structure strive to see it maintained.

Change occurs as a result of conflict between competing interests rather than through adaptation. Change is often abrupt and revolutionary rather than evolutionary.

Interactionism

Interactionism is a theoretical perspective that derives social processes (such as

conflict, cooperation, identity formation) from human interaction. It is the study of how individuals act within society. Interactionist theory has grown in the latter half of the twentieth century and has become one of the dominant sociological perspectives in the world today. Interactionism was first linked to the work of [James Parker](#). [George Herbert Mead](#), as an advocate of pragmatism and the subjectivity of social reality is considered a leader in the development of interactionism. [Herbert Blumer](#) expanded on Mead's work and coined the term "symbolic interactionism".

Symbolic Interactionism is a theoretical approach to understand the relationship between humans and society. The basic notion of symbolic interactionism is that human action and interaction are understandable only through the exchange of meaningful communication or symbols. In this approach, humans are portrayed as acting as opposed to being acted upon. The main principles of symbolic interactionism are:

1. human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that things have for them
2. these meanings arise from social interaction
3. social action results from a fitting together of individual lines of action

It focuses on the concrete details of what goes on among individuals in everyday life. Interactionists study how we use and interpret symbols not only to communicate with each other, but also to create and maintain impressions of ourselves, to create a sense of self, and to create and sustain what we experience as the reality of a particular social situation. From this perspective, social life consists largely of a complex fabric woven of countless interactions through which life takes on shape and meaning.

Email-artirani21nov@gmail.com