

## Quadrant II – Transcript and Related Materials

**Programme: Bachelor of Arts (First Year)**

**Subject: Sociology**

**Paper Code: SOC 101**

**Paper Title: Introduction to Sociology -I**

**Unit: II Approaches to Sociology**

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### Notes

Look at the picture - If you see this picture, some would say I can see a young girl – others would say I can see an elderly lady – Both are right from their own viewpoint or perspective.

Likewise different Sociologists view society in different ways. They have their own way of understanding society and its dynamics.

Some see the social world basically as a stable and well integrated. Other sociologists see society in terms of conflict or tension between competing groups. To still other sociologists, they view society in the everyday forms of interaction, including symbols and other types of nonverbal communication.

Meaning - Sociological perspective is a way of looking at the society and studying the patterns of behaviour. In other words, it is the point of view that examines how the structure of the society is created, maintained and changed,

These three above mentioned views tells us that the same society can be looked or studied from different theoretical perspectives. The most significant of these perspectives are functionalist, conflict, and interactionist.

#### Functionalist Perspective

Proponents – It is prominent in the work of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer two of the Founding Founders of the discipline. It was developed by Emile Durkheim and refined by Talcott Parsons (1902 – 1979), a Harvard university sociologist.

View of the Society – Functionalists view society like a living organism in which each part of the organism contributes to its survival. You take example of our human body. It has a structure. It consists of number of interrelated parts such as head, eyes, nose, heart, legs,

nervous system and so on. Each of these parts has a function to play in the life of the total organism. So also society has a structure, it also consists of interrelated parts such as family, religion, education, economy, judiciary etc. Each of this institution also has a function that contributes to the overall stability of the social system.

Mechanism followed - People are socialised to agree on basic values to keep society as stable and well integrated system. The underlying principle is to maintain a balance. They look for value consensus. They maintain social order through cooperation and consensus.

Functionalists view social change as disruptive unless it is slow and gradual, since changes in one part of the system normally brings about changes everywhere in the system. Their focus is on the stability of the society and hence their outlook is seen as more conservative. Example – Public punishments reinforce the social order.

### Conflict Perspective

The conflict perspective derives its strength and support from the work of Karl Marx (the German born philosopher, economist and sociologist) who saw the struggle between the social classes as the basic force for change. Modern conflict theory is associated with C Wright Mills (1956) and Lewis Coser (1956).

View of the Society - The Conflict perspective emphasises that conflict and change are a constant feature of all human societies. They see the social world in continual struggle. It does not necessarily imply outright violence. It includes tension, hostility, severe competition and disagreement over goals and values. They see conflict as a part of everyday life in all societies. They are concerned with conflicts between lower and upper castes, men and women, parents and children, cities and villages, rich and poor, whites and blacks, Asians and Europeans etc.

Mechanism Followed - They see how society's different institutions like family, religion, education, economy etc helps to maintain the privileges of some groups and keep others in a subservient position. The conflict theorists maintain social order through power, authority, force and coercion.

Another important contribution of conflict theory is that it has encouraged to view society through the eyes of those people who rarely influence decision-making. Example blacks in America and South Africa, untouchables in India, minorities, women in family, gender equality etc. Hence, the conflict perspective is viewed as more radical and activist.

Interactionist Perspective - While the functionalist and conflict perspectives were initiated in Europe, interactionist perspective developed first in the United States. George Herbert Mead (1863 – 1931) is widely regarded as the founder of the interactionist perspective. Other proponents include C H Cooley and Erving Goffman.

View of the Society - Interactionism focusses on the process of interaction in particular contexts. Interactionism is concerned with interaction which means action between individuals. This perspectives seeks to understand this process. It begins from the assumption that action is meaningful to those involved. It therefore follows that an understanding of action requires an interpretation of the meanings which people give to their activities. Example – picture a man in a room and he lighting a candle. This action is open to number of interpretations. – requires light because of power cut – for some ritual – celebrating a

birthday so on – in each case a different meaning is attached to the act of lighting a candle. So to understand the act it is therefore necessary to discover the meaning by the people. Meanings are not fixed entities but depend on the part of the context of the interaction.

Since all action is meaningful, it can only be understood by discovering the meanings which people assign to their activities. Meanings both direct action and derive from action. The reality of our existence is not fixed but socially constructed

Mechanism followed - The Interactionist theorists maintain social order by shared understanding of everyday behaviour. They focus on how people view and explain shared meanings underlying everyday social life and social routines. These meanings are conveyed through symbols – words, gestures, signs and the like – which are learned and shared within any interacting group.

The interactionist view of social change is reflected in people's positions and their communications with others. It provides interesting insights into the basic mechanics of everyday life. People respect laws or disobey them based on their past experience.

Conclusion - The functionalist and conflict perspective analyse society at the macro-level. They attempt to explain society through the examination of wide patterns of behaviour. Whereas interactionist perspective analyse society at the micro level – as a way of understanding the larger macro phenomena.

These three perspective namely functionalist, conflict and interactionist represent three different ways of understanding the same reality, which is social phenomenon. We cannot say that one is better than the other two or even that they are always incompatible. Each of these perspectives focusses on a different aspect of reality. But taken together they provide a broader and deeper understanding of the society.