

Essay on functionalism

[Family](#), [Parents](#)



Even in our quickly advancing, modern world where it appears that men and women are on an ever-evening playing field, there are some parts of the world where women are still hidden in complete obscurity. Sometimes women are so undervalued in a family they are killed once they are born, or murdered because the dowry that came with them on their wedding night was not large enough. India is a place where to be a woman and to be afraid are sometimes synonymous. Forced into labor before their bones are even fully formed, and never allowed to make a real decision for themselves, human services workers like Janani are attempting to change the tide for women in India and, through the lens of structural functionalism, bring about change to the impoverished and sometimes barbaric country.

The documentary, “ Woman by Woman: New Hope for the Villages of India,” by Dorothy Fadiman shows the struggles, triumphs, and emerging hope for women and society in this part of the world. India houses one-sixth of the world’s population, and the northern areas are still some of the most impoverished. Women are the most disadvantaged, often forced into marriage and left without an education; they are expected to care for the house and bear many children in hopes of giving their families sons.

Unfortunately, the documentary explains that infanticide, gendercide, and bride murders are still too commonplace, even in India, because women are so undervalued .

Human services workers, such as the outreach program provided by Janani, are trying to correct what the documentary showed. They are inserting themselves into poorer villages, and are attempting to facilitate change by involving the women more in clinical processes that involve deciding on birth

control, abortion, and other aspects of family planning. The team at Janani does everything they can to train the women, and make them comfortable with discussing topics that are thought to be taboo for a woman to discuss. They do this so that women in the community will feel more comfortable coming forward and expressing their needs, because it was found early on in Janani's studies that females did not feel comfortable expressing their concerns or desires to male doctors. Though many members of the community thought ill of this progressive approach to family practice, other members, especially women, saw it as a turning point that represented hope, and a better future. From a structural functionalist perspective, Janani's efforts are helping to restore balance between the genders, as well as give purpose to women who are commonly walked on by men and their in-laws.

It is common in India for a woman to be thought of as nothing more than unpaid labor, another resource to be used and traded, as a slave or a sack of flour. In-laws, in particular mother in laws, see their son's wives as unpaid labor that can help around the house so that they may rest more, or simply delegate chores and feel powerful. While this is all too common in India, one mother-in-law in the documentary, Rajkumari, states that she saw her daughter-in-law as no different than one of her sons, and wanted her to have fulfilling work outside of the home. She also stated that for her family her daughter-in-law, Rekha, is the light for the whole family . It is very unorthodox for a mother-in-law to encourage a daughter-in-law to leave the house and lead a fulfilling life, let alone compare the woman to one of her sons. Rajkumari, however, is certain that more in-laws should take on

housework and less selfish so that the community may benefit more from the talents these young women have to offer. Speaking from a structurally functionalist perspective, Rajkumari sees that if young women right now or women of the future are to thrive, they will need fulfillment outside their homes, and she understands that Janani's purpose is progression of the gender, but also of India.

Another example of structural functionalism can be found in Janani's challenge of gender norms based on the consensus that women should not work alongside their husbands. In India, women's labor is at home. The very impoverished work in agriculture while those with any wealth at all are bound to a husband, forced to hide their faces when they go out in public. They are undereducated and nothing short of slaves. However, Janani challenged this paradigm with its family planning services by training women and putting them in positions of authority and power. Few Indians had seen a woman in a seat that commanded respect, but Janani granted this example and one Rural Medical Practitioner, Pawan, noticed the other women in the village had immediate respect for his wife after she began practicing alongside him. Pawan, and his wife Sarita were challenging the stereotypical views on how an Indian male and female should live in a marital union before Sarita began practicing for Janani, but this further pushed the boundaries of what society had distinguished as a norm. The two genders, as well as the two spouses, working alongside one another in the same position helps to promote balance in a country where "normal" means women are considered worthless.

Fadiman's documentary also shows structural functionalism at work as a

couple use their opportunities at Janani to influence their daughter, Kiran. Normally, women are married very young in India, and are often forced to forego their education in lieu of child-rearing and household chores. Some do so in order to ensure financial security for their family, if only for a short while. Kiran, however, sees both of her parents working at the clinic. She understands they are doctors who are changing people's lives as well as the community at large. At seventeen, she still lives at home while most girls her age are already married or are preparing to marry. She remains ambitious about studying, finishing college, and becoming a doctor, having made the connection that education can keep you from marrying young and effectively becoming a house slave. Structural functionalism has allowed Kiran to see what society's idea of normal is for her, but her parents' life has challenged that. Therefore, Kiran has been able to adopt her own ideals, and is attempting to help create a balance in the community instead of accepting the ideals forced on her gender.

In sum, the parties mentioned in this paper are all part of a societal evolution, consequently making each of them structural functionalists. While it is common for in-laws to prefer new women in the family to keep up with all the chores, much as a slave would, some mother in laws are insisting their sons' new brides become involved in the community, helping to push India toward a brighter and more balanced future. Many practitioners are now practicing alongside their wives at Janani, challenging the archaic view that women should be left home with the housework and fields to tend to. This act is also helping revolutionize, not only how the people of India see women, but also how the balance of power between genders will look in the

future. Some of these couples working alongside one another are using their example to show that the next generation they do not need to marry at fourteen and begin bearing children. They should stay in school and be a part of the change that is coming into India. Each aspect of these acts forces a balance to an imbalanced nation, gives the individual purpose, and reexamines cultural norms that have not been altered in centuries. Structural functionalism is about the restoration of balance, and the evolution or progress of societal structure. India, as we can see, is in the middle of a revolutionary structurally functionalist breakthrough thanks to the brave women who are willing to step forward and say they are no longer willing to stand in the shadows of an India that should have been forgotten long ago.

References

WOMAN by WOMAN: New Hope for the Villages of India. Dir. Dorothy Fadiman. 2009. Documentary.