

Then to which  
familiarity has made  
most



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Then what is the sociological point of view? The student of sociology must learn the sociological perspective or point of view for “ sociology is first and foremost a way of looking at the social world”. The sociologist must see into and through man’s daily round of activities” An untrained eye sees simply the routine that underlies daily social interactions. “ Every one has become so accustomed to the fact that he kisses his children, greets warmly friends and relatives, wave’s hands to his neighbours, shakes hands when he meets a stranger, etc.

, and these actions are virtually invisible”. The primary task of a sociologist is to teach himself to notice these social relationships with fresh eyes, with as much wonder as if they were exotic rites performed by some far-off jungle tribe. “ The sociologist specialises in seeing those things to which familiarity has made most of us blind.” A sociologist learns that a member of social transactions like these make up the fabric of human social life. Now he must ask himself questions-why do people do all these? Say, for example, why a male child is still preferred to a female child in the Indian family? Why wife prostrates before the husband and not vice versa? Why the kissing act of adults in public is still looked with disapproval amongst the Indians and not so amongst their Western counterpart? Why people go to the temples in bigger number on the occasion of festival, etc. No sociological training is, of course, required to answer these questions. Ordinarily people may give an answer—it is the ‘ right’ thing to do.

But a sociologist goes beyond these and tries to find an answer through traditions or morality. He asks questions why some practices become traditional? How people know that certain practices are right? Who or what

conferred this “rightfulness” upon them? He may point out that an action which is, one society’s sacred custom, may be another’s immoral vice. In other words, sociologist will look beyond the generally accepted explanations for social behaviour and seek more scientific answers. This is what Peter Berger calls the “debunking” function of sociology. When sociologists “debunk” or remove traditional explanations many of their explanations or answers become public controversy because people may be upset with their explanations. Example: Why do people go to temples or churches? The ordinary explanation is people go to temples due to their utmost religiosity. But a sociologist might say, in addition to the above-mentioned ‘manifest’ function, the church-going behaviour may serve some “latent” functions such as—to enhance one’s social standing, to exhibit one’s new clothes, to parade one’s jewellery, to demonstrate one’s religiosity, and so on. Sociologists must be ready to face the charge that is made against them as “unrespectable”.

The sociological perspective is quite different from the ordinary way of looking at things and events as it is stated above. The following example of the class-room will further clarify this point. Example of class-room: During their very first class the college students will be having their own assumptions relating to professor’s looks, dress, knowledge, language, expression, style of performance, class command etc. Student’s evaluation of the class is based on personal reactions to a particular professor. But a sociologist focuses on social relationships rather than on individual behaviour. He observes power relations, rules of conduct, and class characteristics. A sociologist observes unequal distribution of power in the

class-room, the teacher having the power to talk, discipline, punish and to determine grades. He observes that the teacher has the institutional support at his command in disciplining the students, denying library and laboratory facility, etc.

Still, teacher is not having absolute power. Students may also use their power as a sharp reaction and may refuse to keep quiet, boycott classes, stage strikes, etc. Further, the sociologist observes that there are certain unspoken rules and expectations that every one more or less follows. It is known that combing in class-room is inappropriate.

The sociologist observes that the class as a unit has its own characteristics which are not the properties of any individual in the class. The class meets in a room, has a size, has a specific average age of students, has a specific number of men and women in it, has lower-upper-class people, etc. Each of these features belongs to the class as a whole, and individual in that class. These observations of a class of students are sociological observations. They concern patterns and regularities that will occur regardless of the individuals who occupy that class-room. A doctor or a photographer, or an artist, or an educationalist, or a social reformer, or an administrator, or a parent, etc., looks at the classroom from various other points of view. " The sociological perspective trains us to pay attention to those details that are regular and patterned, details that are not unique to a particular situation or to particular people in those situations " -Donald Light Jr and Suzanne Keller.

As Kingsley Davis has pointed out that " our interest lies in societies as systems (that is, as going concerns) and in social relationship regardless of

their type". This does not mean that sociology is purely encyclopedic in its approach summing up everything that the other social sciences include, but rather " a special discipline devoted to the way in which societies achieve their unity and continuity and the way in which they change ". This sort of analysis is usually called sociology.