

Major theories in sociology

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Science is non-ethical in the sense that it deals with the study of events as they are and not what they should be. A scientist has no technique by which he can determine what the ultimate values of society should be.

The knowledge attained by him is instrumental. Some people think of science as a particular knowledge and some think of it as particular method to investigate natural phenomenon. The results of these methods are available for everyone to use and to check so they are authentic and valuable.

Sociology studies society and human behaviour, it uses systematic methods of investigation to build theory about social structure and its activity.

Common sense is based on a person's own experience and the manner he understands it. Common sense is not based on any sort of method of investigation; it can be hearsay, based on lies, imaginary and factionary. It is more prone to change and has no evidentiary value. It can never be used as a source of reference as it lacks in validity and authenticity.

The main difference between science and sociology is that sociology is a branch of science and derives all its methods of investigation from it, whereas common sense is in absolute contrast with these two. Common sense has no roots hence has no means of authenticating it.

August Comte believed that the facts in society can be used by physical scientists for the study of their subject with the objective that the society can be understood in a scientific manner. This is called 'Positivism'. He

explained different methods used by sociologists like data collection and comparison of data.

As opposed to positivism interpretivism believed that humans are not helpless like puppets who respond to certain changes in a prescribed manner. Human response can vary in different kinds of situations as they are active and more prone to changes. They can bring changes to their surroundings as they are not static and lifeless.

Qualitative methods are used to understand individual differences keeping in view the likes and dislikes, beliefs, mental and intellectual level of the subject. Quantitative research uses many methods like data collection, survey, interview etc.

Positivism studies different institutions of a society whereas interpretivism analyses the role of individuals in society. Positivism is macro and interpretivism is micro sociology.

Positivism defines sociology as science which is based on data and experiments, interpretivism does not agree with this and argues that sociology is not a science that behaviour of individuals cannot be explained properly through data or experiments.

A perspective is a way of looking at things, since this is the subject of sociology so here it can be said that the way sociologists look at society. There are many perspectives to sociology but this assignment will look at feminism, functionalism and Marxism.

Feminists believe in woman's rights, they think that there is inequality of power, cultural values and believes which alienate and oppress women. It has three main types Radical, Liberal and Marxist Feminism.

Liberal feminism believes that society can be changed through peaceful methods whereas radical feminism do not believe in equality. It advocates female dominance there by absolutely nullifying the mother role and male dominance. They use aggressive methods to bring on such supremacy. And argue men and women should lead separate lives.

Marxist Feminism believes that women have no means of income so they suffer in society.

The first feminist was Mary Wollstonecraft, was born in London in 1759. She wrote a book "Vindication of Rights of Women" which was published in 1792. In those times women were not educated as it was believed that it would lead them to infertility and mental issues. She advocated that men and women are equal. It is due to lack of education that women are suppressed. American, Sojourner Truth was born in 1797, delivered a speech in Woman's Right Convention in 1852. She also won a place in Parliament at that time. Benazir Bhutto is Islamic feminist from Pakistan. She was elected Prime Minister two times but she was murdered due to her views

Suffragettes means a right to vote. They advocated actions like smashing windows, wrapping themselves in chains, throwing acid etc. This movement in UK is called Suffragists. They believed in right to vote but in a peaceful way. Women won right to vote in 1928 and equal rights in 1960. The "pill"

was introduced which meant that women had right to plan their lives and number of children they wanted.

In 1967 The Abortion Act was introduced as women were using variety of methods like throwing themselves from stairs. Due to illegal abortions many women lost their lives. One more reason was that in 1960 the population of men decreased due to was so more and more women were inducted in work force. Burn the Bra movement gave this struggle a new dimension. Equal Pay Act was introduced in 1970 as women worked more than men but were paid less.

England is a society where feminism took birth but in itself there has been only one female Prime Minister. All top jobs are with men. Feminism enabled women to write about women, raised and highlighted the topic of gender inequalities with in society.

Feminism gives women the right to choose for themselves in all areas of life including reproduction, employment, sex etc. This movement gave women the quality at work due to which life of children and families improved.

As opposed to functionalism, as it talks about only specific section of society that is woman and totally ignores other components of social system. It only lay stress on the right of white women and ignores issues relating to minority women as of race, ethnicity, disability etc. It brainwashes women to the point of thinking that all men are bad. It exerts more pressure on women economically. The method used by radical feminists can cause death as well.

The similarity between Marxism and Feminism is that these both are the theories of conflict, in which one is opposed to class segregation whereas the other gender conflict. But both take stand for oppressed and ignored sections of society without whom social system would lead to chaos and destabilization.

Functionalism is a theory that explains social institutions as combine method of fulfilling basic needs of individuals. It is linked with Emile Durkheim in 1900, then in 1950 to Talcott Parsons. It is also known as consensus theory that is the theory of agreement.

Many Functionalist believe that these institutions are linked with each other in such a manner that they together form a system. If one institution is not working properly it will affect the rest of systems as well. For example police, schools, hospitals all have their own individual functions they all work together to promote social stability. They look at society as a whole not as Marxist or Feminist. Because rather than having a conflict, all institutions work together in harmony and agreement. The opposite of functionalism is Marxism and feminism which are conflict theories. Purpose of family is sexual satisfaction, reproduction, for social bonding, security, economic and educational benefits etc. It is positive in nature and compares society to human body. Takes society as a whole, talks of only positives and no negatives, talks about only most ideal setup. Takes society as a system, when it works it works well.

Functionalism is criticised on variety of points. It does not consider any ground for social change or conflict. Functionalism describes effects but not

the causes of these effects. It is far from reality and sketches an imaginary society in which everyone has the same benefits. The society is static and ignores the mental differences between the groups. Over emphasises the positives and ignores prostitution, rape, racism, drug abuse etc. It compares society to human body for example if heart does not functions the whole system of body stops. In same way if one section of society is not working properly it will handicap the rest of systems as well thereby resulting in breaks down and collapse of the whole system.

Functionalism is bit close to 'New Right' as it takes family as a structure, with full control of the individual. It promotes equality between social classes but also promotes tension.

Marxism is named after Carl Marx who was born in Germany in 1818.

Marxism refers to the study of class. It is based on idea of getting as much money as possible. Carl Marx define two classes 'Bourgeoisie' and the 'Proletariat' in his theory of conflict. These govern the social relationship in capitalism. Bourgeoisie are the one who own capital, they purchase and exploit labour by employing it. Being rich or wealthy does not make one capitalist like managers in state sectors or landlords. What is important is the active role of using this wealth to make it self-expansive through employment and exploitation.

When he made this theory it was Victorian Europe. The bourgeoisie originated by development of trades, industries. This class kept growing by employing more and more labour. It were industrialist capitalist who

employed more labour to control capital which changed the society altogether.

The proletariat were the owners of labour power. They had no alternate means of income to earn livelihood for their families so they looked for work from capitalist employer.

Their wages were kept very low in order to make profit and the worker worked more and more. The relation between these two classes is only economic, as class is a social relation than a rank in society. Capitalist class cannot exist without proletariat and vice versa. At the time of industrial revolution it was very hard to work in industry. It was unsafe, low wages, bad treatment and exploitation was everywhere. Living conditions were very bad. Houses were joined together back to back, without access to fresh air. People were provided accommodation by the owner of factory. Opposite to this was the life of Bourgeoisie.

According to Marx this class conflict leads to protests, unions, strikes. The proletariat organise themselves which is followed by revolution. A new type of society takes birth which is communist in nature. Communism means working together and redistribution of resources. In a shared ownership all share the profits equally.

It would just become a super structure working together. Then there would not be any poor or rich class. The strengths of Marxism is its belief in equality, it does not advocate a need or desire for power, poverty is reduced by it. It gives people more rights and alienates middle class from its system.

The biggest negative of Marxism is that it has been badly misused. As countries which have employed it so far like China, USSR, Cuba, North Korea, Japan, Laos do not offer freedom of speech and do not believe in religion. It causes tension between the classes. It brain washes society. It totally ignores the role of women but later on classes of Marxism developed.

It idealises a view of happy family. Marxists say that family serves the needs of ruling class, whereas feminists say that it meets the needs of men only. Marxism is a theory of conflict, in which one section of society is at odds with the other whereas the theory of functionalism is absolutely different as it presents an altogether harmonious view.