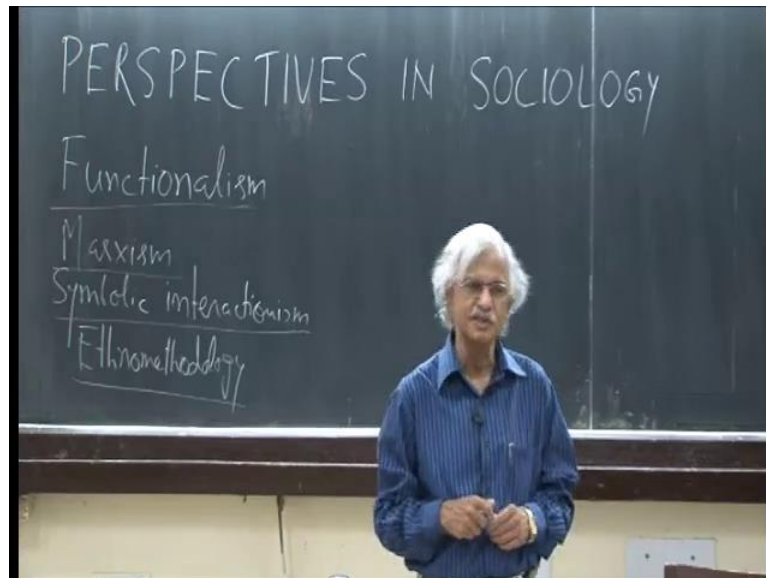


**Introductory Sociology**  
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**Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur**

**Lecture - 36**  
**Perspectives in Sociology – I**

So, friends today we are discussing sociological perspectives. We are not discussing any particular substantive issue, there is a thinking layman thinking that sociology is about society, human behavior. And you know that sociologists study things like family, political institutions, religion, social stratification. But the most crucial aspect of studying sociology is how do they study these things? And when we look at what is unique to sociology - religion, family, politics. These are also the things which are studied by everyone all social scientists, anthropologist, historian, psychologist. So, today I will focus more on what is so unique about sociology or what are the perspectives which sociologists used in studying various parts of society; society as a whole, different institution of society, social change and social processes.

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The perspectives are functionalism, Marxism, symbolic interactionism and ethnomethodology. We are not the only perspective, if you read recent advancements in sociological research. You can find many other and newer perspectives have been added in the kit of sociologists' feminism, postmodernism.

There is another variety of symbolic interactionism; it is called structural symbolic interactionism. You also come across terms like structuralism or attempts to combine 2 or more perspectives like one sociologist Giddens tried to combine methodological individualism and structuralism. And this resulted in a perspective called structuration but my focus because this is a course in elementary sociology; this is an introductory sociology course. So, I will not be very abstract. And just introduce 4 different ways of looking at social reality which are most common sociological research functionalism and Marxism and symbolic interactionism and lastly ethnomethodology. Now, functionalism treats society as the unit of analysis whole society.

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Functionalism unit of analysis is society. What is society? Society is a system of interconnected thoughts, society having certain needs, society adapting to ecological or environmental changes and relationships between different societies. So, functionalism looks at society as a system; most sociologists which are discussed in elementary books of sociology are functionalists. One sociologist Haralambos said that till the year 1950 in the first part of the last century; functionalism was the most common strand in sociology in United States.

Gradually it has given way to Marxism, feminism, symbolic interactionism and things have been changing but it does not mean that functionalism has died. Many very well known sociologists still look at social phenomena in functional perspective. I would

even say that functionalism goes more with managerial perspective. So, in socialist countries also or after the revolution when a new revolutionary group has taken over in socialist countries. They aim at economic and social development of the country; raising power of the country at the international level whether they call it functionalist paradigm or not. They also start using some kind of functionalist paradigm they may not call it because they are Marxist socialist. So, they will hate to use the term functionalism, but perspectives of all managers of society will always use functionalists, because the common thing to functional perspective is concerned about the larger society, and to see society as consisting of interconnected parts or to use a system's approach for analysis of society.

The major names in functional perspective George Peter Murdock who contributed to study of family, Auguste Comte who gave the concept of positivism, and those social phenomena must be studied empirically and scientifically. Kingsley Davis Kingsley Davis gave the concept of status, role,, social stratification. He studied virtually everything but he is more known for his theory of social stratification; he has also studied urbanization in later years. So, urbanization and development in his basic book human society there is also a mention of mental health. Wilbert Moore, Kingsley Davis, Wilbert Moore these are 2 people who came up with their theory of social stratification, emile Durkheim who gave the concept of collective consciousness that there is an external social force outside our ego, outside our individual mind; which exerts influence on our mind and our behavior that is collective consciousness.

So, there is not only a consciousness of an individual, but in society there is also a consciousness of the entire society. And actually it is the consciousness of the entire society which affects individual's consciousness that is Emile Durkheim. Emile Durkheim as also contributed to research on deviance though he is more known for his studies of suicide and religion. Elementary forms of religious life this was one of his most known of research work. And suicide in which he is trying to compare suicide rates with time status, money, urban and rural areas civilians, and armed forces males and females Catholics and Protestants. And trying to develop his theory of suicide by saying that suicide is a function of presence or absence of social integration.

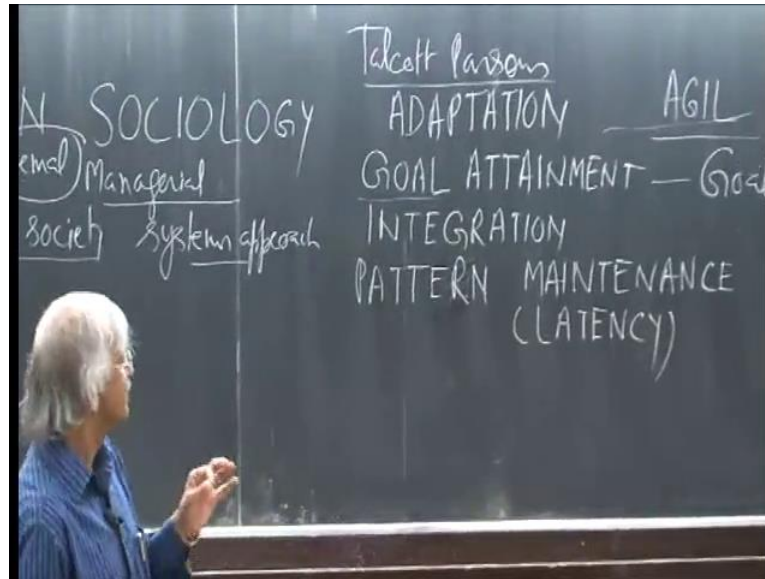
Actually, all these functionalists like Emile Durkheim have some idea of equilibrium and normality that is normal. When our relationship with larger society is normal we are

healthy and when we identify too strongly with larger society. So, stronger that we are ready to sacrifice our own interest or we do not identify with society at all a stage of alienation, separation, disintegration, anomie. Then that affects our health mental health and that can take people to commit the act of suicide. So, in all functionalists writings there are an emphasis of on order because this uses systems approach. So, there is an order, the concept of equilibrium, the concept of relationship and normality. As long as our relationship with society is normal we are physically and mentally healthy. When it is too much or it is absent then we may become floundering to commit suicide; means that can lead to some kind of deviant behavior.

Herbert Spencer has talked about social evolution as from a simple amoeba. A complex biological organism develops from cells to animals, human being, physical, mental, such a complex, biological, mechanism and anatomy physiology from very simple sense. Sometime from amoeba all these complex structures have developed. Likewise in society also from a simple undifferentiated primitive society develops a complex postmodern, advanced modern, industrial post-industrial society. And Herbert Spencer and theories of his type would be interested in understanding how does a primitive society changes to a complex.

Differentiated, doubly differentiated, triply differentiated a complex how does a very complex society like post-industrial and postmodern society developed. Spencer was as such not writing about postmodern these term post-industrial postmodern are later day additions to sociological literature. But the idea is that Herbert Spencer would like to understand the process of change from a simple to differentiated society. And he could imagine that the degree of differentiation would increase further the society would become more and more differentiated, and so more and more integrated also at a higher level of abstraction. Talcott Parsons Talcott Parsons he has contributed to almost all areas of sociology. And today while talking about functionalism I will just touchup on two important contributions of Talcott Parsons. One that he says that like individual organism societies also have certain needs because he is a functionalist. Talcott Parsons is known for his theory of social action and in theory of social action he considers personality, biological system, social system and cultural system.

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And, he says that all these system social, cultural, biological and personality can be seen as divided into 4 one he calls adaptation. This is I am talking about Talcott Parsons; this helps us actually in understanding. How does functionalist mind work? Functionalist mind takes society as the unit of analysis and looks at order, equilibrium, system, interconnections, adaptation, survival, sustenance of society.

So, for any society there are 4 most important rules of survival or 4 most important needs of society, adaptation, 2nd Goal attainment, 3rd Integration and 4th Pattern maintenance which is also called latency. And by taking 1st letter from each you have AGIL Talcott Parsons is known for his contribution of AGIL. All societies have these needs adaptation first of all society and it is member should exist. So, food, shelter, other physical and economic needs of society must be satisfied; this is what adaptation is. Society should first of all society and it is member should exist. The most important of all the needs of society would then be food, shelter, other physical needs, some kind of safety, shelter and in general economic economic needs.

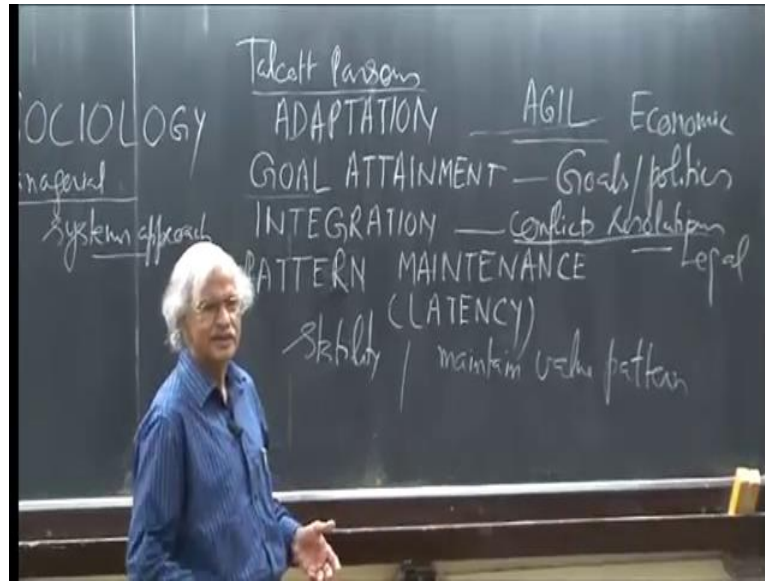
So, you can call adaptation economic function also. For society to survive it is important to effectively, efficiently maintain its economic system. No society can survive if there is problem on economic front. Most important need of society then goal attainment. Goal attainment means politics there must be some goals towards which members of society must be directed people survive, after they survive, after they are sure of survival once

the members of society are confident about survival. Means, once the society has adapted to environmental conditions and food, shelter, other physical needs, economic needs in general are satisfied. Then people do not exist for surviving only, people do not exist for eating only, or people do not exist only to construct houses they want something else some direction, some goal, some future, some destination.

What does our society stand for? What are we looking for? Our short term and long term goals, long term, short term goals of people of society. Society needs a mechanism from institutions through which values of the members of society or values of the society are articulated that is political. The main aim of political institution is to articulate the value system of society; value in the sense of where does society want to go goal? What is the goal of the society? For what purposes a country, a society, a collectivity, a caste, a community, even a person personality why does one person exist? We do not exist if somebody ask you why do you exist? Why do you exist? It you would not say that I exist to eat by eating by living in a good house, by having good clothes, by having decent income. You exist no doubt that is important for existing, but you do not exist to live in a good house you do not exist to eat food only. You must have a goal and for society this goal is goal attainment is the job of political institutions.

So, all societies will have to have some form of political institution through which the goals of society are articulated, then in any society consisting of so many people. Indian society more than one billion people today live in Indian society there are possibilities of conflicts. Conflicts between individuals, conflicts between groups, conflicts between different regions, different cultural linguistic areas, Hindus and Muslims, conflicts between males and females, conflicts in the interest of old people and in the interest of young people. So, some way has to be found to resolve the possibilities of conflicts in society. This is to look at society in a functional perspective that people must exist. So, must have food there must be some goal for which people or societies or communities are living. And there must be a mechanism to resolve conflicts.

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Conflicts are very much impossibility; conflicts resolution you can say that this is the job of the legal institution. So, all societies must have an institution resembling the legal institution or you can different countries may have different legal institutions; that is not important. In some countries there is a written constitution, in some countries there is only a tradition or unwritten constitution. And the forms that supreme court, high courts or courts lower courts, higher courts take may also be different.

Sometime you have only a panchayat to implement traditional laws or customs. Sometimes you have very elaborate mechanism as in our country from lower court to Supreme Court. And then benches one judge declaring a verdict or a bench of judges when issues are more complicated or more complex, more important than not one judge, but a bench of two or more judges will take the decision. So, you need forms may be different but all societies will need a mechanism of integration. Thus, conflicts are reality functionalists also functionalist like Talcott Parsons would also not deny the possibility of existence of conflicts in society. But what is they believe in that the, because there is a possibility of conflicts. So, in all societies there is also an institution which specializes or whose job is to resolve conflicts as and when they arrive.

Various types of conflicts, conflicts between industry and labor, capital and labor, urban and rural, tribal's, non-tribal's, educated, uneducated, high income group, low income group, various types of conflicts. And lastly there has to be something which provides

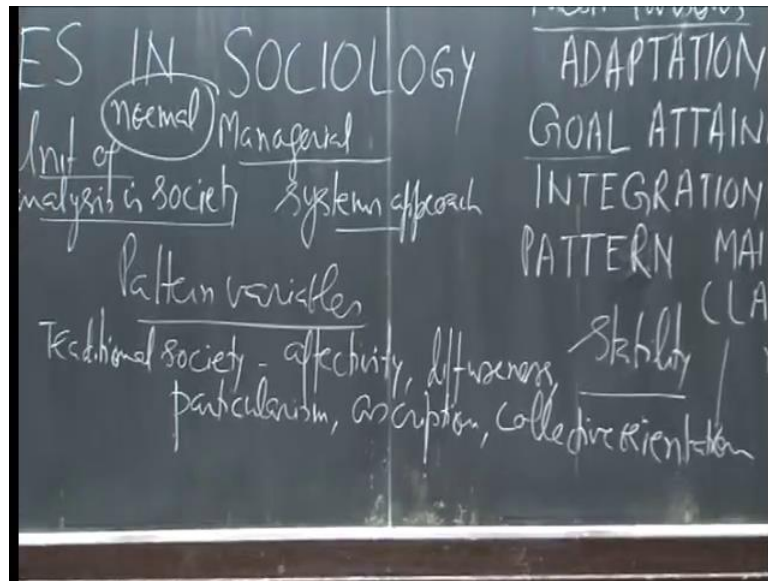
stability to society. To provide stability you have to have some institution to maintain the values pattern. So, all societies must have something of this kind cultural or religious something which maintains the value system of society and to provide stability to society. One may say in our context that Hinduism or certain varieties of Hinduism; have provided stability to a large complex diversified, heterogeneous society like India.

India was never a nation of the type we are today, but there was a cultural unity in the entire Indian, so called Indian sub continent. There was a kind of cultural unity which provides for the stability of society. All societies have something like this. This is functional way let me repeat that functionalist make the whole society as the unit of analysis their issues and concerns are about society. How does society survive? How does society maintain itself or at the time of change how does society change? What forces lead to change? Without leading to any breakdown of society.

So if there is a disequilibrium, somewhere it is only a temporary disequilibrium eventually. Because of the internal resilience of society and social process a re-equilibrium is established Talcott Parsons. But one interesting thing I find in Talcott Parsons that because Talcott Parsons is one of the most recent of all the functional sociologists. So, he was also able to see that modern society is not same as the traditional society was. Although he believes in functionalism and also he believes in stability and interconnections and correlations between different things but he know that society has changed.

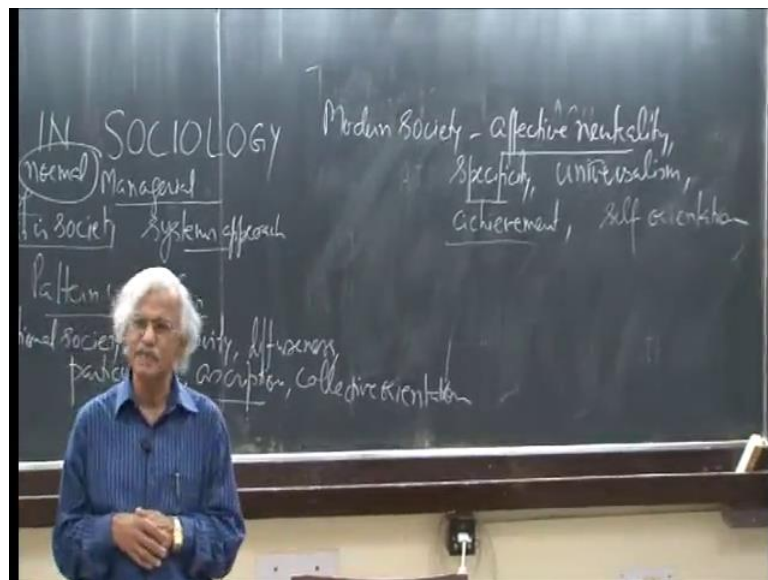


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Talcott Parsons gives certain patterned variables and he says that this is how we can look at social change? A traditional society or pre-modern society the chief characteristics of traditional society are affectivity, diffuseness, particularism, ascription and collective orientation. A traditional society is marked by affectivity, diffuseness, particularism, ascription, and collective orientation. These are the patterns of relation; these characteristics describe the pattern of relationships in a traditional society. Now, just opposite of that.

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Now, just opposite of that a modern society or industrial society is characterized by reverse of them. In place of affectivity you have affective neutrality, in place of diffuseness you have specificity, I will explain this in a moment particularism universalism, ascription to achievement and collective orientation to self orientation. This is so although a modern society is different from a traditional society, an industrial society is different from agrarian agricultural society or primitive society. But there is pattern characteristics have change, but patterns there are certain pattern behavior or there is a pattern; there is an underlying unity of values value systems orientations which can be described in terms of these things.

In traditional society affectivity, modern society affective neutrality; the term affection is used for emotions in a traditional society or in a traditional system. Actually in terms of these things you can also compare relatively more traditional institution and modern institution, family and corporate world. In family your relationships are emotional; in the corporate world your relationships are governed by affective neutrality. There is no emotion your relationships are based on calculations rationality. In modern society workers do not sacrifice their life for the corporate world. In the same manner in which say Lakshman sacrifice sort of sacrifice his life for his elder brother Ram; going to forest for 14 years to provide safety and security to elder brother was also making a sacrifice. And that sacrifice was emotional or Sita was going along with ram to forest. Sita who had never seen any forest who was brought born, and brought up in a family of powerful kings, and enjoyed all the facilities comforts of life from the beginning.

Traditional society affectivity relationships are quite affective. With you must have heard that in people saying that in villages earlier. Everybody connected with other members of the village emotionally even to those people with whom you were not directly connected through any kind of economic or political interest. You call them uncles or aunts or grandfather or grandmother. All were the members of the same family emotionally connected. In traditional society you are emotionally connected, in modern society emotions are not important. Anyway more you become neutral to affects or emotions more modern you are some people think that modernity is about rationality. You become rational you do not remain emotional.

The kind of stories we hear about friends in traditional society in old days. We do not have friends of those types today. Today's friendship is more rational calculated. You

make friends because they can give you photocopies of notes. There is no emotion in traditional society I do not know if somebody has seen a picture like [FL]. Now, the concept of (( )) or friend which was part of traditional society you do not have friends of that type any more. So, affectivity to affective neutrality then earlier relationships are diffused.

Today relationships are specific; relationship in the family context was diffused. Father was everything, father was protector, father was employer, father was teacher, father was religious guru and father was the political head of the family everything diffuse. Diffuse means everything anything everything but today our relationships are very, very specific very specific. Your relationship with a shopkeeper, your relationship with a teacher, your relationship with warden, your relationship with friend, your relationship with your employer, your immediate boss, your subordinates, they are specific relationships earlier they were diffuse. But there is a there is some kind of pattern you know Talcott parsons is more concerned about the presence of certain patterns.

Patterns are different but there are patterns rules of the game specific relationship is specific. Earlier it was diffused, particularism our orientations were particularistic in the sense we work in the interest of certain persons, groups, subgroups, communities, family first, then maybe caste, then maybe the village, village identity, so family identity, caste identity, village identity, religious identity, particular and today's value orientations are universal means global. So, the concerns issues and the yardsticks of today are global. What is right for one person is right for the entire world rise of humanism universalism. What are seen as needs of some specific individuals are also seen as needs of the whole humanity. And earlier roles were allocated on the basis of ascription in which families are born; today roles are achieved.

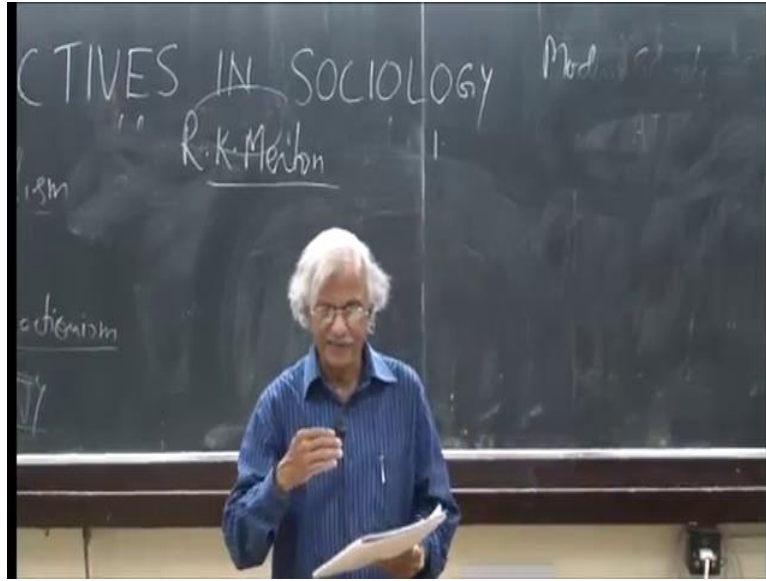
You can look at the entire course of sociology. There is a big shift from ascription to achievement. In jobs, jobs mainly because job is the major role of industrial modern society. So, job is achieved on the basis of your education, credentials, your merit, your own physical and mental achievements characteristics and collective orientation to self orientation. While societies of the past where collectively oriented means people stood to attain the goals of the larger collectivity; you did not have any private life. in modern society orientation predominant orientation is self. It does not mean that social identities have gone social identities are there. And quite often our behavior reflects our identity,

but there is much more of personal or self more concerned about self, more concerned about your own interest rather than the interest of the collectivity.

We can go on, but my main concern is to tell you how do functionalist work? How do functionalist think? And the example of Talcott Parsons says that functionalists are interested in understanding the needs of larger society. For them society is a real entity. And there are certain needs of society AGIL, adaptation, goal attainment, integration and latency these are the needs of society. And therefore societies have to develop appropriate mechanism of all these types within biological systems, cultural systems, social systems and personality. And although these people Talcott Parsons and people of his type do believe in social change. But they say that behind change there is some kind of constancy behind all kinds of societies there is some kind of pattern of values. There is a pattern of value there is a there is a an order there is an a kind of equilibrium.

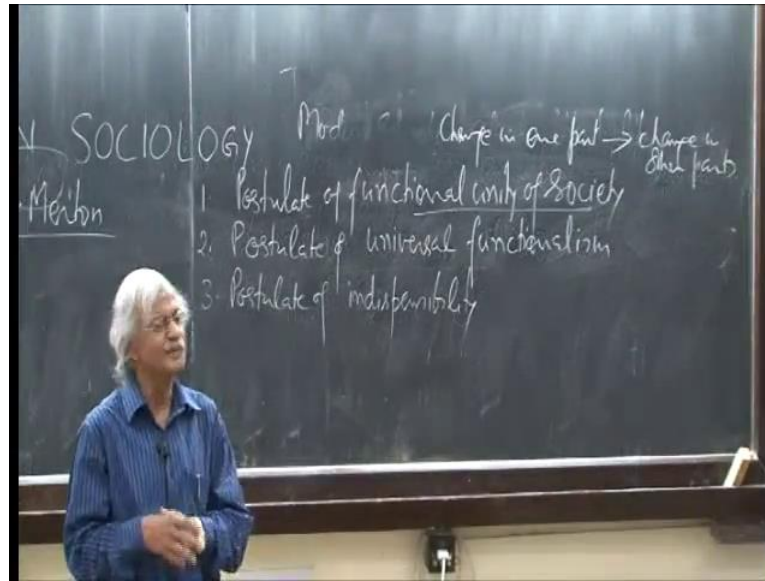
For example when I wrote ascription, diffuseness, particularism, you can see that this is a set a cluster of certain values in a modern society. If you are modern otherwise, but in place of affective neutrality you go by affection there will be quos. So, this is a set of interconnected integrated values there is one set for traditional society, another set for modern society. In modern society you cannot afford to have or people do not have the collective orientation. In modern society you are more you are tremendously concerned about yourself that is at the root of modern society. You are concerned about yourself, in traditional society to collective orientation. You live for society, you live for your culture, you live for your religion and you live for your family.

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Now, the same thing has been expressed by another sociologist a very important name R.K Merton, Robert Merton. And actually I wanted to spend more time on Merton than on Talcott parsons. Merton has some important contribution to understand some of the present day institutions including social stratification and so on. I I will first say what Merton said and then apply this to something. One thing he say he say that the functionalist positions or the functionalist thinking in sociology is governed by 3 postulates. So, first like a teacher first Merton is summarizing what is functionalist thinking? And then he makes some contribution of his own to functional theory; which has been found to be quite important by present day sociologist.

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One he calls Postulate of functional unity of society postulate of functional unity of society, 2nd postulate of universal functionalism and 3rd postulate of indispensability. This is not Merton's own contribution; first Merton is saying that if you read the works of functional sociologists you find that all of them tend to make 3 postulates. 1 postulate of functional unity of society. I think by now your understand what this functional unity of society means? This means, that all the parts of society, all the components of society, all the institutions of society, groups, subgroups of society are interconnected; which means change in 1 part or 1 group or one institution leads to change in other parts. So, industrialization leads to change in social stratification, urbanization leads to economic development, urbanization leads to modernization, westernization, westernization leads to secularization, secularization, westernization produce demographic transition, everything is interconnected.

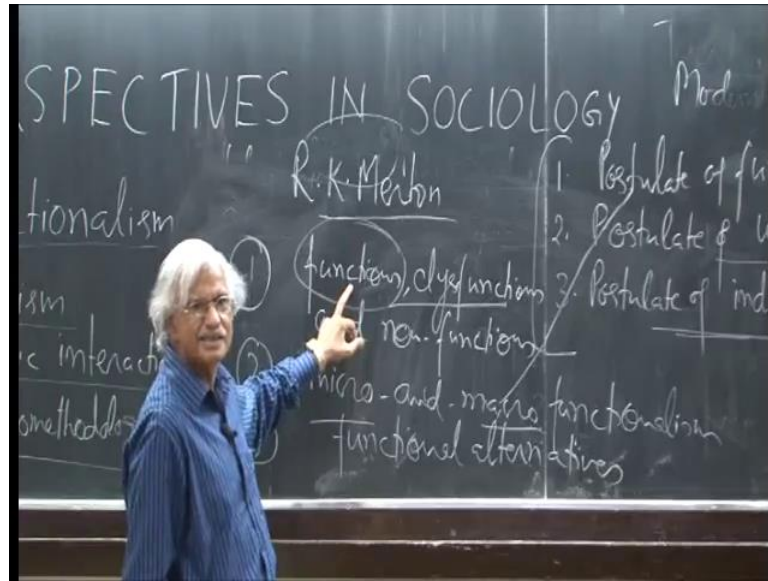
Education makes at rational rationality produces a self orientation rather than collective orientation, affective neutrality and so the demographic transition everything is interconnected. Postulate of functional unity of society means society is a unity and that unity is functional. Here, the term function means relationship correlation. Everything is a function of everything else. Long back in his positivists Auguste Comte said that one thing of society is related to another thing of society. Emile Durkheim social fact for Emile Durkheim all patterns of thinking, behaving or acting or feeling are social facts all all patterns. When there are patterns of thinking, feeling, acting, believing they are facts

outside us. And one fact is related to another fact; this is the positivist and functionalist methodology relating one thing to others.

So, there is a postulate of functional unity. 1 thing changes everything changes; change in 1 part of society cultural lag there may be some lag, there may be some social lag. And one part of society, one group of society, one institution of society may change faster than the others but eventually all others will change. All others have change there is a period of maladjustment and this maladjustment creates social problem. Postulate of universal functionalism means that anything that exists in society is sort of useful in simple language is useful. It exists because it is the need of society anything that exist that means anything that exist has some positive functions.

If poverty exists poverty must be having some useful consequences for the larger society. If Casteism exist it must be having some function. Anything you may think that it is bad, but actually if you analyze it carefully you will find that everything has a function. And that function is for the entire society everybody is gaining. And postulate of indispensability means if the whole society is a system of interconnected parts. 1 thing changes everything changes kind of and if anything that exists exists, because it is functional; it has positive consequences for the larger society. So, does that not create the idea that everything that exists is indispensable because everything that exist has a function. So, that means no other thing can take its place it is indispensable it must remain. It will remain and it must remain.

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So, if some people find that despite so much political economic attack on poverty. Poverty has persisted for long for 100s of years, 1000s of years, lakhs of years. Poverty has not vanished social stratification has not vanished social inequality remains. So, then it means that poverty and social stratification must be indispensable without them society cannot exist. According to Merton all functionalists tend to make these 3 postulates, but Merton says that we need to have a relook at some of them. First of all he makes it distinction between functions, dysfunctions and non-functions this is his contribution.

It is not a from commonsensical point of view it is not a great contribution. What he saying that anything that exist has functions as well as dysfunctions and non-functions. Everything that exists need not be having only positive functions; there may be some harmful functions also. If functionalism is about relationships or correlations some of the correlations or some of the consequences or some of the implications of things existing in society maybe negative wrong dysfunctions.

There may be functions there may be dysfunctions. And some functions which are neither good nor bad neither functions nor dysfunctions so non-functions, and second so the second micro-and-macro functionalism. This means, that the level of analysis can be made the larger society macro, Then we are looking at the macro functions or it can be a smaller group or subgroup of society also micro; as micro as an individual. So, the level of analysis in Merton's functionalism shifts from or includes both macro and micro. And



third thing he says that things may not be indispensable in the sense that there may be functional alternatives for them.

Let me repeat and then give a small example and then I will stop here. First Merton says that if you review the works done by those with whom we attach the level of functionalism. Their works are guided by 3 postulates. One is the postulate of functional unity of society; that means society is a system of integrated parts. And whenever anything changes because of correlations between different parts, different groups, different institutions. When one thing changes all other things are likely to change. When will they change? In 1 month, 2 months, 1 year, 10 years, that depends, but change in one thing is going to produce change in everything. Functional unity and as against this Merton says that I do not agree with this position of functionalism.

Although R.F Merton himself is a functionalist but he says that the functionalist need to revisit their theory and have a relook at their postulates. I do not agree that when something changes then everything changes, because we have to analyze changes at the aggregate level, macro level and societal level and at the level of parts separately. Micro functionalism macro functionalism, so for Merton although Merton remains in the framework of functionalism. But suppose you are analyzing Indian society or suppose you are analyzing religion. Then what kind of change in one part of society is producing has to be analyzed separately at different level; at the level of larger society as well as at the level of subgroup or different institutions or at the level of individual. And all the effects, at the level of society, at the level of regions, at the level of groups, at the level of individual, need not be same macro and micro.

Economic development of India may have separate effects on society of Kerala, society of Uttar Pradesh, on Hindus, on Muslims, on forward classes, and backward classes, on urban areas and rural areas and the impact of modernization and development may be different for different individuals, so macro and micro. Do you understand? The one thing he says that the level of analysis need to be explicitly a macro and also a micro different. We has to analyze effects at different level. 2nd thing while most functionalist believes in postulate of universal functionalism means...

So, micro macro this takes care of that the effects may be same or different. And here we also have to once we analyze the effects separately at the aggregate level and at the level

of groups or institutions or individuals. We must recognize that some effects may be good you can call them functions; some effects may be bad or dysfunctions and some may be non-functions. So, economic development of the country like India. Economic when we talk of economic development of the whole nation economic development of India has been functional for certain states for Punjab, Haryana agriculturally advanced state for Gujarat and Maharashtra industrially advanced states its functional. But economic development of India has been dysfunctional for Jharkhand; Chhattisgarh may be in certain respects for the northeastern region where you have more alienation, Naxalites, (( )) activities separatist tendency.

The effect of economic development has not been same for all economic development. Effect of economic development economic development has been functional for bureaucrats, administrators, political elite, feudal elite in rural areas and dysfunctional for illiterate. People belonging to lower caste rural areas, landless laborers and scheduled tribes dysfunctional for schedule tribes. So, effects may be positive as well as negative. And there may be certain things which have neither a positive effect nor a negative effect. And functional alternative this is for this postulate. Postulate of indispensability things are you know somebody may say like poverty, somebody may say that poverty exists because it is functional.

Why is it functional? Because it has certain religious functions associated with it. Charity or voluntary poverty or helping the poor through these things you are religious (( )). But that Merton says it does not mean that poverty should always remain that it is indispensable for religious and spiritual development or moral development. You can have alternative ideas, alternative institutions, alternative ideas it is not necessary for mankind to keep some people poor, so that you can engage in charity. You are almost all religions in Christianity, saying that wealth is bad; wealth is sin to earn wealth to earn sin. Islam also says that you cannot be loyal simultaneously to both Allah and the material world. You cannot be you cannot serve both you cannot serve the spirit, you cannot serve the God Allah God.

You cannot be spiritual and materialist at the same time. And Hinduism also says something of similar kind that (( )) you earned wealth, but you are earning of wealth should be done in a manner which is not inconsistent with dharma. (( )) there are 4 Purushartha. Merton will say that to earn the Purushartha or to live a moral or dharmik or

religious or spiritual life. It is not necessary that we maintain poverty in society by an alternative philosophy, functional, alternatives different things. The function that one existing institution or group or part of society perform can be performed by many alternative parts, functions parts or groups or institutions. So, it is wrong to say that if something exist and it is functional for the larger society then it must continue ok.

I think it is clear and in open discussion later on in tutorial things will be made more clear. Merton first presents 3 postulates which show his understanding of functionalism. And then he attacks each of them by saying that there may be dysfunctions along with functions, reality at the macro level, may not be same as reality at the micro level. And you cannot take the position that if something is existing. It must continue to exists because it is functional. There may be other possibilities of getting the same functions which some of the existing institutions or groups or components provide. We stop here then.