

From Individualised to Collective Approach

- **Abandoning Common sense in Sociology, We shift from Personalized approach to Sociological Approach**
- **Personalized approach-** Based on **individual experience**
 - Ex: You know one man who committed suicide because he was jobless. Does this mean they were lacking strength / will power?
- **Sociological approach** – Based on use of scientific methods to **understand broader picture**.
 - Ex: You try to look if jobless men are more likely to commit suicide?- Data?
 - Understand Patterns - Do all jobless men commit suicide? Are some groups more likely to do so in comparison to others - think of single jobless versus someone with family to take care of? Other differentiators- socio-economic status, caste / ethnic characteristics, educational trajectories etc.
 - Find similarities and differences, find reasons.
 - Look for broader patterns and shifts - has it been the same always? Does changing economy got to do anything with changing suicide rates?
- In doing sociology, you start looking at the world differently – The obvious/common sense has to be abandoned – look from the vantage point of ‘others’.
- In understanding these ways, Sociology uses a ‘scientific method’.

Sociology and Scientific Method

- Science – body of systematic knowledge that shows operation of general laws.
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- What do scientists do? – Observe, experiment, generalize, verify
- However, science is not simply about the method of data collection.
- Scientists also ‘theorise’ – organize facts into an order
- A good scientific theory must be:
 - Internally consistent – not fleeting opinions (so definitely not common sense)
 - Should fit the evidence – systematically gathered, not picked up to match theory
 - Science constantly changes- deals with failure by examining theory in light of new evidence
 - Objective – not biased
- Sociology uses the **same methods** as natural sciences :
 - Hypothesis building, Observation, Experimentation, Data Collection, Analysis, Generalization
 - Experimentation – Difficult (impossible to recreate certain circumstances) ; Sometimes doable (Jodhka’s Study on Meritocracy; Sapkal’s study on LinkedIn)

- Ex: Study on feeling Happiness – Theologist (God Ordained) ; Poet (Experiential)
- Unlike these, when science will study this phenomenon, we are trying to link it to observable events – **Empiricism** – generalizations are valid only if they can be 'observed' or 'experienced through senses'
- Sociologists in studying Happiness will try and relate it to observable-measurable events:
 - Class position, income
 - work satisfaction , work culture
 - Family and other relations
 - political orientation
- But this is just one way of producing sociological knowledge.
- Epistemological Perspectives define how is Sociological Knowledge produced.

Epistemologies of Sociology

- Epistemology- theory of knowledge :
 - How do we know what we know? – method, validity, scope
 - Nature of knowledge and ‘multiple truths’
- In Sociology, there are broadly 3 epistemological perspectives:
- **Positivism** – Looking at social world as an objective reality. Using scientific method to explain **what causes things** that we observe. Positive Methodology is rooted in cause and effect. Strong belief in **Empiricism** – we can verify information from our senses.
- **Phenomenology / Humanism** – Premise is human world is different from Physical World. Understanding the **meaning that social world has for actors**. Concerned with interpreting world rather than explaining it.
- **Critical** – Social World made of **reflective people** but they are **constrained by wider social structure of relations – Structures of inequality**.

Let's use an Example to understand this



Positivism

Why Strikes Happened?
Causes?
What happened?
Incidence that triggered this?
Sequence of Events

Phenomenology

Meanings of Strike for people?

Why is someone protesting?

What are they gaining or losing through it?

Critical

Relating strike to
Broader structure
Capitalism
Employer-employee
relations
Government Policy
Legal constraints