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Keywords: *theoretical sociology, analogy, ontology, epistemology, approach, methodology.*

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Rethinking Modern Sociological Theories: An Analytical Synthesis of their Ontology, Epistemology and Methodology

Dr. Rabindra Garada

Abstract- No matter how different sociological ontology, epistemology and methodology are, they pull together reasoning the social world for a better human understanding. So of their diverse theoretical paradigms and perspectives that developed over the time, make sociology a distinct discipline. But so far, their internal contradictions and dualism remain unresolved, and rather invites challenges for the future prospect of world sociology. The challenge is not how they thrive humans on different or diverse universe of meanings but to see their cross-boundaries of meanings. Our study also reveals that now the foundationism- the theoretical narratives of Durkheim, Marx and Weber (DMW) have been reconstructed and regained with a fresh lease of life in the sociological world. But the proponents for such original building blocks are not always visible protagonists. However, in this context, the neo-functional theorists buttress structural functionalism with some radicalism whereas the critical theorists juxtapose the conflict theoretical perspectives uncovering many missing dimensions of exclusions of sociological marginal and minorities. There is also hardly any visible attempt to break loose their compartmentalization in sociology. But why this so happens props up many queries in contemporary sociological theorizing. This paper reflects upon the juxtaposition of functionalism versus neo-functionalism and of conflict versus critical theories especially looking into their theoretical ontology, epistemology and methodology for future of sociology. The theoretical contrast and continuum deconstructed through analytical paradigms in creative figure formats promote perspective optimism for an epistemological synthesis in the paper. Thus, the author argues it to be an inevitable prerequisite for the future of world sociology.

Keywords: *theoretical sociology, analogy, ontology, epistemology, approach, methodology.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Just two and a half decades later the subject Sociology will commemorate her two century old disciplinary origin in the European world. So of its theoretical eclecticism has been proved incredible worldwide. However, its retrospective history does not uphold the common disciplinary concerns because its theoretical analogy, ontology, approach, epistemology and methodology are distinctly perceived as divergence theses in sociology. Of most sociological theories the significant theories like structural-functionalism, conflict theory, critical theory and neo-functional theory are usually taken as for instance, to explore such dynamics.

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In this context, both theoretical building blocks- the functional theory and conflict theory are largely unique although not indifferent to one another. Historically, the much of functional analysis was active from 1940s to 1950s and remained dominant till 1960s (see, Turner, 2013; Allan, 2013). However, the functional theories developed by Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Brown and Parsons retrospectively were debated and contested in 1970s and severely criticized in 1980s. Consequently, the functional theorizing reveals its weakness as well as threat to the growth of sociology worldwide. On the other hand, Marx's ideas on materialistic reductionism, historical and dialectical materialism, radicalism, revolutionary change, etc, were taken as alternative dimensions of thinking on society contrary to that of structural functionalism in sociology. Karl Marx as the chief architect of conflict sociology had prospective impact on the writings of G. Simmel, Mitchel, C.Wright Mills, Ralf Dahrendorf, Lewis Coser, Irving Louis Horowitz and Randal Collins in sociology (Turner, 2013; Abraham and Morgan, 2010; Bottomore and Nisbet, 2004). Further, going through the history of sociology we can assume that since the structural-functional and conflict theories have been rectified and revised, a need of rethinking for their theoretical synthesis is greatly solicited. There may be three groups of sociologists such as One the theoretical protagonists- functionalists or conflict theorists themselves who argue for their respective theorizing, Second the theoretical antagonists- the functionalists and conflict theorists who argue against each other and third the protagonists-antagonists' dualists who have the tendency of dualism. This antagonist dilemma and dualism not necessarily polarize the sociological theorizing but become potential possibilities for a theoretical synthesis. In this context, the sociological theorists with sociological background (insiders) and the social theorists with non-sociological backgrounds (outsiders) largely contribute to the growth of theoretical ontology, epistemology and methodology in sociology. Thus, this stimulates intellectual debates and deliberation worldwide. This is also true that, the theoretical oppositions are no more contradictory but complementary to one another as no dichotomised theoretical assumptions remain sacrosanct at present. Indeed each one's boundary has been crossed and the peculiarity it used to hold has

been criticised, liberalised and secularised to a large extent. To address such dynamics at this juncture of world sociology a rethinking on their contrast, continuum and synthesis is indispensable. In this context, we have a The critical reflection on the issues related to ontological, epistemological and methodological contrast, continuum and synthesis between functional theorists and conflict theorists, between functional and neofunctionalists theorists, between conflict and critical theorists in the sociology has been comprehended in the article. The theoretical literatures mostly developed in macro sociology have been critically analysed in this paper. (see, Turner, 2013; Allan, 2013; Garada, 2013; Abraham and Morgan,2010; Berger,2008; Macionis, 2006; Rizter, 2004; Nisbet and Bottomore 2004; Doshi,2003; Ritzer &Smart, 2001; Turner, 1999; Crapanzano, 1992; Haralambos;1980; Merton, 1968; Parsons, 1937 Giddens, 1979; Goudner, 1976; Gouldner, 1970; Mills,1959; Nadel,1957). Before exploring a theoretical synthesis a theoretical contrast and continuum have been deconstructed in the article through different analytical paradigms. The major objective of this article, therefore, is to find out not simply the contrast and continuum between functional and conflict perspectives, between structural-functional and neo-functional perspectives, between conflict and critical perspectives and also among all perspectives themselves. In this backdrop, we have developed a creative cross-Figure Format using SWOT analysis in detail.

II. ANALOGICAL THESIS AND SYNTHESIS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

In fact, in order to give a progressive push to the academic development in the crises of European societies the early functionalists promptly accepted organic analogy as established by Greek philosophers (Hobbes and Rousseau) and Biology as an already established scientific subject in the western world at that time (Rizter,2004). The organism analogy was germinated in functional theorizing by Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Brown and Parsons accordingly (Turner, 2013; Allan, 2013). Such functional analogy was greatly reflected in the field studies undertaken by the social anthropologists who developed unique structural-functional theories in a comparative analysis. In this context, contribution of Durkheim, Brown and Malinowski are par excellence (Garada, 2013; Macionis, 2006; Rizter, 2004; Nisbet and Bottomore, 2004). The functionalists using organic analogy view the society as a living organism where its parts- families, classes and cities and communities were compared with that of cells, tissues and organs of a living organism. While Comte conceived society like living organic system Spencer conceived it as a super organic system as how it organizes human social life in the line of functional

arrangement of biological organism (ibid). He distinctly analyzed the uniqueness of inorganic, organic and super organic analogies. Durkheim conceives the society as sui-generis (something more than the mere combination of its parts) along with its causal functional requirement of society. Later period, the extension of Spencer's functional analysis was found in Bronislaw Malinowski's understanding of biological system, social system, and cultural systems(1913, 1944) while the Durkheimian tradition was sustained in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's understanding of structural functionalism(1914, 1922, 1924, 1935, 1952). The functional theorizing was further, revived and sustained by Parsons and Merton greatly till 1960s as a dominant theorizing in America. The structural functionalism developed by E.Durkheim and L.Strauss in France, Malinowski and Nadel in Britain and Parsons and Merton in America explains its intellectual specialization differently (Turner, 2013; Upadhyaya and Pandey, 1993; Merton, 1968; Parsons, 1937). Interestingly, the cross-countries intellectual extension from Comte and Durkheim in France to Radcliff Brown in Britain and from Spencer to Malinowski from Britain and Parsons from America could establish the core of functional paradigm over the time. However, there is difference between organic analogy applied by Comte, Spencer and Brown which views society as empirical reality and system analogy used by Parsons which views society as social system- a conceptual scheme (Garada, 2013; Merton, 1968; Parsons, 1937). Thus, structural-functionalism is being greatly reflected from organic analogy and conceptual scheme of social system in sociology. On the other hand, the so called conflict theorizing came to sociology as a synthetic tradition of the two early western philosophies- the political philosophy developed by Machiavelli, Bodin, Hobbes and Mosca and the philosophy of classical economics developed by Adam Smith and Robert Malthus(). Karl Marx was its chief architect as A.F. Abraham rightly says that "Marx is undoubtedly the master theoretician of conflict sociology" (Turner, 2013; Allan, 2013; Garada, 2013; Berger,2008; Abraham and Morgan,2010; Haralambos and Heald, 2008; Macionis,2006; Rizter,2004; Nisbet and Bottomore 2004). Max Weber, G. Simmel, Mitchel, C.Wright Mills, Ralf Dahrendorf, Lewis Coser, Irving Louis Horowitz and Randal Collins are other champions of this theory (ibid). Based on Marx's ideas, consequently, these theorists brought a variety of conflict theories to sociology such as dialectical conflict theory (Ralf Dahrendorf), formal conflict theory (G.Simmel and T.Caplow), analytical conflict theory (Randal Collins), critical theory/ Frankfort school (neo-Marxists- Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Fromm & Habermas), new /radical conflict theory (C.Wright Mills and Irving Louis Horwitz) and conflict functional theory (Lewis Coser) in the western world(Turner,2013; Allan,2013; Haralambos and Heald,2008; Rizter, 2004). In spite of its multiplicity the

conflict theories project dualistic views of social reality such as conflict between bourgeoisie and proletariat for property (Marx's understanding), elite and master for power (Mill's understanding) and the ruler and ruled (Dahrendorf's understanding) for authority (ibid). History is testimony to the fact that a fresh rethinking on Marxism by Frankfurt school at the University of

Frankfurt in Germany helped its protagonists to revise and reconstruct the conflict theorizing with new inclusive dimension in sociology eliminating its earlier limitations and rigidity (ibid.). In this context, the Figure-1 explicates the fundamental convictions of theoretical analogy for the future prospect of world sociology.

Figure 1 : Fundamental Convictions of Theoretical Analogy in Sociology

Sl.No	Theory	Analogical Contrast
1	Structural-Functionalism	Organic Analogy / System Analogy
2	Neo-functionalism	Descriptive/System Analogy
3	Conflict theory	Dialectical Materialistic Analogy
4	Critical theory	Dialectical but Material and Non-Materialistic Analogy

Source: Our Own

In this Figure-1 we can observe that while organic analogy or system analogy used in structural-functional theorizing the descriptive/system analogy are used in neo-functional theorizing. The dialectical materialistic analogy is used in the conflict theorizing the dialectical but material and non-material analogies are used in the critical theorizing. Thus, a contrast analogical thinking is not simply there between functionalism and conflict theorizing but also between functionalism and neo-functionalism and between

conflict and critical theorizing in sociology. However, an analogical continuum is also seems to be there between two similar block of theoretical sociology. The Figure-2 reveals that the system analogy and dialectical materialistic analogy are the potential continuum between Structural-Functional theories and neo-functional theories, and between conflict theory and critical theory respectively. Thus, it is the descriptive analogy which is followed in each theoretical sociology as we can see in the Figure-2.

Figure 2 : Analogical Continuum and Synthesis in Theoretical Sociology

Sl.No.	Theory	Analogical continuum	Analogical Synthesis
1	Structural-Functional-Neo-functional Theory	System Analogy	System cum Descriptive Analogy
2	Conflict-Critical theory	Dialectical Materialistic Analogy/ Descriptive Analogy	Dialectical Materialistic/ Non-Materialistic Analogy/ Descriptive Analogy
3	All Theories	Descriptive Analogy	Conflict Functional Analogy/ Descriptive Analogy

Source: Our Own

The two different theory building blocks such as the first one refers to structural-functional- neo-functional theories and the second one refers to the conflict-critical theories can be put together for an analogical synthesis in sociology. The Figure-2 clears that the system cum-descriptive analogy developed in the structural-functional- neo-functional theory and dialectical analogy found in conflict- critical theory reveals the possibility of analogical synthesis. Thus, the descriptive analogy, dialectical analogy and conflict functional analogy together help synthesizing the analogical theories of functionalism-neo-functional theories and conflict-critical theories in sociology. However, the dynamics of major analytical synthetic reflect their strength, weakness, opportunity and threat (SWOT) for the future of global sociology.

Figure.3 : SWOT Analysis of Theoretical Analogy

Sl.No	Theory	Analogical Synthesis	S	W	O	T
1	Structural-Functionalism-Neo-Functionalism	System Analogy-Descriptive Analogy	Holistic Descriptive Understanding	Rivalistic Motivation	Reconstructionistic/Revisionist Motivation	Continuity with Core Functionalism
2	Conflict - Critical theory	Dialectical materialistic and non-materialistic Analogy	Dialecticalism	Revivalist motivation	Communitistic vision	Political Motivation
3	Functionalism-Neo-Functionalism and Conflict - Critical theory	Descriptive Analogy and Dialectical Analogy	Descriptive-cum Dialectical Analogy	Hiding theoretical contradiction	Inter and intra theoretical motivation	Theoretical Endism

Source: Our Own

As we can observe from the Figure-3 that the dynamics of holistic descriptive understanding and reconstruction /revisionist motivation are assumed to be the strength and opportunity respectively and the dynamics of revivalist motivation and continuity with core of functionalism respectively are assumed to be the weakness and threat respectively in structural-functional- neo-functional analogical synthesis. In case of conflict-critical theoretical analogical synthesis the dynamics of dialecticalism and communistic vision are assumed to be the strength and opportunity respectively and the dynamics of revivalist motivation and political motivation are assumed to be the weakness and threat respectively. Interestingly the descriptive- cum dialectical analogy and inter and intra-theoretical motivations as the strength and opportunity respectively and hiding theoretical contradiction and theoretical endism as weakness and threat respectively are revealed in the analogical synthesis of two different theory building blocks of structural-functionalism-neo-functionalism and conflict- critical theory in their togetherness.

III. ONTOLOGICAL THESIS AND SYNTHESIS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

Ontology in sociology deals with the queries of what is social reality, what really exists, the conceptions of what social realities are, etc. The sociological ontology different from material ontology as visible natural objects of earth, water and plants, discursive ontology as religious ethics and texts and constructed arte factual ontology as constructed infrastructures, amenities and arts deals with social structures, social conventions, social norms, social values, etc (see, Fleetwood,2013; Hall, 2003; Gould, 1978). The ontology the structural-functional theorists propose is the structural ontology which goes beyond individualistic ontology (individual is the realty). The sociologists like

Hegel, Marx, Durkheim, Parsons, Strauss, Gidden, Althusser and Bourdieu all explain like this (Garada, 2013; Turner; 2013; Doshi, 2003). In this context, the structural-functional theorists assume that there is social reality that exists not simply as a thing that exterior to individuals but also coerce the individuals (Turner, 2013; Allan, 2013; Macionis, 2006; Rizter, 2004; Nisbet and Bottomore, 2004; Doshi, 2003; Ritzer &Smart, 2001; Turner, 1999; Haralambos, 1980). Thus, unlike physical reality which is visible the social reality is invisible, unlike discursive ontology it is factual reality and unlike ideal reality it is real reality. To the structural-functionalists the invisible, factual and real social reality makes the individual as if a creature not creator of society. However, it brings in its structures- harmony, stability, order and equilibrium which are indispensable for the individuals as social beings to live in. The conflict theorist on the other hand though does not reject the social ontology but doubt its consensus mechanism, and instead focus on its dissensus mechanism and contradictory tendencies among the structural parts (Garada, 2013). They explain how the social reality is social in the sense it perpetuates structural inequality, exploitation and oppression in the society. The structuralism emphasizes the underlying deep structure as ontological position (Levis Strauss) whereas the functionalists see it social structure however both acknowledge the structural forces behind the social actions performed by the individuals in the society. The social ontology makes individual as structural dopes and critical theorists make individuals as cultural dopes (Garfinkel, 1967). The conflict theorists doubting the stability and order in structural functionalism question the making of individuals as structural dopes, and therefore argue the need of change for stability whereas the critical sociologists argue for the emancipation and liberation of the cultural dopes. The neo-functionalists seem to rectifying the over dominance of structural over agency and instead argue for integrating the structure

and agency in the sociological analysis. The ontological autopsies of structural functionalism cannot be justified always as without agency there will be no structure. In fact, the conflict theorists expose the ontological dualism in the sociological analysis. The ontological monism as only structure as reality not agency is not rectified in the structural functionalism because Durkheim himself perceived the dualistic image of society but the society is perceived more than the sums of its parts (Turner, 2013; Garada, 2013; Allan, 2013; Garada, 2013; Colomy, 2008; Macionis, 2006; Ritzer, 2004; Nisbet and Bottomore 2004; Doshi, 2003; Calhoun, 2002; Ritzer & Smart, 2001; Turner, 1999). Talcott Parsons also in the beginning did not visualise the dichotomy between structure and agency. Thus, the potential possibilities of this dualism are somehow getting resolved through neo-functionalism for their ontological synthesis. Similarly the ontological dualism in conflict theories gets resolved at their synthesis. The Marxism is never discussed without its visionary process of synthesis. The ontological dualism of thesis and antithesis is thus perceived to make their synthesis in course of time after passing through the processes of materialistic and historical dialiceticalism. Marxism is more optimistic in this sense. To Marxism it is our existence which determines our consciousness but not vice versa. But in reality the consciousness was taken into consideration in Marxism as from false class consciousness to true class consciousness is achievable in a circumstances of class for itself in the process of classless society. Thus, our mere material existence is meaningless unless there will be class consciousness. In fact, the entire critical research in Frankfurt school of thought in Germany and failures of Marxism in Soviet Russia brought pessimism in the sociological theories. However, the dualism and dichotomy between structure and agency can be resolved through neo-functionalists like Jeffrey Alexander and Nicklas Luhmann and critical theorists like Louse Althusser and Habermas in the macro-sociological theories (see, Turner, 2013; Garada, 2013; Harbermas, 1987; Connerton, 1976). If we carefully see the critical realism evolved through the critical discourses as for instance in case of Roy Bhasker's analysis of critical realism although society is created out of individual but irreducible to individuals is not free from the dualism (see, Bhaskar, 1997, 993, 1989a and 1989b, Collier, 1994). The dynamics of ontological thesis and synthesis of sociological theories can be better analyzed for the comprehension of analogical debate in the sociology.

IV. THESIS AND SYNTHESIS OF THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The sociologists tend to conduct social research in three level i.e., micro (in individual level),

meso (group level) and macro (institutional and structural level). At the micro level the sociologists study the experiences of individuals and their interactions whereas at meso level they study the experiences of groups and their interactions. But at the macro level, they examine the role of social structures and institutions related to individual and group experiences. Unfortunately, there has been growing gulf between these approaches over the years in sociology. There is also hardly any visible attempt to break loose their compartmentalization in sociology. But why this is happened so props up significant query in contemporary sociological theorizing. The Figure-4 explicates that the functional and conflict theory explains about macro level studies and their significance whereas neo-functionalism reflects upon both macro and micro level approaches. And, over the macro level approaches developed in structural-functional and conflict theory explains an abstract understanding of the social structures and institutions. The dichotomy between micro and macro perpetuate the contrast between the agency and structure, part and whole, individual and society, action and order, life world and system world, conversation analysis and discursive analysis, positivists and realists, concrete and abstract, particular and general, subjectivity and objective conditions, etc. However, the first and second waves of debate on 'micro' and 'macro' sociology started in 1960s and 1980s respectively help bridging the gap between micro and macro sociology for a better perspective of their inter-linkages and synthesis (see, Collins, 1998; 1991; Knorr-Cetina; Wiley, 1988, Ritzer, 1985, 1988, Alexander et al., 1987; Knorr-Cetina and Cicourel, 1981; Ritzer, 1981). In this context, though the structural-functionalism, neo-functionalism, conflict theory and critical theory focus on macro-approaches but have potential possibilities of micro understanding of the social phenomena. Organic analogy, analytical schemes, teleological and tautological derivatives, system pre-requisites, etc as running bloods of grand narratives perpetuate the processes of macro approaches in sociology. The grand theorizing of Meta narratives is largely reflected through macro approaches. The foundational, grand and impersonal contiguity go beyond the individual reach. On the one hand the neo-functionalism includes both macro and micro approaches in sociology. It made efforts to integrate ideas from exchange theory, symbolic interactionism, pragmatism, phenomenology, and so on. In other words, Alexander and Colomy endeavoured to synthesize structural functionalism with a number of other theoretical traditions (Garada, 2013; Doshi, 2003; Ritzer, 2004). The Figure-4 explains that the strength of structural-functional and conflict theoretical approaches seems to be have similar Nomothetic approaches as strength but non-similar system and dynamic approaches as opportunity. The Figure also explains

that though there has been similarity between different theoretical approaches they are in variation of SWOT analysis. Similarly there is a similar macro approaches found in both critical theory and neo-functional theories

but their dissimilar opportunities such as historical approach and system approach is found there respectively.

Figure 4 : SWOT Analysis of Theoretical Approaches

Sl.No.	Theory	Approach	S	W	O	T
1	Structural-Functionalism	Macro Approach	Nomothetic Approach	Narrative Approach	System Approach	Ahistorical Approach
2	Conflict Theory	Macro Approach	Nomothetic Approach	Reductionist Approach	Dynamic Approach	Conflicting in Nature
3	Critical Theory	Macro Approach	Nomothetic Approach	Pessimistic Approach	Historical Approach	Pro-Agency
4	Neo-Functionalism	Macro-Micro Approach	Nomothetic Ideographic Approach	Dualistic Approach	System Approach	Pro-Structure/Pro Agency
Theoretical Synthesis		Synthetic Approach	S	W	O	T
5	Functionalism-Neo-Functionalism And Conflict - Critical Theory	Macro-Micro Approach	Nomothetic-Ideographic	Teleological Approach	Ahistorical/Historical Approach	Structure- Agency Conflict

Source: Our Own

As a result, weakness and threat are dissimilar and more severe than the strength and opportunities found in the macro-sociological theories. In case of structural-functional approach the narrative approach and ahistorical approach are the weaknesses whereas it is the reductionist and conflicting tendency in the conflict theory. However, such weaknesses are rectified in the strength and opportunity of critical and neo-functional theories to some extent. Thus, the critical and neo-functional theories have immense possibilities of a synthetic approach in sociological theories. However, their synthesis cannot be free from their teleological approach and structure- agency conflict in sociology. The possibility of macro and micro approaches and of post-positivism greatly signifies in the Alexander's theory of neo-functionalism. However, it has neither any substantive alternative epistemological background nor substantive ontological identity. Thus, the questions of ethics in neo-functionalism are yet to proved. Now, it is worthwhile to note only how distinct is the neo-functionalism but also what it continues with the structural functionalism. In term of SWOT analysis the synthesis between macro-micro approaches however reveals both advantage and disadvantage for the sociologists. The potential synthesis between structural functionalism and neo-functionalism is the Nomothetic-ideographic approaches whereas between Conflict theory and Critical theory is the nomothetic approach as stated earlier. The Nomothetic approach against any speculative theorizing in sociology is largely being accepted in sociology. Thus, the potential synthesis of the Nomothetic-Ideographic approaches is assumed to be the strength but the dominating tendency of nomothetic over ideographic approaches remains the weakness in sociology.

V. EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL THESIS AND SYNTHESIS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

All macro- sociological theories hardly clear about their origin, nature, extend and possibility of knowledge in a certain manner. However, their knowledge claims on what social reality is and how real it is get resolved through their epistemological grounds. However, the epistemological grounds they provide for their claims on nature and extend of social reality as how much representative, reliable and valid is the significant questions. In fact, two important inquiries can be made through objective and subjective verification for their justification. In objective verification the positivistic epistemology with quantitative methods and techniques are emphasized whereas in subjective verification interpretative epistemology with qualitative methods and technique are emphasized (see, Law, 2004; Lin, 1998; Giddens, 1979; Fuller, 1991; Weber, 1949). The question is that which mode of verification is appropriate to unravel the origin, nature, extent and possibility of knowledge on social phenomena or social reality. In fact both the objective and subject mode of verifications is important for the understanding of social reality. However, the early macro- theories like structural-functionalism and conflict theories are perceived to have the former mode of verifications neglecting the latter mode of verification. As a result, the positivistic epistemology with quantitative methods and techniques has been dominating the interpretative epistemology with qualitative methods and techniques. Now to deal with the ontological questions of what is reality or nature of social reality the question of reliability, validity and representativeness of data whether qualitative or

quantitative is appropriate hardly resolved. It is because data remains and reflects through multiple ways. It is also true that all ways are not exclusive in themselves as it is very difficult to say that positivism is entirely different

from interpretivism. Both qualitative and quantitative data are also related to one another. These two data are analysed in statistical measures and non-statistical interpretation differently.

Figure 5 : Epistemological and Methodological Modes of Verification

Sl.No.	Modes of Verification	Epistemology	Methodology	Data	Analysis
1	Objective	Positivism	Quantitative Methods	Quantitative	Statistical Measures
2	Subjective	Interpretivism	Qualitative Methods	Qualitative	Non-Statistical Analysis

Source: Our Own

The structural functional theories based on the positivistic epistemology are applied with objective methodology and quantitative methods (Garada, 2013; Macionis, 2006; Brady, 2004; Corbetta, 2003).). Their ontological claims are proved because it is based on verifiable facts and universal law. It is logical and empirical in nature. The structural functionalists argue that social reality exists out of our influences and true because it is verifiable and governed by general law. But this perspective failed to explain the empirical possibilities in the society. The structural-functional explanation is therefore not scientific in true sense of its application (see, Garada, 2103 Homan, Doshi; 2003). Probably, it is therefore R.K.Merton reminded the norms of science that has not been institutionalized in the early functional theorizing. Sociology like any other social science to what extent institutionalizes in itself the general norms of science such as norms of disinterestedness, norms of communism, norms of universalism and norms of organized skepticism is still a matter of scrutiny. Dealing with a structure it becomes vague, unclear, and ambiguous theoretical project in sociology (see, for example, Abrahamson, 1978; Mills, 1959). In fact, as a grand theory it claims to study all societies is an illusion. And further comparative analysis is not possible in case of structural functionalism (Turner, 2013; Garada, 2013; Ritzer, 2004). Anti-empiricist bias is found to be there in structural functionalism as it is more concerned with abstract social systems instead of real societies as stated earlier. Like structural-functional theory the conflict theories are also perceived through positivistic epistemology. But unlike structural-functional theory its methodology and methods are assumed to be both objective and subjective and both quantitative and qualitative in nature. For instance, Marx's economic theory is largely based on empiricism and G.Simmel's conflict theory emphasised the anti-positivistic stand like that of Weberian interpretivism (Turner, 2013; Abraham). Thus, the conflict theorists not only react to the positivistic traditions of structural –functionalism but also continued with the positivistic tradition but with correction. Thus, the conflict theorists are more flexible and changeable with their outlook studying social realities. The methods applied in both structural-functional theories and conflict

theories are largely non-experimental such as comparative and case studies, observation and statistical analysis, etc. Since both theorists belief that the knowledge about the social reality/ phenomena based on objective facts their methodologies are nomothetic in nature. As for instance, individual entity is denied infavour of collective entity that is society. The theorists largely belief that the idiographic methodology (individual case/ experience) and speculative methodology (conjectural logic) cannot help visualising true social realities. In fact, the epistemology, methodology and methods nurtured through macro-sociological theories are positivistic, objective and quantitative in nature respectively as explained earlier. In this regards Garada (2013) rightly observes that “the psychic levels of all classical theorists were seemed to be positivistic and rationalistic in the beginning. In fact, what could be studied objectively charged with the battery of “etic methodology” and “collective rationality” became the subject matters of sociology” (Garada, 2013). In real life situation the emperistic values of science hardly hold any truth in the use of static analogies- organismic, linguistic and system which was the original defect of early sociology. It run through organic analogy emerged through the ideas of Comte and Spencer together. The positivistic and interpretative epistemology of conflict theories are better expressed in the post-positivistic framework of thinking in the critical sociology.

Figure 6 : Epistemological and Methodological Thesis of Sociological Theories

Sl.No	Theory	Epistemology	Methodology	Methods
1	Structural-Functionalism	Positivism	Objective	Quantitative
2	Conflict theory	Positivism/Interpretivism	Objective/ Subjective	Quantitative/ Qualitative
3	Critical theory	Post-Positivism	Subjective/ Subjective	Qualitative/ Qualitative
4	Neo-functionalism	Post-Positivism	Objective /Subjective	Quantitative-Qualitative

Source: Our Own

As a result, the sacrosanct tendency of positivism is broken with subjective methodology and qualitative methods in sociology. The critical theorists or Frankfurt school of thought are largely anti-positivists. However, the means and ends of conflict theories are improvised through critical theories in great respect. They argue that positivism has been an ideology for sustaining dominance and exploitation in the society. The social phenomena or social reality cannot be understood without their interpretations. The status

quoist assumption of structural functional theories, deterministic theory of Marxism hardly has any scope for interpretative epistemology. The critical theorists argue without understanding the social reality we cannot verify and predict the social phenomenon. The stereotypes of the positivism- representativeness, reliability and validity of epistemology, methodology and methods are no longer resolved in the contemporary societies. It is the epistemology of post-positivism which justified in this sense resolve the crisis of positivism in the sociology.

Figure 7 : Epistemological Continuum and Synthesis of Sociological Theories

Sl.No.	Theory	Continuum	Synthesis
1	Structural-Functionalism- Neo-Functionalism	Positivism	Post-Positivism
2	Conflict - Critical theory	Positivism	Post-Positivism
3	Functionalism- Neo-functionalism and Conflict - Critical theory	Positivism- Post-Positivism	Post-Positivism

Source: Our Own

The anti-dote of positivism – phenomenology and symbolic interactionism hold up the true existential epistemology, methodology and methods in sociology. Furthermore, the Figure-7 also explicates the strength of post-positivism in neo-functional theory. The neo-functionalism includes objective /subjective methodology and both quantitative and qualitative methods in exploring the social realities. The more the macro-sociology becoming flexible more flexible are epistemology, methodology and methods used in the sociology. If we see the origin, nature and extent of macro-sociological theories there are many instances of their continuum and synthesis among them in sociology. The Figure-7 in this respect visualise that the tradition of

positivism is the continuum between all the theories. The sense of positivism explains the intra and inters theoretical juxtaposition. For instance, within structural functionalism Parsons' analytical functionalism and Merton's empirical functionalism explain both theory and facts as equally important provided these are grounded through positivistic epistemology, methodology and methods in sociology. And between structural functional and neo-functional theories the traditions of positivism is reflected. Similarly within conflict theories the use of positivism is revealed although not like the use of traditional positivism as inbuilt in structural-functional theory.

Figure 8 : Methodological Synthesis of Sociological Theories

Sl.No	Theory	Methodological Synthesis
1	Structural-Functionalism- Neo-functionalism	Post-Positivism
2	Conflict - Critical theory	Positivism
3	Functionalism- Neo-functionalism and Conflict - Critical theory	Positivism and Post-Positivism

Source: Our Own

The tradition of positivism is also reflected between conflict theory and critical theory. Broadly the tradition of post-positivism is germinated by the critical theories and neo-functional theories in sociology. It is therefore, a synthetic understanding between the

macro-theories can be visualised in the Figure-8. For a synthesis of all theories in sociology it is important to see that there is a post-positivism tendency found in neo-functional theory and critical theory help synthesising the epistemology, methodology and

methods of structural-functional theories and conflict theories in sociology. The SWOT analysis explores the possibly and extent of theoretical epistemology and methodology for the future prospects of sociology. The positivism cum interpretivism and post-positivism are assumed to be the strength and opportunity in the process of epistemological synthesis among macro-sociological theories in the sociology. By empiricism and experience the social reality will be realized in this synthesis. However, the epistemological dualism spoils the established status of sociology as a scientific discipline. And by realizing this positivistic epistemology gets revitalized over its associate- interpretative epistemology in the process of synthesis in sociology.

For instance, in the name of positivism the empirical functionalism gets revitalized over analytical functionalism whereas in the name of realism the terror of objectivity remains intact in sociology (Garada, 2013). Thus, the objective methodology cannot be jeopardized in the process of methodological synthesis in sociology. However, the objective cum-subjective synthesis adds an appropriate value to the sociology. Addition to that the critical realism emerged in critical theories can better promote the future prospect of sociology. The Figure-9 also clears that the quantitative-cum qualitative methods are more practical approach to research question. But in applying so the sociologists overlook the limitation of their exclusive methods.

Figure 9 : SWOT Analysis of Sociological Theories

Sl.No	Synthetic Dimensions	S	W	O	T
1	Epistemology	Positivism cum- Interpretivism	Epistemological Dualism	Post-Positivism	Positivistic Epistemology Revitalized
2	Methodology	Objective cum- Subjective	Methodological Dualism	Realism and Critical Realism	Terror of Objectivity Remains
3	Methods	Quantitative cum-Qualitative	Limitation of Exclusive Methods Get Sidelined	Survey and Observation Methods Go Together	Quantitative Measures Perpetuate

Source: Our Own

VI. IDEOLOGICAL THESIS AND SYNTHESIS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES

The Figure-10 explicates the ideological bases of structural functionalism; neo-functionalism, conflict theory and critical theorizing include conservatism,

liberalism, radicalism and political liberalism respectively. While the liberalism promotes changes and individual freedoms the conservatism resists that, and the radicalism brings about the fundamental change challenging the established traditional social order.

Figure 10 : Ideological Thesis of Sociological Theories

Sl.No.	Theory	Ideology	Ideological continuum
1	Structural-Functionalism	Conservatism	Parsons's connection of positivism, utilitarianism and idealism
2	Neo-functionalism	Liberalism	Radicalism and Revising Parsons's Early Liberalism
3	Conflict theory	Radicalism	Early Marxist Hegelianism/Humanism
4	Critical theory	Political Liberalism	Marx's Analysis of Praxis/Activism

Source: Our Own

The liberalism in neo-functionalism is an inevitable correction of conservatism built in the theory of structural-functionalism whereas the radicalism in conflict theory is rectified in political liberalism of critical theory. The radicalism of conflict theory challenges the conservative collectivism and extreme individual liberalism. If we put the sociological theories into two block- rightist and leftist then the structural-functionalism belongs to former block whereas the conflict theory belong to latter block. But in fact, the radicalism may take shelter either in extreme economic conservatism for instance in term of economic reductionism or extreme liberalism for instance in term of capitalism. However, the ideological continuum between the major theories in sociology explains the needs of their rethinking. For instance, the Parsons's action frame of references, the

voluntaristic theory of action and pattern variables epitomise a continuum of positivism, utilitarianism and idealism. It is thus, the neo-functionalism was developed on the Parsons's functionalism. In fact, Parsons' attempt to capturing the essence of rationalism has been revised in neo-functionalism. Because of this tendency there has been a possibility of ideological synthesis between structural-functional and neo-functional theories.

Figure 11 : Ideological Synthesizing of Sociological Theories

Sl.No.	Theory	Ideological Synthesis
1	Structural-Functionalism- Neo-functionalism	Liberalism
2	Conflict - Critical theory	Political Liberalism
3	Functionalism- Neo-functionalism and Conflict -Critical theory	Liberalism

Source: Our Own

The Figure-10 explains that the prospect of liberalism is assumed to be there in the connection of structural-functionalism with neo-functionalism. There are also an ideological continuum between conflict theory and critical theory. For instance, the early Marxist Hegelianism/Humanism developed in Marx's conflict theory is largely reflected in the political liberalism of critical theory (Turner, 2013). Thus, the political liberalism might be the theoretical continuum exists between the conflict theory and critical theory in

sociology (Figure-11). The Figure-12 also clears that it is the political liberalism which explains the possibility of synthesis between two theories in sociology. Thus, taking all these four theories together their possibilities of ideological synthesize can be deconstructed in the sociology. And it is the liberalism in each theory however of their different degrees can be the common factor of synthesis. The SWOT analysis of ideological synthesis as assumed to be there in four theories explains different reflections.

Figure 12 : SWOT Analysis of Ideological Synthesis in Theoretical Sociology

Sl.No.	Theorizing	Ideological Synthesis	S	W	O	T
1	Structural-Functionalism- Neo-Functionalism	Liberalism	Pro-Idealism	Status Quoism	Revisionist, Reconstructionist Motivation	Elitism
2	Conflict - Critical theory	Political Liberalism	Pro-Realism	Determinism	Dialectical Conflict	Hegemonic control
3	Functionalism-Neo-Functionalism and Conflict - Critical theory	Liberalism	Idealism and Realism	Moving/Partial Equilibrium	Rationalization of neo-functionalism	Consensus and Dissensus

Source: Our Own

The synthetic tendency between structural-functionalism and neo-functionalism and between conflict and critical theory are assumed to be of pro-idealism and pro-realism respectively. The functionalism-neo-functionalism and conflict -critical theory therefore, can be synthesized through the inclusion of idealism and realism as they are already promoted in them. Thus, the inclusiveness of idealism with realism or vice-versa and of rationalization of neo-functionalism is assumed to the strength and opportunity in the ideological synthesis. However, the moving/partial equilibrium and dualism of consensus and dissensus mechanism perpetuate weakness and threat in the ideological synthesis.

VII. CONCLUSION

Thus, we can conclude that the dimensions of theoretical contrast, continuum and convergence reflect a mixed result on the prospect of sociology. The SWOT analysis exposes the dualism and dilemma of synthesizing the kernels of sociological theories at present context. However, such dualism and dilemmas need to be critically analysed through different dimensions that include- analogy, ontology, ideology,

approach, epistemology, methodology and methods as the most common conceptual measures of theoretical significance in sociology. The descriptive-cum dialectical analogy and inter/intra-theoretical motivations as the analogical synthesizers of sociological theories bring forth their strength as well as opportunity for the future prospect of sociology. However, SWOT analysis also reflects the weakness and threat of theoretical endism in the process of analogical synthesis of two different theoretical building blocks- the structural-functionalism-neo-functionalism and conflict- critical theory in their togetherness. The ontological autopsies of structural functionalism cannot be justified always as without agency there will be no structure. Thus, the potential possibilities of this dualism are somehow getting resolved through the neo-functionalism for their amicable ontological synthesis. Similarly the ontological dualism in conflict theories gets resolved through critical theories at their synthesis. However, the ontological rigidity in structural functionalism and the ontological contradiction in conflict theories and their continuities in neo-functionalism and critical sociology perpetuate theoretical weakness and threat in sociological analysis. In term of SWOT analysis the potential synthesis of the nomothetic-ideographic approaches is assumed to be

the strength but the dominating tendency of former over latter approaches perpetuate the weakness in sociology. The epistemological synthesis among macro-sociological theories though promotes the process of positivism cum-interpretivism and post-positivism as strength and opportunity respectively but cannot avoid their epistemological dualism. Consequently such epistemological dualism spoils the established status of sociology as a scientific discipline. The methodological synthesis draws a great deal of methodological triangulation in building sociological theories in sociology. Further, the objective cum-subjective synthesis adds an appropriate value to the sociology. Addition to that the critical realism emerged in critical theories can better promote the future prospect of sociology. The quantitative-cum qualitative methods are more practical methodological approach to research question. But in applying so the sociologists overlook the limitation of exclusive methodology and methods that so far are being used in sociology. Thus, the inclusiveness of the neo-functional liberalism with critical realism of critical theory is assumed to the strength and opportunity in their ideological synthesis. However, the dualism of consensus and dissensus mechanism perpetuates weakness and threat in the ideological synthesis. Now, the sociologists have to rethink the entire epistemological discourses developed through Durkhemian positivism, Marxian dialectical materialism and Weberian interpretivism for a better future in sociology.

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