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BA Sociology Honours | Semester III | Calicut University

Fundamentals of Social Research

Course Code: SOC3CJ202 • Module 1

Module 1: Foundations of Social Research

Course: SOC3CJ202 – Fundamentals of Social Research • **University of Calicut (CUFYUGP 2024)**

1. Curricular Orientation & Theoretical Foundations

Module 1 ("Foundations of Social Research") within *Fundamentals of Social Research* provides third-semester undergraduate scholars with rigorous conceptual, epistemological, and empirical training. In sociological thought, social reality is never an arbitrary collection of isolated actions; rather, it constitutes an emergent, dynamically structured matrix of historical practices, material relationships, institutional apparatuses, and symbolic systems.

At the intermediate undergraduate level, sociology transitions from introductory foundational concepts to in-depth theoretical analysis, methodological sophistication, and critical empirical application. This module interrogates the historical genesis, structural mechanics, and political-economic implications of its subject matter, enabling learners to contextualize modern social transformations within broader sub-continental and global currents.

> **Pedagogical Inquiries of Module 1**
>
> **Core Analytical Themes:** How do macroscopic institutional and economic forces shape the microscopic realities of everyday life? What theoretical paradigms best illuminate the contradictions, tensions, and reproduction of order within modern society? In what ways does the historical trajectory of India and Keralam illustrate, challenge, or refine classical and contemporary sociological models?

2. Comprehensive Analysis of Philosophical Moorings of Social Research: Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology

The scholarly investigation of **Philosophical Moorings of Social Research: Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology** constitutes an indispensable pillar of this module. Within sociological discourse, this domain addresses core structural contradictions, institutional practices, and theoretical debates that have preoccupied social scientists for over a century. From classical nineteenth-century formulations to contemporary critical perspectives, scholars have explored how social forces shape subjective experiences and objective material realities.

Analyzing philosophical moorings of social research: ontology, epistemology, and methodology requires unbundling its multi-layered dimensions. Social practices are neither natural nor unchangeable; they are socially constructed and historically situated. Sociologists dissect the specific institutional mechanisms, normative frameworks, and power asymmetries that sustain or transform these arrangements over time.

2.1. Theoretical Traditions and Scholarly Formulations

The intellectual literature concerning philosophical moorings of social research: ontology, epistemology, and methodology reflects rich theoretical plurality. Positivist and functionalist paradigms conceptualize social patterns through the lens of systemic integration, functional imperatives, and equilibrium maintenance. Conversely, conflict, critical, and feminist traditions analyze how these patterns embody structural inequalities, class domination, caste privilege, and patriarchal control.

Furthermore, interpretative and phenomenological traditions illuminate how human actors actively negotiate meanings, construct symbols, and navigate institutional demands in everyday life. In modern sociological theory, these disparate traditions converge through structuration theory, subaltern critique, and post-structuralist discourse analysis.

Theoretical Framework	Primary Analytical Focus	Underlying Epistemological Stance	Application to Philosophical Moorings o
Structural Functionalism	Systemic integration, institutional roles, social equilibrium	Society as an integrated whole fulfilling vital functional needs	Examines the systemic contributions of philosophical moorings of social research: ontology, epistemology, and methodology to social stability.
Conflict & Critical Theory	Power monopolies, class exploitation, structural inequality	Institutions serve the material interests of dominant ruling groups	Unmasks how philosophical moorings of social research: ontology, epistemology, and methodology reinforces structural domination and privilege.
Interpretative & Phenomenological	Subjective intentionality, symbolic interaction, lived experience	Social reality is constructed through intersubjective meaning-making	Analyzes how actors experience, interpret, and perform philosophical moorings of social research: ontology, epistemology, and methodology.
Subaltern & Post-Colonial	Marginalized standpoints, anti-caste critique, decolonization	Universalized Western models obscure subaltern colonial realities	Reinterprets philosophical moorings of social research: ontology, epistemology, and methodology from the perspectives of Dalits, Adivasis, and workers.

2.2. Institutional Structures and Empirical Realities

In contemporary empirical reality, philosophical moorings of social research: ontology, epistemology, and methodology operates across diverse social spaces—including family arrangements, state apparatuses, corporate workplaces, community organizations, and mass media platforms. These institutional sites demonstrate how abstract societal values and economic dictates are translated into tangible behavioral expectations and differential resource distributions.

Within the Indian socio-cultural matrix, traditional structures frequently articulate with modern bureaucratic, market, and technological forces. Rather than experiencing simple unilinear modernization, Indian society exhibits complex configurations where traditional caste hierarchies, kinship networks, and religious identities fuse with modern democratic politics, neoliberal capitalism, and consumer culture.

Sociological Fieldwork Insight: Empirical Complexities in India & Keralam

Within the empirical setting of Keralam, **Philosophical Moorings of Social Research: Ontology, Epistemology, and Methodology** takes on distinctive characteristics. The state's celebrated history of subaltern social reform (Kerala Navodhanam), radical land reforms dismantling the feudal Janmi system, universal public education, expansive welfare safety nets, and heavy reliance on transnational migration and Gulf remittances provides a unique sociological laboratory for observing social change, institutional democratization, and second-generation development challenges.

2.3. Critical Methodological and Epistemological Issues

Methodologically, studying philosophical moorings of social research: ontology, epistemology, and methodology requires acute reflexivity. Sociologists must scrutinize the assumptions inherent in their data collection techniques, navigating between quantitative demographic surveys, qualitative ethnographic fieldwork, and critical discourse analysis.

Moreover, an intersectional analytical lens is indispensable. The intersecting axes of caste, social class, gender roles, regional location, and generational status must be simultaneously evaluated to comprehend the diverse lived realities of social actors in contemporary society.

3. Comprehensive Analysis of Positivist vs. Interpretative Paradigms in Social Inquiry

The scholarly investigation of **Positivist vs. Interpretative Paradigms in Social Inquiry** constitutes an indispensable pillar of this module. Within sociological discourse, this domain addresses core structural contradictions, institutional practices, and theoretical debates that have preoccupied social scientists for over a century. From classical nineteenth-century formulations to contemporary critical perspectives, scholars have explored how social forces shape subjective experiences and objective material realities.

Analyzing positivist vs. interpretative paradigms in social inquiry requires unbundling its multi-layered dimensions. Social practices are neither natural nor unchangeable; they are socially constructed and historically situated. Sociologists dissect the specific institutional mechanisms, normative frameworks, and power asymmetries that sustain or transform these arrangements over time.

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Theoretical Framework	Primary Analytical Focus	Underlying Epistemological Stance	Application to Positivist vs. Interpret
Structural Functionalism	Systemic integration, institutional roles, social equilibrium	Society as an integrated whole fulfilling vital functional needs	Examines the systemic contributions of positivist vs. interpretative paradigms in social inquiry to social stability.
Conflict & Critical Theory	Power monopolies, class exploitation, structural inequality	Institutions serve the material interests of dominant ruling groups	Unmasks how positivist vs. interpretative paradigms in social inquiry reinforces structural domination and privilege.
Interpretative & Phenomenological	Subjective intentionality, symbolic interaction, lived experience	Social reality is constructed through intersubjective meaning-making	Analyzes how actors experience, interpret, and perform positivist vs. interpretative paradigms in social inquiry.
Subaltern & Post-Colonial	Marginalized standpoints, anti-caste critique, decolonization	Universalized Western models obscure subaltern colonial realities	Reinterprets positivist vs. interpretative paradigms in social inquiry from the perspectives of Dalits, Adivasis, and workers.

3.2. Institutional Structures and Empirical Realities

In contemporary empirical reality, positivist vs. interpretative paradigms in social inquiry operates across diverse social spaces—including family arrangements, state apparatuses, corporate workplaces, community organizations, and mass media platforms. These institutional sites demonstrate how abstract societal values and economic dictates are translated into tangible behavioral expectations and differential resource distributions.

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3.3. Critical Methodological and Epistemological Issues

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4. Comprehensive Analysis of Scientific Method in Social Sciences: Characteristics, Potentials, and Limitations

The scholarly investigation of **Scientific Method in Social Sciences: Characteristics, Potentials, and Limitations** constitutes an indispensable pillar of this module. Within sociological discourse, this domain addresses core structural contradictions, institutional practices, and theoretical debates that have preoccupied social scientists for over a century. From classical nineteenth-century formulations to contemporary critical perspectives, scholars have explored how social forces shape subjective experiences and objective material realities.

Analyzing scientific method in social sciences: characteristics, potentials, and limitations requires unbundling its multi-layered dimensions. Social practices are neither natural nor unchangeable; they are socially constructed and historically situated. Sociologists dissect the specific institutional mechanisms, normative frameworks, and power asymmetries that sustain or transform these arrangements over time.

4.1. Theoretical Traditions and Scholarly Formulations

The intellectual literature concerning scientific method in social sciences: characteristics, potentials, and limitations reflects rich theoretical plurality. Positivist and functionalist paradigms conceptualize social patterns through the lens of systemic integration, functional imperatives, and equilibrium maintenance. Conversely, conflict, critical, and feminist traditions analyze how these patterns embody structural inequalities, class domination, caste privilege, and patriarchal control.

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Theoretical Framework	Primary Analytical Focus	Underlying Epistemological Stance	Application to Scientific Method in Soc
Structural Functionalism	Systemic integration, institutional roles, social equilibrium	Society as an integrated whole fulfilling vital functional needs	Examines the systemic contributions of scientific method in social sciences: characteristics, potentials, and limitations to social stability.
Conflict & Critical Theory	Power monopolies, class exploitation, structural inequality	Institutions serve the material interests of dominant ruling groups	Unmasks how scientific method in social sciences: characteristics, potentials, and limitations reinforces structural domination and privilege.

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Interpretative & Phenomenological	Subjective intentionality, symbolic interaction, lived experience	Social reality is constructed through intersubjective meaning-making	Analyzes how actors experience, interpret, and perform scientific method in social sciences: characteristics, potentials, and limitations.
Subaltern & Post-Colonial	Marginalized standpoints, anti-caste critique, decolonization	Universalized Western models obscure subaltern colonial realities	Reinterprets scientific method in social sciences: characteristics, potentials, and limitations from the perspectives of Dalits, Adivasis, and workers.

4.2. Institutional Structures and Empirical Realities

In contemporary empirical reality, scientific method in social sciences: characteristics, potentials, and limitations operates across diverse social spaces—including family arrangements, state apparatuses, corporate workplaces, community organizations, and mass media platforms. These institutional sites demonstrate how abstract societal values and economic dictates are translated into tangible behavioral expectations and differential resource distributions.

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5. Comprehensive Analysis of Inductive vs. Deductive Logic in Sociological Investigation

The scholarly investigation of **Inductive vs. Deductive Logic in Sociological Investigation** constitutes an indispensable pillar of this module. Within sociological discourse, this domain addresses core structural contradictions, institutional practices, and theoretical debates that have preoccupied social scientists for over a century. From classical nineteenth-century formulations to contemporary critical perspectives, scholars have explored how social forces shape subjective experiences and objective material realities.

Analyzing inductive vs. deductive logic in sociological investigation requires unbundling its multi-layered dimensions. Social practices are neither natural nor unchangeable; they are socially constructed and historically situated. Sociologists dissect the specific institutional mechanisms, normative frameworks, and power asymmetries that sustain or transform these arrangements over time.

5.1. Theoretical Traditions and Scholarly Formulations

The intellectual literature concerning inductive vs. deductive logic in sociological investigation reflects rich theoretical plurality. Positivist and functionalist paradigms conceptualize social patterns through the lens of systemic integration, functional imperatives, and equilibrium maintenance. Conversely, conflict, critical, and feminist traditions analyze how these patterns embody structural inequalities, class domination, caste privilege, and patriarchal control.

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Theoretical Framework	Primary Analytical Focus	Underlying Epistemological Stance	Application to Inductive vs. Deductive
Structural Functionalism	Systemic integration, institutional roles, social equilibrium	Society as an integrated whole fulfilling vital functional needs	Examines the systemic contributions of inductive vs. deductive logic in sociological investigation to social stability.
Conflict & Critical Theory	Power monopolies, class exploitation, structural inequality	Institutions serve the material interests of dominant ruling groups	Unmasks how inductive vs. deductive logic in sociological investigation reinforces structural domination and privilege.
Interpretative & Phenomenological	Subjective intentionality, symbolic interaction, lived experience	Social reality is constructed through intersubjective meaning-making	Analyzes how actors experience, interpret, and perform inductive vs. deductive logic in sociological investigation.
Subaltern & Post-Colonial	Marginalized standpoints, anti-caste critique, decolonization	Universalized Western models obscure subaltern colonial realities	Reinterprets inductive vs. deductive logic in sociological investigation from the perspectives of Dalits, Adivasis, and workers.

5.2. Institutional Structures and Empirical Realities

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Methodologically, studying inductive vs. deductive logic in sociological investigation requires acute reflexivity. Sociologists must scrutinize the assumptions inherent in their data collection techniques, navigating between quantitative demographic surveys, qualitative ethnographic fieldwork, and critical discourse analysis.

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6. Comparative Analytical Matrix & Applied Case Study

To achieve comprehensive academic synthesis of Module 1, the multidimensional elements of this subject matter are systematically contrasted across distinct socio-historical paradigms in the comparative matrix below:

Comparative Parameter	Traditional / Pre-Modern Context	Modern Industrial & Colonial Period	Contemporary Globalized & Digital Era
Organizing Principle	Ascriptive status, ritual hierarchy, localized agrarian subsistence	Rational-legal bureaucracy, capital accumulation, urbanization	Networked information flows, flexible labor, global consumerism
Power & Hegemony	Feudal landlords, religious orthodoxy, traditional monarchies	Colonial administrative apparatus, modern state institutions, industrial elites	Transnational corporations, technocratic governance, algorithmic platforms

Comparative Parameter	Traditional / Pre-Modern Context	Modern Industrial & Colonial Period	Contemporary Globalized & Digital Era
Subjectivity & Agency	Collective corporate identity rooted in lineage, caste, or village	Civic citizen identity, trade union solidarity, anti-colonial nationalism	Individualized, fluid, and reflexive identities shaped by media and consumption
Modes of Resistance	Peasant revolts, religious millenarianism, everyday non-compliance	Socio-religious reform movements, organized labor strikes, electoral politics	Decentralized digital networks, identity-based movements, environmental activism

Applied Sociological Case Study: Institutional Transformations in Keralam

Empirical Context: Kerala's historical trajectory offers a remarkable case study for examining institutional transformation. From a rigid 19th-century caste feudal structure characterized by severe untouchability and unapproachability (famously described by Swami Vivekananda as a "lunatic asylum"), the region transformed into one of the most egalitarian and politically conscious states in South Asia.

Analytical Evaluation: Applying the concepts of Module 1, students analyze how the confluence of subaltern reform mobilizations (Sree Narayana Guru, Ayyankali), missionary and state education, radical political unionism, the 1969 Land Reforms Act, and mass migration to the Persian Gulf fundamentally restructured traditional social hierarchies. However, contemporary sociologists also examine emerging contradictions: persistent gender asymmetries in the formal workforce, high elderly dependency ratios, youth out-migration, and ecological vulnerabilities.

7. Applied Policy Dimensions & Social Interventions

Sociological analysis provides vital diagnostics for informing progressive social policy, grassroots development programs, and community welfare initiatives. The theoretical principles analyzed in this module yield actionable insights across multiple applied arenas:

- **Targeted Social Policy Interventions:** Designing social security programs that address systemic, structural disadvantages faced by marginalized communities rather than deploying paternalistic, piecemeal relief.
- **Participatory Community Planning:** Integrating participatory rural appraisal (PRA), local social auditing, and decentralized governance models to ensure community ownership and democratic accountability.
- **Human Rights & Social Equity Advocacy:** Supplying rigorous empirical evidence and conceptual frameworks to expose structural violence, discrimination, and exclusion before policy-makers and judiciary.
- **Organizational Development & Conflict Resolution:** Enhancing diversity management, ethical communication, and collaborative team functioning in public institutions, non-profit organizations, and social enterprises.

8. Pedagogical Synthesis & Examination Preparation

In concluding Module 1 ("Foundations of Social Research"), students should consolidate their command of the central theoretical paradigms, comparative taxonomies, and empirical debates examined. Mastering sociology requires developing the capacity to critically interrogate social structures, challenge commonsense assumptions, and evaluate institutional dynamics with analytical rigor.

Key Concept / Theorist	Foundational Sociological Definition	Analytical & Curricular Significance
Structural Inequality	Systematically unequal distribution of resources, power, and opportunities built into social institutions.	Demonstrates that disparities are structured outcomes of institutional arrangements rather than individual deficiencies.
Social Hegemony (Antonio Gramsci)	Dominance maintained through cultural leadership and moral consensus rather than physical force.	Explains how ruling groups win the spontaneous consent of subordinate classes through ideological institutions.
Cultural Capital (Pierre Bourdieu)	Accumulated cultural knowledge, linguistic skills, credentials, and dispositions conferring social power.	Illuminates how educational institutions reproduce class hierarchies under the guise of meritocracy.
Epistemological Reflexivity	The systematic practice of scrutinizing the researcher's own positionality, assumptions, and power relations.	Guarantees methodological integrity and ethical rigor in qualitative and quantitative social research.

Self-Assessment & Critical Examination Questions

1. Critically evaluate the theoretical debates and foundational concepts articulated in foundations of social research, contrasting functionalist and conflict approaches.
2. Examine how historical transformations, state interventions, and social movements in India and Keralam have reshaped institutional structures and power dynamics.
3. Discuss the methodological challenges and ethical responsibilities involved in empirical sociological inquiry into contemporary social problems.
4. Analyze the practical relevance of sociological insights in designing inclusive development policies and empowering marginalized communities.

Advanced Academic Seminar: Epistemological Controversies & Methodological Debates

To foster advanced scholarship in *Foundations of Social Research*, undergraduate students must engage deeply with the epistemological tensions and theoretical innovations that characterize contemporary sociological discourse. This seminar section provides an exhaustive, multi-perspectival examination of contested paradigms and empirical methodologies.

1. Paradigm Shifts: From Positivism to Post-Colonial and Subaltern Epistemologies

The historical development of sociological theory reflects continuous paradigm shifts. Early nineteenth-century sociology was dominated by positivist epistemology, which asserted that the social world could be investigated using the exact same empirical and deductive methods as the natural sciences. Auguste Comte and early positivists championed the discovery of invariant social laws, asserting that social phenomena could be objectively measured, quantified, and predicted.

However, the hermeneutic and interpretative revolt initiated by Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber fundamentally challenged this positivist orthodoxy. Weber demonstrated that human action is infused with subjective meaning, intentionality, and cultural values that cannot be reduced to mechanistic natural laws.

The task of sociology, therefore, is *Verstehen*—the interpretive understanding of subjective social action within its specific historical and cultural matrix.

In contemporary twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholarship, this interpretative critique has been dramatically radicalized by subaltern studies and post-colonial theory. Scholars such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Edward Said, and Dipesh Chakrabarty argue that Euro-Western sociology historically universalized the parochial historical experiences of Western Europe, positioning the Western nation-state, capitalist economy, and nuclear family as the normative teleology of human progress. Subaltern sociology insists on de-centering Western canons, retrieving the suppressed histories and conceptual categories of colonized peoples, and recognizing subaltern agency in resisting systemic oppression.

Epistemological Paradigm	Core Methodological Assumption	View of Social Reality (Ontology)	Scholarly Representation
Positivism	Empirical observation, quantitative measurement, universal causal laws	Objective, external social facts operating independently of actor consciousness	Auguste Comte, early Emile Durkheim
Hermeneutics & Interpretivism	Qualitative understanding, *Verstehen*, thick ethnographic description	Intersubjectively created meanings, cultural symbols, and purposeful action	Max Weber, Alfred Schutz, Clifford Geertz
Critical & Neo-Marxian	Critique of ideology, historical materialism, dialectical inquiry	Structural contradictions, economic exploitation, class and cultural hegemony	Karl Marx, Frankfurt School, Antonio Gramsci
Post-Colonial & Subaltern	Decolonization of knowledge, standpoints of the marginalized	Plural, contested realities shaped by coloniality, caste, and imperial legacies	B.R. Ambedkar, Ranajit Guha, Gayatri Spivak

2. Intersectionality and the Complexity of Power Relations

A major theoretical breakthrough in contemporary sociology is the framework of intersectionality, originally articulated by Kimberlé Crenshaw and expanded by Patricia Hill Collins and bell hooks. Intersectionality contends that distinct modalities of social categorization—such as caste, class, gender, race, sexuality, religion, and physical ability—do not operate as independent, additive variables; rather, they form an interconnected, mutually reinforcing matrix of domination.

In the Indian sociological context, Dalit feminist scholars (such as Sharmila Rege and Gopal Guru) demonstrated that mainstream Indian sociology and upper-caste feminist movements long ignored the distinct structural oppression experienced by Dalit women. A Dalit woman does not experience gender discrimination and caste oppression as separate burdens; she encounters a unique, indivisible form of structural violence at the intersection of caste patriarchy, economic landlessness, and untouchability. Applying intersectional analysis to foundations of social research enables researchers to expose hidden dimensions of privilege and marginalization that unidimensional frameworks inevitably miss.

> **Theoretical Formulation: Intersectional Matrix of Domination**
>
> *"The matrix of domination refers to the overall organization of hierarchical power in which any particular society is embedded... Intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, and nation cannot be understood without analyzing how institutional, symbolic, and individual dimensions of power interlock."* – Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*.

3. Methodological Reflexivity and Applied Social Ethics

Modern social research rejects the naive fiction of the completely detached, value-free researcher. Every investigator operates from a specific social location, gender identity, caste status, and cultural background that inevitably shapes the selection of research problems, the formulation of theoretical categories, and the interpretation of empirical findings.

Epistemological reflexivity requires researchers to make their positionality explicit and to continuously interrogate their own power relations with research participants. In studying subaltern and vulnerable communities, sociologists must adhere to rigorous ethical protocols: securing genuine informed consent, preserving informant confidentiality, avoiding voyeuristic representations of suffering, and ensuring that the knowledge produced contributes directly to the emancipation and empowerment of the communities studied.

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