

RESTRUCTURING SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND APPROACHES IN A TRANSDISCIPLINARY PLATFORM

Prof. (Dr.) Dibyendu Bhattacharyya¹

Department of Education, University of Kalyani, Kalyani, Nadia, West Bengal, India

Email: db.ku@rediffmail.com

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6354-8619>

Subrata Halder² Ph.D. Research scholar, Department of Education, University of Kalyani, Kalyani, Nadia, West Bengal, India

Email: subratah914@gmail.com,

Orcid : <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9928-6028>

Abstract

The rapid expansion of urbanization and technology uptake in India has significantly altered the traditional social landscape, reshaping social structures, institutions, and interpersonal relationships. This transformation has particularly affected the family system, which historically functioned as the primary social unit within Indian society. The gradual shift from extended and joint family structures toward nuclear and single-parent families reflects a profound restructuring of the primary social group and its traditional functions. Such structural transitions challenge classical sociological frameworks, particularly Structural Functionalism, which assumes stability and interdependence between social structures and their functions. In contemporary Indian society, the weakening or transformation of traditional structures raises questions about the continued relevance of functionalist explanations.

This paper argues that the changing dynamics of social organization require a restructured sociological perspective that moves beyond rigid structural explanations toward a more flexible, transdisciplinary framework. The study proposes the integration of Collaborative Functionalism and Social Interactionism as alternative analytical approaches capable of addressing emerging social realities. Collaborative Functionalism emphasizes collective adaptation, cooperation, and evolving group dynamics in maintaining social order, while Social Interactionism focuses on micro-level interactions and meaning-making processes within rapidly changing urban contexts.

Through a qualitative methodological approach, the research explores social perspectives emerging from urbanization, family restructuring, and shifting social roles in India. The study relies on logical interpretation of sociological theories, contemporary social patterns, and conceptual analysis to understand how evolving social agendas influence institutional functioning and social cohesion. By adopting a transdisciplinary platform that bridges sociology with urban studies, cultural studies, and social psychology, this paper attempts to

“unfreeze” traditional sociological frameworks and propose a dynamic analytical model suited to modern Indian society.

The findings suggest that contemporary social transformations require sociological approaches that acknowledge fluidity, collaboration, and interaction within evolving social systems. The proposed restructuring of sociological perspectives aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of social change, institutional adaptation, and collective identity formation in a rapidly urbanizing India.

Keywords: *family structure, structural functionalism, collaborative functionalism, social interaction, social change, transdisciplinary sociology, Indian social structure*

1. Introduction:

The discipline of sociology emerged in the nineteenth century as a systematic attempt to comprehend the structural dimensions of modern society — its institutions, stratifications, and integrative mechanisms. Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Émile Durkheim, and Talcott Parsons collectively elaborated a framework in which society could be understood as a structured totality whose constituent parts fulfilled differentiated yet interdependent functions. This paradigm, known broadly as structural functionalism, dominated sociological theory through the mid-twentieth century and continues to exert significant influence on institutional analyses and policy frameworks.

Yet the social landscape of the twenty-first century — characterized by mass urbanization, digital connectivity, the reconfiguration of kinship and family, the rise of networked individualism, and the erosion of stable institutional affiliations — poses fundamental challenges to the assumptions underlying classical structural-functional theory. The question is no longer merely whether particular social institutions are changing, but whether the theoretical vocabulary through which sociologists have historically interpreted social life remains adequate to the phenomenology of contemporary existence.

India, the world's most populous democracy, is undergoing one of the most sweeping social transformations in its recorded history. Driven by accelerating urbanization, digital connectivity, economic liberalization, and the erosion of traditional caste-based occupational structures, the social landscape of contemporary India is being fundamentally 'unfrozen' — a metaphor drawn from Kurt Lewin's theory of organizational change (1947) — from the sedimented norms, roles, and institutions that structured its social life for centuries. The sociological study of India has long been dominated by frameworks rooted in Western academic traditions — most notably Structural Functionalism as elaborated by Talcott Parsons (1951) and Robert Merton (1949) — even as Indian sociologists such as M.N. Srinivas (1952), A.R. Desai (1948), and Yogendra Singh (1973) have sought to develop more contextually grounded analyses. Today, neither the Western functionalist canon nor its Indian adaptations appear fully adequate to the task of explaining the complexity, fluidity, and emergent character of Indian social life in the twenty-first century.

2. Rational of the study:

The title 'Restructuring Sociological Perspectives and Approaches in a Transdisciplinary Platform' was consciously selected to capture the triple imperative confronting contemporary Indian sociology: the necessity of restructuring (not merely refining) existing theoretical frameworks; the centrality of perspectives and approaches as the objects of reform; and the imperative of transdisciplinarity as the epistemological platform through which such restructuring must occur.

Classical sociological frameworks, particularly Structural Functionalism, are theoretically inadequate for the analysis of contemporary Indian social realities characterized by rapid urbanization, family restructuring, normative pluralism, and the emergence of new collaborative and interactional forms of social organization. The persistence of these inadequate frameworks in Indian academic sociology generates a systematic misalignment between sociological theory and social reality, with consequent impoverishment of both theoretical understanding and practical social analysis.

'Sociological Perspectives and Approaches' indicates that the target of restructuring is both theoretical (how we conceptualize social reality) and methodological (how we analyze it). 'Transdisciplinary Platform' signals that the reconstruction must occur across disciplinary boundaries, integrating insights from urban studies, social psychology, development economics, political philosophy, and indigenous Indian intellectual traditions.

The specific trigger for this research is the observable disjuncture between the accelerating pace of social change in contemporary India and the relative stagnation of the theoretical frameworks through which that change is analyzed. India's sociological establishment continues to deploy frameworks — Structural Functionalism foremost among them — that were developed to analyze social realities fundamentally different from those confronting twenty-first century India. This disjuncture is not merely an academic problem; it has practical consequences for social policy, welfare provision, community development, and the quality of sociological education offered to students across Indian universities.

3. Review of the related studies:

The following review of related studies critically outlines major theoretical and empirical contributions to understanding social change, identity formation, and structural transformation in Indian society:

Sr. No.	Title	Year	Authors/ Agency	Research Methodology	Aims and Objectives	Findings
1	Digital Transformation and Social Structure	2023	TRAI; Banaji & Bhat	Secondary data analysis, digital society studies	To understand how digital technology affects social interaction and community structures in India	Digital platforms have created new forms of social networks, community collaboration, and also new challenges like misinformation and online divisions.
2	COVID-19 Pandemic and Accelerated Social Change	2020	India Migration Now Initiative	Policy analysis and migration studies	To examine the impact of the pandemic on migration and social institutions	The pandemic showed the importance of informal social networks and village ties while exposing weaknesses in urban institutional support systems.
3	Family Structure Transformation in India	2019-21	National Family Health Survey (NFHS-5), 2019-21	Large-scale national survey	To study changing family patterns and household structures in India	Nuclear families and single-parent households are increasing, especially in urban areas.
4	Social Interaction and Identity in Modern India	2010	Thorat & Newman	Field studies and social discrimination research	To analyze how caste identity operates in urban social interactions	Caste discrimination continues in cities but is often managed or hidden through everyday social interactions.
5	Urban Modernity and Social Identity	2000	Dipankar Gupta	Sociological analysis and theoretical study	To understand contradictions of modernity and identity in Indian urban society	Individuals manage multiple identities such as caste, class, and religion in urban settings.
6	Social Capital and Community Collaboration	1999	Narayan & Pritchett	Development research and community studies	To examine how social capital influences development and cooperation	Strong community networks and collaboration improve social and economic outcomes.
7	Social Identity Theory and Group Dynamics	1979	Henri Tajfel & John Turner	Social psychology theory and experimental studies	To explain how group membership influences behavior and social perception	Group identity shapes collective action, competition, and social cohesion.
8	Transformation of the Indian Family	1974	I.P. Shah	Sociological field studies	To study changes in the joint family	The joint family adapts to modern conditions even when nuclear

Sr. No.	Title	Year	Authors/ Agency	Research Methodology	Aims and Objectives	Findings
					system in modern India	families become more common.
9	Caste, Class and Power in Indian Society	1965	André Beteille	Village fieldwork and sociological analysis	To examine relationships between caste, class, and power	Traditional social structures interact with modern democratic systems, creating both integration and conflict.
10	Sanskritization and Social Mobility	1966	M.N. Srinivas	Ethnographic research	To study social mobility and caste change in Indian society	Lower castes adopt upper-caste practices to improve social status.
11	The Indian Joint Family System	1966	K.M. Kapadia	Historical and sociological analysis	To examine the structure and functions of the joint family	The joint family has been a central and durable institution in Indian society.
12	The Social System (Structural Functionalism)	1951	Talcott Parsons	Theoretical sociological framework	To explain how social institutions maintain stability and order	Social institutions perform different functions to maintain social balance.
13	Structural Functionalism Refinement	1949	Robert K. Merton	Sociological theory development	To refine functionalist theory by introducing new concepts	Distinguished between manifest and latent functions and recognized social dysfunctions.
14	Political Economy of Indian Urbanization	1948	A.R. Desai	Marxist sociological analysis	To analyze urbanization within colonial and capitalist economic structures	Urbanization increases class inequality and social stratification.
15	Caste and Social Inequality	1936	B.R. Ambedkar	Critical social and political analysis	To critique the caste system and its impact on social mobility	Caste is a system of graded inequality that restricts freedom and social progress.
16	Symbolic Interactionism	1934	George Herbert Mead	Social psychological theory	To understand how social interaction shapes identity and meaning	Human behavior and identity develop through communication and interaction.
17	Division of Labour in Society	1893	Emile Durkheim	Classical sociological theory	To explain social solidarity in traditional and modern societies	Modern societies move from mechanical solidarity to organic solidarity through division of labour.

4. Research Gaps:

A literature review of the sociological literature and sociological theory more broadly reveals five significant research gaps that the present study addresses.

1. Absence of a Theoretically Integrated Account of Urbanization-Driven Social Unfreezing in India.
2. Theoretical Inadequacy in Explaining Single-Parent Family Functional Adequacy in the Indian Context.
3. Incomplete Systematic Critique of Structural Functionalism's Core Assumptions Against Indian Empirical Evidence.
4. Under-theorization of Collaborative Social Organization as a Sociologically Significant Mode of Indian Social Life.
5. Absence of an Integrated Transdisciplinary Platform for Contemporary Indian Sociological Analysis.

5. Research Questions

Four research questions, each grounded in the identified research gaps and aligned with the thematic pillars of the paper:

1. How does rapid urbanization in India disrupt traditional social structures, and what specific relational patterns are emerging within contemporary urban and peri-urban communities?
2. How does the shift from joint families to nuclear and single-parent households redefine the "primary social group," and what are the resulting impacts on individual identity and social function?
3. To what extent can Structural Functionalism explain the transitions of modern Indian institutions, and where does the Indian context expose the limitations of this framework?
4. How do Collaborative Functionalism and Reconstituted Social Interactionism better capture the complexities of Indian social life compared to traditional models?

6. Research Methodology

This study employs a Qualitative Documentary Analysis (QDA) methodology, a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents — both printed and electronic — to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge.

First, theoretical qualitative inquiry: the critical engagement with existing theoretical frameworks through logical analysis, conceptual deconstruction, and synthetic reconstruction.

Second, secondary qualitative analysis: the interpretive engagement with existing qualitative empirical studies of Indian social life — particularly studies of urbanization, family structure, caste dynamics, and collective action — to ground theoretical propositions in documented social realities.

7. Discussion and Analysis:

The following sections provide a detailed analytical discussion of each of the four thematic pillars identified in this research, integrating theoretical perspectives with evidence from the Indian social context

7.1 Unfreezing Social Landscape and structure with the passage of growing urbanization:

Urbanization and Social Landscape Transformation



Kurt Lewin's 'unfreezing' concept, drawn originally from organizational change theory, provides a powerful metaphor for understanding what urbanization does to social structures. Just as frozen water must be unfrozen before it can be reshaped, social structures — ossified through centuries of tradition, ritual, and institutional inertia — must first be destabilized before new configurations can emerge. In India, urbanization functions as the primary unfreezing agent, disrupting the normative certainties of caste hierarchy, religious observance, gender roles, and community obligation that structured rural social life.

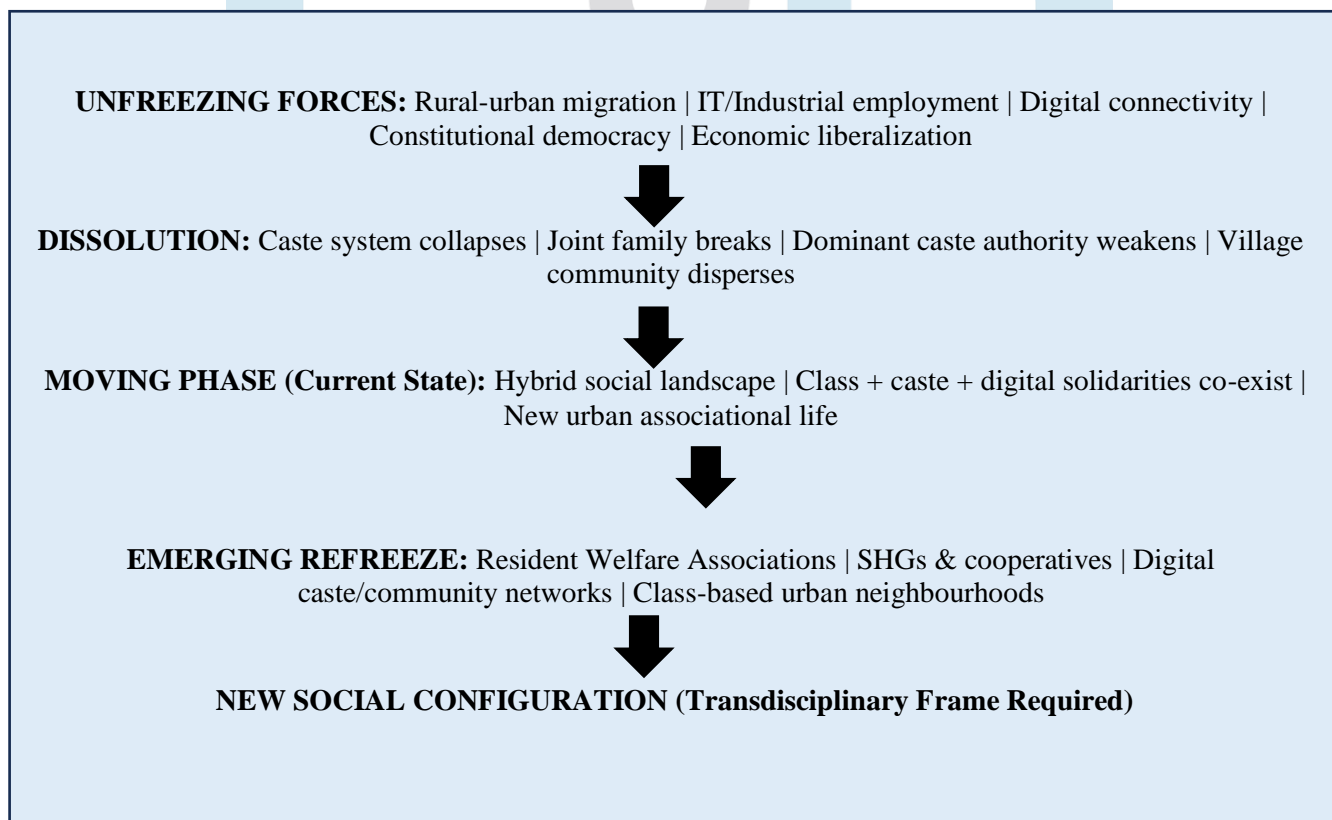
The empirical evidence for this unfreezing is substantial. Census data demonstrate that between 2001 and 2011 alone, India's urban population grew by 91 million people — equivalent to the entire population of Germany relocating from rural to urban environments in a single decade (Census of India, 2011). This unprecedented demographic movement carries with it a cascade of social consequences. Urban environments impose new social arrangements: apartment living separates families from extended kin networks; factory and service employment replaces agriculture as the primary economic activity; formal educational institutions replace community elders as transmitters of knowledge and value; and anonymous urban neighborhoods replace the face-to-face communities of village life.

From a structural functionalist perspective, one might predict that urbanization would produce a functional differentiation — that new urban institutions would emerge to perform the functions previously served by village-based structures. Indeed, Parsons' evolutionary theory anticipated precisely this process of differentiation and reintegration. However, the Indian experience reveals a more complex, uneven, and often dysfunctional pattern. New urban institutions have not uniformly replaced traditional ones; instead, a patchwork of traditional forms, partially adapted traditional forms, and new institutional arrangements coexist in urban settings, often in tension with each other.

Particularly significant is the uneven quality of this institutional landscape. Elite urban Indians access private hospitals, schools, and financial services that partially substitute for functions previously performed by extended family and community networks. For the urban poor, however — who constitute a majority of India's urban population — the erosion of traditional support networks is not compensated by adequate institutional alternatives. The urban slum dweller

who has lost the security of village community belonging without gaining meaningful access to urban public services represents a sociological crisis that classical functionalism, focused on system-level integration, tends to render invisible. Social Interactionism offers a complementary perspective, illuminating the micro-level identity work that migrants undertake as they navigate the transition from rural to urban social worlds. The processes of identity negotiation — maintaining a 'village self' in family and ritual contexts while performing an 'urban self' in professional and public settings — reveal the creative agency with which ordinary Indians manage the consequences of structural transformation. Goffman's dramaturgical framework is particularly illuminating here: the urban migrant becomes a skilled social performer, managing multiple identity repertoires across different social stages.

Lewin's Change Model Applied to Indian Urbanization
TRADITIONAL SOCIAL STRUCTURE (Pre-Urbanization)



The unfreezing-moving-refreezing cycle of Indian social structure under urbanization

Urbanization as Social Unfreezer:

Relationship between urbanization processes and their structural consequences in the Indian social context:

Urbanization Driver	Traditional Structure Dissolved	Emerging Social Configuration
Industrial & IT employment	Caste-based occupational specialization (jajmani system)	Class-based occupational stratification
Rural-urban migration	Village community & dominant caste control	Neighbourhood associations, RWAs, urban mohallas
Digital connectivity & social media	Oral/face-to-face community knowledge networks	Digital WhatsApp groups, online caste & regional networks
Economic liberalization & consumerism	Collective consumption & joint family economy	Individualized consumption; nuclear household economy
State welfare expansion (Aadhar, DBT, MGNREGA)	Dependence on landlord/patron patronage networks	State-citizen direct relationship; individual rights claims

Urbanization as Structural change in Indian Social Context

7.2 Restructuring family structure towards a nuclear family to one parent family symbolises breaking the primary social group:

Evolution of Family Structure in India

JOINT FAMILY <i>Multi-gen / Collective</i>	NUCLEAR FAMILY <i>Parents+children</i>	SINGLE-PARENT <i>Single caregiver</i>	RECONSTITUTED <i>Blended units</i>
View Point: Traditional → Modern → Post-modern → Weakening of Primary Social Group			

The family occupies a uniquely central position in Indian sociological theory and social life. As the institution that performs the full range of Parsons' functional imperatives — adaptation (economic provision), goal attainment (socialization into cultural goals), integration (emotional support and conflict regulation), and latency/pattern maintenance (transmission of values and norms) — the family is simultaneously the most intimate and the most socially consequential institution in Indian society. Its transformation, therefore, carries implications that ripple through the entire social system.

The trajectory of Indian family transformation follows a historical arc from the joint family system — characterized by multiple generations and collateral kin living under common roof, sharing economic resources, and organized around patriarchal authority — through the nuclear family, to increasingly diverse post-nuclear forms including single-parent

families, reconstituted families, and chosen family arrangements. This is not a simple linear progression; different family forms coexist within Indian society, and individual families may move between forms over their life course.

The joint family system, as Kolenda (1968) documented in her comprehensive study of Indian family structures, was never the universal reality that popular mythology suggested. Regional variation was substantial, and even in regions where joint family residence was common, the actual dynamics of family authority, resource allocation, and emotional life were considerably more complex than idealized accounts suggested. Nevertheless, the normative ideal of the joint family — as a collective unit of mutual obligation, material sharing, and intergenerational solidarity — exercised powerful social force even when actual living arrangements diverged from the ideal.

The nuclear family that has emerged as the modal form in urban India (and increasingly in rural India as well) represents not merely a smaller residential unit but a fundamentally different social organization. Economic individualism — in which each nuclear family unit must independently secure its livelihood — replaces collective economic management. Conjugal partnership becomes the primary emotional bond, displacing the filial bonds (parent-child, sibling) that dominated joint family emotional life. Child-rearing becomes an intensive, privatized activity focused on individual development rather than socialization into a collective identity.

The emergence of single-parent families represents a further step in this trajectory of individualization. In Indian context, single-parent families arise primarily through: widowhood (historically the dominant pathway, particularly in rural areas); separation and divorce (increasingly significant in urban areas, particularly among educated populations); and unmarried parenthood (still socially stigmatized but increasingly acknowledged). Each pathway carries different social meanings and different sociological consequences, but all share the common feature of concentrating parenting responsibilities in a single individual — typically, in the Indian context, the mother.

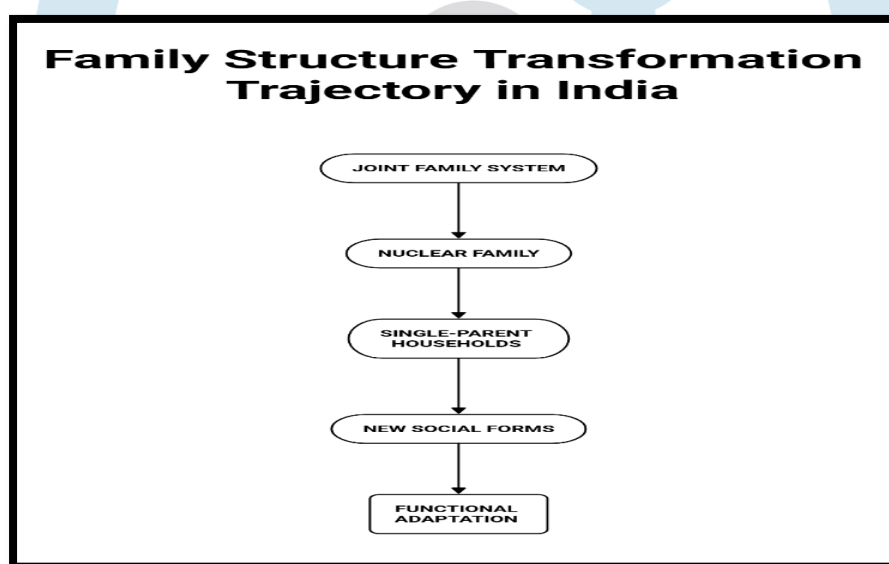
From a functionalist perspective, the single-parent family represents a structural deficiency: a social unit attempting to perform functions that the structure is not adequately equipped to fulfill. The socialization function — transmitting values, providing role models, managing the child's development — is compromised when a single adult must perform the work that two adults or an extended family network previously shared. The economic function is similarly compromised: single-parent families in India consistently show higher rates of poverty, food insecurity, and housing instability than comparable two-parent families.

Family Structure Transformation

Dimension	Joint Family	Nuclear Family	Single-Parent Family
Structure	Multi-generational, patrilineal co-residence	Parents + children only	One parent + children; structurally incomplete
Economic Function	Collective production, joint ownership, pooled resources	Dual or single income; individualized consumption	Single income; resource scarcity; welfare dependency

Care Function	Distributed across multiple adults; elder care included	Concentrated on parents; reduced elder care	Critically strained; external support essential
Socialization	Inter-generational, value-intensive, caste/tradition-embedded	Parent-centred, school-dependent, more individualistic	Parent-centred; peer/media influence rises
Social Identity	Family/caste/village collective identity dominant	Individual identity gains; family identity retained	Stigmatized identity; resilience required
Functionalist Fit	High: structure-function alignment strong	Moderate: some dysfunctions recognized	Low: functionalism fails to explain adequacy

Comparative Analysis of Indian Family Structure Configurations



7.3 Now structural functionalism is under question, like that functioning is relevant when there is Structure and similarly a structure demands a functional entity:

Classical vs. Proposed Sociological Frameworks

STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALISM	COLLABORATIVE FUNCTIONALISM
Static structure Fixed roles	Dynamic collaboration Fluid roles
Top-down stability	Bottom-up agency
Consensus-based	Negotiated order
Functional prerequisites	Adaptive social functions
Resistant to rapid change	Responsive to rapid change

Structural Functionalism, as the dominant theoretical paradigm in mid-20th century sociology, was built on a foundational assumption: that social structures and their functions stand in a relationship of mutual necessity. Structures exist because they serve functions; functions are performed because structures exist to perform them. This elegant circular logic produced a powerful but deeply conservative theoretical apparatus — one that, in the words of Gouldner (1970), 'was an ideology of the Welfare State and had a built-in political conservatism.'

The specific challenge that contemporary Indian society poses to Structural Functionalism can be formulated precisely: What happens when structures dissolve faster than new functional alternatives emerge? What happens when functions must be performed but no adequate structures exist to perform them? These are not merely hypothetical questions — they describe the lived reality of millions of urban Indians who have lost access to traditional social support structures without gaining adequate access to formal institutional alternatives.

Consider the specific case of the traditional joint family's function in managing old-age care. In the classical functional analysis, the joint family structure performs the function of providing economic support, physical care, and emotional companionship for elderly members. This structural-functional arrangement served Indian society reasonably well for centuries. However, urbanization, nuclearization of the family, increased geographic mobility, and women's entry into paid employment have progressively eroded the structure — the co-resident, economically integrated joint family — that performed this function. The function — old-age care — remains as urgent as ever; indeed, it becomes more urgent as India's population ages. But the structure that performed it is dissolving, and no adequate alternative structure has emerged to replace it.

This 'structural gap' in old-age care provision exemplifies a broader pattern across multiple social domains in India. The function of conflict mediation previously performed by caste panchayats, village councils, and patriarchal family authorities has eroded without being replaced by adequate formal legal institutions. The function of social insurance previously performed by extended family and community networks has eroded without being replaced by comprehensive formal social protection systems. The function of identity provision previously performed by the combined complex of caste, religion, family, and regional community has been disrupted by urbanization without the emergence of adequate new sources of stable social identity.

The classical functionalist response to this critique would invoke Merton's concept of 'functional alternatives' — the possibility that different structures can perform the same functions. This concept was indeed a significant advance over the rigid structure-function determinism of Parsons' early work. But it raises more questions than it answers: What determines which functional alternatives will emerge? Who decides which alternatives are 'equivalent' in their functional performance? Who bears the costs during the period between the dissolution of old structures and the emergence of new functional alternatives?

These questions reveal the inherent limitation of functionalist analysis: its focus on system-level integration tends to obscure the distributional consequences of social change. The costs of structural dissolution — the insecurity, vulnerability, and suffering experienced by those who depended on the dissolved structures — are distributed unequally. In the Indian context, these costs fall disproportionately on women (who bore the greatest burden of care work within traditional structures), on lower-caste populations (who had the least access to formal institutional alternatives), and on the urban poor (who lack the economic resources to purchase market-based substitutes for dissolved social functions).

This critique does not amount to a wholesale rejection of structural analysis. The insight that social structures and social functions are interdependent remains valid and valuable. What requires revision is the assumption that this interdependence operates smoothly, automatically, and beneficially for all members of society. The reformulated framework proposed in this paper — Collaborative Functionalism — retains the structural-functional insight while incorporating agency, power, and collective action into the analytical framework.

Structural Functionalism vs Indian Realities

Structural Functional Assumption	Indian Empirical Reality	Theoretical Implication
Social equilibrium is the norm	Caste violence, communal conflict, and class struggle are persistent features	Conflict, not consensus, requires theoretical centrality
Structures are functionally indispensable	SHGs, cooperative societies, digital networks perform family/state functions	Functional equivalence replaces functional necessity
Normative consensus sustains order	Competing norms across caste, class, religion, and region are permanent features	Normative plurality demands negotiation theory, not consensus theory
Functions are institutionally fixed	ASHA workers, Anganwadi centres, NGOs perform state health/welfare functions	Functional fluidity: multiple actors share functions across institutional domains

Structural Functionalism's Assumptions vs Indian Social Reality

7.4 A reshaping is required to replace the approach of Structural Functional and even that incorporate is meaningful with some collaboration urgency or some group dynamics reveals our social agenda. So, the social approach approaches may be classified as collaborative functionalism and social interactionism:

TRANSDISCIPLINARY SOCIOLOGICAL PLATFORM		
SOCIOLOGY Social structures Institutions Norms	URBAN STUDIES Migration Space Policy	SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY Identity Interaction Meaning
Collaborative Functionalism + Social Interactionism ↓ Analytical Output: Dynamic Social Understanding Contextual Policy Inclusive Frameworks		

The theoretical restructuring proposed in this paper rests on two complementary pillars: Collaborative Functionalism and Social Interactionism. Together, these approaches seek to overcome the limitations of classical Structural Functionalism while retaining its genuine insights, and to integrate the macro-structural and micro-interactional levels of sociological analysis that have too often been treated as separate domains.

Collaborative Functionalism:

Collaborative Functionalism begins from the observation that social functions in contemporary India are increasingly performed not by clearly defined, stable social structures but by fluid, negotiated, collaborative arrangements among multiple actors and institutions. The family function of childcare, for example, is no longer performed exclusively by the

nuclear family unit but by a complex collaboration involving family members, neighbors, private childcare providers, schools, state institutions, and digital platforms. The function is the same; the structural arrangement performing it is fundamentally different — more fluid, more negotiated, more dependent on active collaboration.

Collaborative Functionalism proposes the following core theoretical propositions:

- Social functions are performed by collaborative networks rather than by fixed structures alone. These networks are dynamic, context-dependent, and continuously renegotiated.
- The stability of social systems depends not on structural homeostasis but on the quality of collaborative relationships — the trust, reciprocity, communication, and conflict resolution capacities of network members.
- Social change occurs not through the automatic functional differentiation of structures (as Parsons proposed) but through active collective agency — groups perceiving shared needs, developing collaborative responses, and institutionalizing successful innovations.
- Power is a central dimension of collaborative arrangements: who initiates collaboration, who benefits from collaborative outcomes, and who bears the costs of collaborative failures are always questions requiring explicit analytical attention.
- The social agenda — the collective understanding of what needs to be done and for whom — shapes the functional priorities of collaborative networks. Social agendas are themselves produced through interactional processes and are therefore subject to contestation and change.
- The key conceptual move is the substitution of structural integration with collaborative articulation as the primary mechanism of social order.

In the Indian context, this substitution captures a social reality that classical functionalism systematically obscures: the extraordinary resourcefulness with which Indian communities have historically organized collective action in the absence of adequate formal institutional support. The self-help group movement, the cooperative dairying revolution (Amul/GCMMF), the community forest management systems documented across tribal India, and the neighbourhood welfare committees (Resident Welfare Associations) of Indian cities all exemplify collaborative functional organization — the achievement of social functions through collective problem-solving, resource pooling, and mutual accountability rather than institutionally prescribed role performance.

Social Interactionism:

Reconstituted Social Interactionism, as the second theoretical pillar of the proposed framework, retains the interactionist insight that social reality is constituted through meaningful interaction — the exchange of symbols, the negotiation of identities, and the collaborative production of shared definitions of situations — while extending this micro-sociological perspective to encompass structural constraints, group dynamics, and the transformative potential of collective action. The Indian context provides particularly rich empirical support

for an interactionist approach: a society in which social identity is continuously negotiated across the competing axes of caste, class, religion, language, and region, and in which the micro-politics of daily interaction are suffused with the macro-politics of structural inequality.

The concept of 'group dynamics' — developed by Lewin (1951) in his foundational work and elaborated in the Indian context by the extensive literature on panchayati raj institutions, self-help groups, and community development programmes — is central to Reconstituted Social Interactionism. Groups in India are not merely aggregations of individuals: they are the primary sites of social identity formation, collective meaning-making, and resource mobilization. An adequate sociology of India must place group dynamics — the processes of formation, cohesion, conflict, and transformation that characterize Indian social groups — at the centre of its theoretical framework.

The Transdisciplinary Framework:

Dimension	Collaborative Functionalism	Reconstituted Social Interactionism
Level of Analysis	Macro and meso form of: institutions, networks and groups	Micro and meso form of: interaction, meaning, identity
Core Mechanism	Collaborative coordination, adaptive problem-solving	Symbolic exchange, negotiated meaning, group dynamics
View of Structure	Pluralistic: multiple structures perform equivalent functions	Emergent: structures are outcomes of ongoing interaction
Indian Examples	SHGs, cooperative societies, gram sabhas, Amul model	Caste identity negotiation in cities, WhatsApp community groups
Disciplinary Links	Organizational sociology, development studies, political economy	Social psychology, cultural studies, urban anthropology

Comparative Architecture of the Two Proposed Frameworks

The Transdisciplinary Integration:

The integration of Collaborative Functionalism and Reconstituted Social Interactionism constitutes the core of the transdisciplinary sociological platform proposed in this paper. This platform is transdisciplinary in the sense articulated by Nicolescu (2002): it not only crosses disciplinary boundaries but integrates multiple levels of social reality — the individual, the group, the institution, and the system — within a single coherent analytical framework.

Importantly, the platform is specifically designed for the Indian social context, drawing on indigenous intellectual resources — Gandhian sarvodaya, Ambedkarite anti-caste sociology, Nehruvian developmentalism, and the participatory traditions of the cooperative and self-help movements — alongside

international theoretical resources. This 'glocal' theoretical synthesis reflects the conviction that an adequate sociology of India cannot be achieved by the simple application of Western frameworks but requires genuine theoretical dialogue between Indian and international sociological traditions.

Amartya Sen's (1999) capability approach — which theorizes social development as the expansion of individual and collective freedoms to live lives they have reason to value — provides a normative framework that is compatible with both Collaborative Functionalism and Reconstituted Social Interactionism, and that draws explicitly on Indian philosophical traditions (particularly the Buddhist and Advaita Vedanta emphases on human dignity and self-realization). Sen's framework shifts the evaluative focus from structural form (which institutions exist?) to functional outcome (what can people do and be?) — a shift that is central to the present paper's argument.

The remarkable success of the Kerala development model — which has achieved social development indicators (life expectancy, literacy, infant mortality) comparable to developed economies at income levels far below those of comparable Indian states — provides compelling empirical support for the Collaborative Functionalist thesis that social functions can be effectively performed through community-based collaborative organization in the absence of the structural conditions that classical functionalism presupposes. The central role of the Kerala Sastra Sahitya Parishad (KSSP), the cooperative movement, and the panchayat raj institutions in mediating between state, civil society, and community in Kerala represents precisely the kind of transdisciplinary collaborative functional organization that the present framework is designed to theorize (Isaac and Franke, 2000).

The Transdisciplinary Sociological Platform — Proposed Framework
SOCIAL REALITY: Urbanizing, pluralistic, digitally connected India

ANALYTICAL ENTRY POINTS: Macro-structural | Meso-institutional | Micro-interactional



COLLABORATIVE FUNCTIONALISM: Collective adaptation, SHGs, cooperative networks, gram sabhas



RECONSTITUTED SOCIAL INTERACTIONISM: Identity negotiation, group dynamics, everyday resistance



TRANSDISCIPLINARY INTEGRATION: Urban Studies + Social Psychology + Development
Economics + Indigenous Theory



OUTCOME: Adequate analysis of Indian social change, policy support, community development

Proposed transdisciplinary platform integrating Collaborative Functionalism and Social Interactionism

Findings of the study:

1. Findings: Urbanization as an Agent of Social “Unfreezing”

The analysis reveals that rapid urbanization in India acts as a major force transforming traditional social structures. Rural institutions such as caste-based occupations, joint family living, and village community authority are gradually weakening due to migration, industrialization, and urban employment opportunities. As individuals move to cities, new social arrangements such as nuclear households, neighborhood associations, digital networks, and class-based occupational structures emerge. Urban life therefore produces a hybrid social landscape where traditional norms coexist with modern institutional forms. These findings indicate that urbanization functions as a multidimensional “unfreezing” mechanism that destabilizes traditional structures while simultaneously encouraging the formation of new social relationships and identities.

2. Findings: Transformation of Family Structure in India

The study finds that the Indian family system is undergoing a structural transformation from the traditional joint family to nuclear and increasingly single-parent family forms. This shift has important social

consequences. In joint families, economic support, childcare, elder care, and socialization were shared among several family members. In nuclear and single-parent households, these functions become concentrated in fewer individuals, often creating economic and emotional pressure. The rise of single-parent households particularly reflects a structural weakening of the traditional primary social group and highlights the need for external institutional support such as welfare services, community networks, and collaborative childcare arrangements.

3. Findings: Limitations of Structural Functionalism in the Indian Context

The analysis demonstrates that classical Structural Functionalism is insufficient to explain contemporary Indian social change. The framework assumes stable institutions, functional equilibrium, and normative consensus. However, the Indian social reality is characterized by rapid institutional change, inequality, and coexistence of multiple social norms. The dissolution of traditional institutions such as joint families and caste-based occupational systems has not always been replaced by equally stable institutional alternatives. As a result, Structural Functionalism fails to fully capture the dynamic, uneven, and conflict-ridden nature of social transformation occurring in urbanizing India.

4. Findings: Effectiveness of Collaborative Functionalism and Social Interactionism

The study finds that the combined framework of Collaborative Functionalism and Reconstituted Social Interactionism provides a more suitable analytical approach for understanding contemporary Indian society. Collaborative Functionalism explains how social functions are increasingly performed through networks of cooperation involving families, communities, state institutions, and civil society organizations. At the same time, Social Interactionism highlights the importance of everyday interactions, identity negotiation, and group dynamics in shaping social reality. When integrated within a transdisciplinary platform that includes sociology, urban studies, and social psychology, these frameworks offer a more flexible and realistic explanation of social change in India.

6. Conclusion

This paper has argued that the accelerating social transformations of contemporary India — driven by urbanization, family restructuring, caste contestation, and the emergence of new collaborative and interactional forms of social organization — demand a fundamental reconstitution of the sociological frameworks through which Indian society is analyzed. Structural Functionalism, whatever its contributions to the foundational period of Indian sociology, is theoretically inadequate for the analysis of a society characterized by structural fluidity, functional improvisation, normative plurality, and the simultaneous presence of traditional and modern, rural and urban, caste-based and class-based social formations.

The four thematic pillars of the paper's argument have each contributed a distinct dimension to this overarching thesis. The analysis of urbanization as a structural 'unfreezer' has demonstrated that Indian social structure is

in a state of dynamic transition, with traditional formations being dissolved and new configurations emerging in a process of continuous negotiation. The analysis of family structure transformation has shown that the trajectory from joint to nuclear to single-parent family represents not merely a structural change but a functional challenge — a dissolution of the primary social group's collective resources that demands new theoretical and practical responses. The critique of Structural Functionalism has identified the specific assumptions — functional indispensability, normative consensus, structural primacy — that render the framework inadequate for the analysis of Indian social realities as demonstrated by its inability to theorize caste violence, functional equivalence, and institutional plurality. The development of Collaborative Functionalism and Reconstituted Social Interactionism has proposed a transdisciplinary platform that retains what is valuable in the functionalist and interactionist traditions while reconstituting them in forms adequate to the complexities of contemporary Indian social life.

The implications of this reconstitution are both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it argues for a sociology of India that is genuinely transdisciplinary, drawing on urban studies, cultural studies, social psychology, development economics, and indigenous Indian intellectual traditions alongside the mainstream sociological canon. Practically, it suggests that the most effective responses to India's social challenges — urban poverty and exclusion, the vulnerability of single-parent households, caste discrimination, inadequate welfare provision — will be found not in the top-down application of institutional solutions modeled on classical functionalist assumptions but in the cultivation, support, and theoretical recognition of the collaborative and interactional forms of social organization through which Indian communities have historically sustained themselves.

Future research should empirically test the analytical utility of Collaborative Functionalism and Reconstituted Social Interactionism through comparative fieldwork across India's diverse regional contexts, longitudinal studies of family structure transformation and its consequences, and action research partnerships with the self-help groups, cooperative societies, and community organizations whose practices most concretely embody the social logic these frameworks seek to theorize.

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