

INTRODUCTION TO MODERN SOCIOLOGY



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MODERN SOCIOLOGY**

Preface

The study of development, organisation, functioning and classification of human societies is known as sociology in conventional sense. Though sociology may be accorded the place of mother of all social sciences. As a distinct discipline it came in vogue much late. Social accounting, social anthropology, social contract, social democracy, socialism, socialisation, social organisation, social psychology, social security, social work, sociobiology, sociometry etc., fall within the ambit of sociology. While sociology has interrelationship with other social.

The present publication is devised as introductory text to sociology. All important topics are given an elaborate treatment. Devised on the findings of various sociologist, this work has become an authoritative reference book. The readings are organised under eleven chapters, namely—Introduction; Inter-relationship of Sociology with Other Social Sciences; Scope of Sociology; Sociology in India & Indian Sociology; Sociological Theory; Social Organisation; Feminist Sociology; Methods in Sociology; Urban Sociology: An Introduction; Social Structure; Social Problems; followed by an exhaustive bibliography.

Hopefully, this will serve the purpose of students, researchers and teachers in the field.

The editor express his deep sense of gratitude to all great sociologists whose opinions and works are consulted. Librarians at different libraries, friends and colleagues are source of inspiration and support to whom he owes gratitude, Finally he is thankful to the publisher for bringing out the book in very limited period.

—Editor

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Introduction

The word 'Sociology' is derived from the Latin word 'Societus' meaning 'society' and the Greek word 'logos' meaning 'study' or 'science.' The etymological meaning of 'sociology' is thus 'the science of society.' Sociology is the study of man's behaviour in groups or of the interaction among human beings, of social relationships.

Auguste Comte in France coined the word 'sociology' in his *Positive Philosophy* published in 1838. Sociology is the scientific study of human society and social behaviour. The subject matter of sociology is huge, complex and varied. The sociological perspective invites us to become strangers in the familiar landscape of our society. It allows us to look afresh at a world, we have always taken for granted, to examine our own surroundings with the same curiosity and fascination that we might bring to an exotic, alien culture. The basic insight of sociology is that human behaviour is largely shaped by the groups to which people belong and by the social interaction that takes place within those groups. The main focus of sociology is the group, not the individual. Sociologist is mainly interested in the interaction between people—the ways in which people act towards, respond to, and influence one another.

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Sociology is distinguished by two characteristics: First, by its approach to phenomena—the approach of science; and second, by its subject matter—human interaction. In brief, Sociology is the scientific study of human interaction.

Sociology, does not, however, study everything that happens in society or under social conditions. For example, sociologists study religion only insofar as it affects social relationship, i.e., the relationship of man to man, of one group to another, or of one group to the whole society.

Subject Matter of Sociology

'Sociology focuses on human interaction—on the mutual and reciprocal influencing by two or more people of each other's feelings, attitudes and actions. In other words, sociology does not so much focus on what occurs within people (primarily, the province of psychology) as it does on what transpires between people. Hence the focus of sociological inquiry is on people as social beings—their activities in relation to one another. Sociologists are interested in the way people structure their relationship—the manner in which their social ties with others are formed, sustained and changed.

Development

Sociology emerged in the context of the sweeping changes that the Industrial Revolution brought to Europe. No social change in history had been as widespread or as far-reaching and this transformation cried for analysis and explanation. Two other factors operating at the time also encouraged the development of sociology. One was the example of the natural sciences—if their methods could make so much sense of the physical world, could they not be applied successfully to the social world as well. The second factor was the exposure of Europe to the radically different societies that their colonial empires had engulfed. Information about the widely contrasting social practices of these distant people raised fresh questions about society in general: why were some

societies apparently more advanced than others, and what lessons could the European countries learn from comparisons of various societies.

The title "Father of Sociology" usually goes to Auguste Comte (1798-1857), who established two specific problems for sociological investigation, social statics and social dynamics. *Social statics* refers to the problem of order and stability and *social dynamics* refers to the problem of social change. He believed that a science of sociology should be based on systematic observation and classification.

Herbert Spencer (1820-1903) applied the theory of organic evolution to human society and developed a grand theory of "Social evolution."

The third and most important of nineteenth-century thinkers was Karl Marx (1818-1883). To him, the task of the social scientist was not merely to describe the world; it was to change it, whereas Spencer saw social harmony and the inevitability of progress. Marx saw social conflict and the inevitability of revolution.

Nature of Sociology

There is a great controversy about the nature of Sociology. There are some critics who deny Sociology to be regarded as a science. But there are others who assert that sociology is as much a science as other social sciences like Political Science, History, Economics, etc.

All sciences, natural and social assume that there is some underlying order, or regular pattern, in the universe. Events follow a pattern that is sufficiently regular for generalizations to be made about them. Generalizations are crucial to science because they place isolated, meaningless events in patterns that we can understand. It then becomes possible to analyse relationships of cause and effect and thus to explain why something happens and to predict that it will happen again

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under the same conditions in the future. Non-scientific, 'common sense' explanations are based on belief, but scientific explanations are based on facts. This does not mean that common sense can not provide accurate explanations and predictions; it can and often it does. The problem is that without using the methods of science there is no way to tell whether common sense is correct.

Sociology as a Science

A science may be defined in atleast two ways; (1) "A science is a body of organized, verified knowledge which has been secured through scientific observations' (2) A science is a method of study whereby a body of organized, verified knowledge is discovered. If the first definition is accepted, then sociology is a science to the extent that it develops a body of organised, verified knowledge which is based on scientific investigation. To the extent that sociology for-sakes myth, folklore and wishful thinking and bases its conclusions on scientific evidence, it is a science. If science is defined as a method of study, then sociology is a science to the extent that it uses scientific methods of study. All natural phenomena can be studied scientifically, if one is willing to use scientific methods.

(i) Though Sociology cannot experiment with men directly in a laboratory, its social behaviour is amenable to scientific investigation as any other natural phenomenon. It is conducting many experiments indirectly with their consent in certain specific fields, particularly, in the fields of industry. Moreover, sociology does employ scientific methods as scales of Sociometry, Schedule, Questionnaire, Interview and Case History which apply quantitative measurements to social phenomenon and which are, therefore, comparable to the method of experimentation, for instance, if we want to know whether families with low incomes have more infant deaths, we collect statistics. Sociology has quite adequate methods.

The difficulty lies in getting the data, for the process is very costly.

It tries to classify types and forms of social relationships, especially of institutions and associations. It tries to determine the relations between different parts or factors of social life. It tries to deduce general laws from a systematic study of its material and the conclusions drawn from the study of sociological principles are applied to the solution of social psychology, clinical psychology and other sciences concerning man. Though it has not reached perfection, the sociologist is searching for the instruments which will add to the minuteness of the study and exactness of its principles. Comte described it as Social Physics.

Robert Bierstedt has in his book *The Social Order* mentioned the following characteristics of the nature of sociology:

- Sociology is a Social and not a Natural science.
- Sociology is a Pure or Theoretical Science and not an Applied science.
- Sociology is a categorical or Positive and not a Normative science.
- Sociology is a Generalising and not Particularising Science.
- Sociology is both a Rational and an Empirical Science.

(ii) Two other basic methods of scientific investigation, observation and comparison are readily available to the sociologist and he uses them all the time.

(iii) Sociology does frame laws and attempts to predict. It endeavours to discover laws that are generally applicable, regardless of variations in culture; for instance, the law that the social practices of a community are considered right by

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the group because they are in the 'mores'; not that the practices are in the 'mores' because they are right; the people always regulate marriage in such a manner as to prevent incest. These are the principles whose validity can be examined by anyone. They are universal. Moreover, no science can boast of making infallible predictions. Many of the theories established by the other sciences had to be modified with the changes of time. As remarked by Sprott. "The changes in theory which have followed one another so swiftly have made us less certain that what 'science teaches' today will be what science will teach tomorrow." In some areas of social life prediction to a limited extent has been possible. According to Cuvier, the predictive value of sociology is being improved. There is a good deal of approximate information on family relationships and the personality of children. As sociology matures and comes to understand more fully the principles underlying human behaviour it will be in a better position to make accurate prediction.

(iv) Sociology delineates cause-effect relationships. In its study of family it has traced the relationship between family disorganisation and divorce, between urbanisation and family disorganisation is one of the cause of divorce. Thus Sociology traces cause—effect relationship in social disorganisation. It tries to find an answer to 'how' as well as 'why' of social processes and relationships.

As against these strong arguments there is a school of thought which believes that Sociology is not a perfect or pure science. They have their own arguments which include:

- (i) One of the basic criterion of a pure science is that its results should be capable of being generalised. But it is difficult to think and find such laws which are applicable under all circumstances and at all places. Firstly, because social changes are unavoidable and secondly because conditions differ from place to place

and society to society. Since social phenomena everywhere are complex and dynamic the results bound to be ever varying and changing and thus cannot be generalised.

- (ii) Lack of laboratory facilities is another problem with sociologists. For pure sciences we have laboratory where the chemicals can be tested and placed. Similarly we have laboratory facilities which include control over conditions, facilities of repeating the experiment and objective observation. All this is not available to a sociologist.
- (iii) Then there is also problem about factual study. Since society consists of people who have their own limitations every information which is provided to the sociologists is bound by certain limitations. Each individual has his own as well as family secrets which he might not like to disclose to the sociologists. Thus the results concluded are never factual in a human society.
- (iv) Though it is possible and practicable to make precise and accurate predictions in pure sciences, yet, that it is not possible for a sociologist. It is primarily because social fluctuations are very rapid and also unexpected. It is due to these faulty predictions that revolutions come in society.
- (v) A difficulty which a sociologist feels is about objective approach to the problem. In this regard a sociologist is handicapped in two ways. Firstly because it is difficult to weight sentiments, emotions and feelings; and secondly the sociologist himself is a human being who has his own prejudices, likings and dislikings, to every problem and as such it is difficult to have objectivity in sociology.

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To sum up, it can be said that the subject matter of sociology possess many problems that natural sciences do not face, but sociology nonetheless has the same commitment to the scientific method. Sociological explanations are therefore more reliable than those based only on common sense.

Like the other social sciences, however, sociology is relatively less advanced as a discipline than most of the natural sciences. There are two reasons for this. First, the scientific method has been applied to the study of social behaviour only in recent times, whereas scientific method has been applied to the natural world for centuries. Second, the study of human behaviour presents many problems that natural scientists do not have to confront. Sociologists are dealing with people who are conscious, self-aware and unlike rocks or molecules, they may be un-cooperative. In other words, it is difficult to study human nature under controlled conditions.

Sociology, is not less scientific than bio-chemistry or astronomy: it simply faces greater problems of generalization, explanation and prediction sometimes, sociological findings confirm the common sense view; sometimes they do not. The only way to test common sense assumptions about society is to do it scientifically. This does not mean that there is no place for intuition or common sense in sociology.

Scope of Sociology

1. *Specialistic or Formalistic School.* As has been said before, according to the formalistic school the subject matter of sociology consists of forms of social relationships. These sociologists want to keep the scope of sociology distinct from other social sciences. They regard sociology as pure and independent. According to George Simmel, sociology should confine its study to formal behaviour instead of studying actual behaviour. Sociology stands in such a relation with other sciences as is analogous to the relation holding

between the physical sciences and geometry. Geometry studies the spatial forms and relations of objects, not their content. In the same way sociology, too, in its scope comprehends the forms of social relationships and activities, not the relationships themselves. Sociology is a specific social science which describes, classifies, analyses and delineates the forms of social relationships, the process of socialization and social organisation, etc. In this way, the scope of sociology apprehends the forms of human relationships or forms of social processes. Simmel has mentioned some subtle forms in these various forms e.g. competition, domination, imitation, division of labour, subordination, etc.

Small's opinion—Small's way of thinking concurs with Simmel's. According to Small, Sociology does not undertake to study all the activities of society. Every science has a delimited scope. The scope of sociology is the study of the genetic forms of social relationships, behaviours and activities etc. **Vier Kandt's opinion**—It has been said by Vier Kandt that sociology can be a definite science only when it abstains from a historic study of concrete societies. According to him sociology studies the irreducible categories of science. These irreducible categories are the ultimate forms of mental relationships like love, hatred, cooperation, competition, etc.

In this way the scope of sociology is the study of the ultimate forms of mental or psychic relationships.

The View of Von Wiese—According to Von Wiese, the scope of sociology is the study of forms of social relationships. He has divided these social relationships into many kinds, which makes a material contribution towards the understanding of the contentions of the formalistic school.

Max Weber's Contention—According to Max Weber the scope of sociology consists in the interpretation of social behaviour. Social behaviour is that which is related, by the intention of perpetrator, to the behaviour of others and is

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determined by it. Sociological laws are those empirically established generalisations of social behaviour whose meaning can be determined or which can be explained.

Tonnies' Opinion—Tonnies has supported the idea of pure sociology. He has differentiated between society and community on the basis of forms of relationships. In this way, according to the specialistic school, sociology studies one specific aspect of social relationships and behaviours, viz. their forms, and its scope is limited to them.

Criticism of Formalistic School—In criticism the following arguments have been advanced against this opinion:

- (i) *Other Science Also Study forms of Social Relationships.* It does not appear to be an altogether correct assertion when sociologists belonging to the formalistic school contend that sociology alone studies the forms of social relationships. Sociology is not the only science which studies the forms of social relationships. The study of International Law includes, of necessity, the study of such social relationships as conflict, war, opposition, agreement, contact, etc. Political science delineates sovereignty and other social relationships.
- (ii) *The Conception of Pure Sociology is Impractical.* The specialistic or formalistic school has conceived of pure sociology and has also much literature concerning it but none of the sociologists has been able to make any pure sociology. Actually, no science can be studied in complete isolation from the other sciences. The conception of a pure sociology is not practical.
- (iii) *Forms of Social Relationships Differ From the Forms of Geometry.* According to the formalistic school, the relation which sociology bears to other sciences is comparable to the relation between geometry and physics. But in making this comparison, slight has

been lost of the incongruity between the forms of geometry and those of social relationships. The forms of geometry have a definite spatial shape but the social relationships are devoid of any such shape.

- (iv) *Separated from the Concrete Relations, Abstract Forms Cannot be Studied.* The formalistic school of thought has made an absolute distinction between abstract forms and concrete contents and has limited the study of sociology to merely abstract forms. But actually abstract forms cannot be studied in complete separation from concrete contents. In concrete life, how can competition, conflict, hatred and love, etc. be studied without knowing their concrete contents? Actually, social forms cannot be abstracted from the content at all, since social forms keep on changing as the contents change, and these contents are continuously changing. In the words of Sorokin, "We may fill a glass with wine, water or sugar without changing its form, but I cannot conceive of a social institution whose form would not change when its members change."
- (v) *Formalistic School Has Extremely Narrowed the Scope of Sociology.* When the forms cannot be studied in abstraction from the concrete relationships sociology will have to widen its scope to apprehend concrete relationships, behaviours and activities. The formalistic school has extremely narrowed and confined the scope of sociology. Besides studying the general forms of social relationships sociology will have also to study the contents in social life.

Synthetic School

As against the specialistic school the synthetic school wants to make sociology a synthesis of the social sciences or a general science. Modern sociologists, among them Durkheim, Hobhouse and Sorokin, subscribe to this point of view.