



SOCIOLOGY FOR SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING OF SOCIETY

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When we mention the term "social-sciences," the fundamental curiosity that awakens us the difference between the two terms: 'Social' refers to the fact that the subjects wrapped within its scope are related to human beings and subjectivity, and 'Sciences' is affixed to highlight the notion of objectivity in the study. So, when these two terms are combined to form one meaningful word, 'social-science,' it voices the fact of studying the broad spectrums of society as a whole through a rational and evidence-based foundation, creating a relation between knowledge and social values.

Social Sciences aim at studying the dynamics and diversities of human society. It is a subsystem of various other domains, such as politics, economics, philosophy, anthropology, linguistics, law, and sociology. These realms are related to each other, and they exchange information and resources to have profound effects on every part of society. However, this paper deals explicitly with sociology as an illustrating example to show how it logically understands society as a whole and takes an effort to develop humankind.

1. SOCIOLOGY AS A SOCIAL SCIENCE

For thousands of years, men have observed and reflected upon their societies. We have lived and worked in groups from our days of foraging and hunting animals, consequently becoming more extensive and more complex. These groups have ranged from small family units to tribes, villages, cities, and large states. Our 'work-together' perspective has led to civil societies' formation and has increased our sophistication for further development.

As rightly quoted by Aristotle, "*Man is a social animal, and he who lives without the society is either a god or a beast*" (Benjamin), highlights the nature of humans beings. Society positively influences our actions and behaviour, and consecutively affects every aspect of our lives. Hence, it is essential to attempt to describe, understand, and predict various human social phenomena.

Social sciences try to use scientific methods to deal with the dynamics of human interaction utilising various knowledge domains. One such member domain is sociology, modern science with abundant potential, yet at its extreme infancy. Sociology is also concerned with the studies of the origin, structure, functions, and development of human society. It studies how individuals behave in a group and shape their behaviour (Tomley and Hobbs). These include everything from the formation of these groups to the social changes they bring along.

1.1 Origins of Sociology

Sociology was a product of both intellectual and social conditions. Until the 1800s, there were no thinkers who shall be identified as sociologists. A social upheaval began with the French Revolution in 1789 and got carried forward to the nineteenth century, leading to a rise in sociological theorising. It happened so because the industrial revolutions began directly impacting the masses, forcing people to move to cities for work, facing miserable pay, families left at the edge of starvation, leading to broken ties from land and culture. The tradition suffered



blows. New ideas swept the older ones. Western monarchies started inclining towards a more democratic form of governance, stimulating new perspectives. Early modern philosophy was widely stirring itself in the west. By this time, scientific methods came to light. Objective and systematic observations of the material world were in the run. Chemistry and Physics were in the full bloom of their exploration processes. The concealed secrets of nature, which were earlier not within reach of explanation by ancient and medieval theorists and philosophers, were getting unfurled. So the next step for human curiosities to apply the scientific methods was upon social life.

Though there was empiricist development, there was no moral development visible around. Thinkers were widely disturbed by social chaos and disorders. They desired to restore more peaceful days like medieval times. The more sophisticated thinkers recognised social order to be a crucial element to elevate this understanding (Ritzer). The result was the birth of sociology.

1.1.1 Social Forces towards Development of Sociological Theory

The French Revolution's onset led to excesses in capitalism, and the industrial revolution, which was combinely termed as 'Socialism.' It was because many migrations were taking place during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. People had to uproot themselves from their rural homes and have to move to urban settlements. This urbanisation process led to an endless list of social problems, including overcrowding and pollution. The nature of this 'urban-infancy' was not ignorable.

Alongside these materialistic changes, religious changes were also at their peak. When Europe got exposure to different societies and cultures in the colonial empires, intellectual change had to simmer. A new set of questionnaire emerged that tried to understand how some societies were more advanced than the others and could be learned from such comparisons? (Rao)

All these lingering yet unanswered questions attracted the conscience of thinkers of the time.

1.1.2 Intellectual Forces towards the Rise of Sociological Theory

Physical forces and social changes were the reason for social theories' origin, but the prevailing philosophical ideas and intellectual forces played a role.

In the 19th century, there came to be a visible distinction between philosophy and science. The institutionalisation of science as a subject was blooming. Since the subject's technological advancements and logical products served every sector of life's needs and fantasies, science acquired high emphasis and prestige. This very scientific approach was also an aim to be applied to the social world, termed as 'positivism.' This was suggested by none other than Auguste Comte. When he saw people cheering at the king and queen of France's public execution, he got wonderstruck about what holds the society together? Why was there social order instead of chaos? Furthermore, what makes a social change when set on a particular course? (Henslin). He coined the term "sociology." He stated it to be dealing with both existing social structures and dynamic social changes. He developed his scientific view, "positive-philosophy." He called sociology a positive science of society, which meant it to be scientifically discoverable society laws. He sought to demonstrate the importance of science for man and how sociology was a science to name. *He argued that this science called "sociology" would do for "man the social being" precisely what biology had already done for "man the biological animal."* (Rao)



Apart from this, there were prevailing notions of ‘humanitarianism’ that reflected the idea of “social consciousness” and highlighted the need for social work. Social services, orphanages, child protective laws also came into view. Also, the impact of Charles Darwin for his scientific contribution to coin the “origin of species” gave an evolutionary view of things.

These combined ideas gave an impactful boost to explore society and understand its complexities. The first tendency rushed towards unification and thus making one master social science. While on the other hand, a second tendency approached towards the specialisation of individual social sciences. However, the philosophy of specialisation lured every major field to attain specialisation and contribute in unique independent ways. Hence, sociology emerged as a specialised field of social science with a broad scope to understand society and social orders.

1.2 Nature and Scope of Sociology

To explain sociology's nature and scope, it is essential to define what sociology precisely is. With the persuasion of what various sociologists and thinkers define it as, “*sociology is a science of society which attempts to understand social relationships and its forms, social life, human behaviour in groups, social action, and social system.*”

However, the main emphasis is always on the ‘social’ aspect of the relationships. While discovering these social relationships, a sociologist attempts to discover the evolution of various influences regulating the societal interactions, studying community formations' history and all these groups' interdependence. Man becomes a social animal only when he enters into social relationships; hence different aspects of social life- political or economic- are under the expression of social relationships (Bhushan and Sachdeva).

1.2.1 Nature of Sociology

The nature of sociology- often regarded as scientific- is a matter of frequent controversies and debates. When we term ‘science,’ we are explicitly talking about a branch of knowledge that deals with a body of facts linked systematically and shows general laws' operation. It is based on reasons and evidence, and hence it is variable and communicable.

But often, critics deny the claim for sociology to be designated as a science since it lacks experimentation, exactivity, and objectivity. It is marked if something cannot be experimented with or measured, it cannot be scientific. The sociological study's laws and conclusions cannot be expressed precisely, and the predictions might not come true. The terminologies often lack different meanings, such as the words ‘caste’ and ‘class,’ yet haven’t acquired crystal distinction in meanings.

Along with all these obstacles, the main problem is objectivity. Man tends to bring about his personal bias and prejudice in the study. Social relationships cannot be studied through physical senses; hence confronting subjectivity makes it difficult for a sociological study to be detached. However, the critics favoring sociology to be regarded as science still hold justifications against the issues above. They assume that the capacity to derive exact conclusions alone cannot make a study scientific. Astronomy and Meteorology fail to predict things accurately, yet they are regarded as scientific designations. These critics support the method of study to designate a study as scientific.



Although sociology cannot experiment with men in laboratories and fact stamp the behavioural actions, it can undoubtedly interpret questionnaires, interviews, and case history, comparable to scientific experimentation methods. Also, all sciences do not employ laboratory experimentations. Astronomy is one such example where its object of study can never be put under first-hand testing, yet it is regarded as a science. Moreover, many scientists did not invent their laws in laboratories. Most of them were mere hypotheses. They arrived at specific ideas to experiment with and then labelled them as facts. Sociology endeavours to discover laws that are generally applicable, regardless of variations in culture. The more improvement we do in predicting underlying human behaviours, the better we will find ourselves able to make accurate predictions. Lastly, sociology traces cause-and-effect relationships in social disorganisations. It tries to answer both the 'how' and the 'why' of a problem to derive a solution. Sociology is thus a science that concerns a man in its study.

1.2.2 Scope of Sociology

Sociology has for its field the entire life of a person in society, one's activities during the struggle for existence, and the knowledge developed in due course of adapting into society. Nevertheless, this is too wide of scope to carry out. To study any realm without determined boundaries creates difficulty and complexities. Hence, the emphasis has been made to keep sociology's scope limited to problems not unique to other social sciences.

There has been a lack of solid consensus on defining sociology's scope, yet two primary schools of thought have been proposed: the formalistic school and the synthetic school.

The formalistic school of thought holds the opinion of sociology being an independent science with a limited scope. Hence it urges the subject to be confined to the study of human relationships and the exploration of fundamental forces that bring about social behaviour changes. The synthetic school, on the other hand, conceives sociology to be a general social science. It argues that all social life parts are inter-related, and aspect-limited study can never be sufficient to understand the entire phenomenon. Hence it should study society as a whole.

Both these arguments undeniably indicate that there is so much which sociology can shelter. Its scope is vast, and it can study all the social aspects of society. The focus shall not be to delimit sociology's scope but to focus on betterment in its approach to function with its spirit and achieve its aim.

2. SOCIETY AND SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING

Acceptance of sociology as a distinct discipline turned out to be in the latter half of the 19th century. The intellectual atmosphere of the time aided in its distinction from philosophy, and it got recognition as a field of study with its methodology. Nevertheless, this significance was not awarded overnight. Various arguments and analyses put forth by various thinkers of the time led to the acceptance of sociology having its significance.

2.1 What is Society?

Wallerstein wrote in his *World Systems Analysis* (1974), "No concept is more pervasive in modern social science than society and no concept is used more automatically and unreflectively than society, despite the countless pages devoted to its definition." (Rawat)



The term 'society' has far-reaching and varied meanings. Its meaning may differ with the reference subject. It may be used to designate the members in specific groups, for example, a Harijan society, or to designate institutions, such as Arya Samaj (society). However, in sociology, this term is used with a precise meaning. It does not refer to a group of people but an intricate pattern of interaction norms that arises among them. It is taken into view with two angles: the 'abstract,' related to a network of relationships between groups, and in the 'concrete,' as a collection of people (Rawat).

According to MacIver, society is "a web of social relationships" (Mondal). It may consist of consist of interacting individuals and numerous thoughts. A family alone may have a catalogue of relationships based on age, sex, and generation; outside the family, there shall be no limit to the number of relationships possible. Numerous elements play a part in defining what society is. The 'likeness' is one such example, governed by the idea of kinship or nationality of a person. On the other hand, 'interdependence,' which extends to nationality and the continents, is another element of society. Also, 'cooperation' is a factor without which a society may not even exist. In addition to these elements, MacIver has also stated about further elements of society. There are means of action in each society that maintains its harmony and organisation. The presence of authority is essential to uphold order in a society. Feeling of mutual aid is also necessary. There are several groups and divisions, such as family, village, and town. Controls are obligatory for the organisation of the social order. Without liberty, man cannot develop his personality. Thus, society is not a measly agency for the ease of beings, but it is the whole social relationships system.

It may also be mentioned that society is a permanent institution. Its origin is as old as human beings existed in small groups in different stretches of the world. It is a kind of natural organisation that has emerged out of the instincts of man. This wh, Aristotle said that 'man by nature is a social animal.' So long as man possesses an instinct of sociability, society will continue to exist (Bhushan and Sachdeva).

3. SOCIOLOGICAL THEORIES AND SOCIAL UNDERSTANDING

Many sociologists have contributed to society and social understanding, and have developed unique theories to understand the same.

3.1 Émile Durkheim: Social Interconnection and Division of Labour

Émile Durkheim's view of society emphasized the compulsory 'interconnectedness' of all its rudiments. For Durkheim, society was more significant as compared to the total of its parts. He called communal beliefs, principles, and society's attitudes a collective integrity. He states that social integration was critical in social life. He compared society to the body of a living organism, in which each organ plays an essential role in keeping the being alive (Griffiths).

He further explained that society was failing to stay together. The cultural glue was not as effective over time, and people were becoming more divided. In his book "The Division of Labor in Society," Durkheim argued that as society grew more complex, social order made the transition from mechanical to organic (Griffiths).

He explained that in preindustrial societies, the social order was maintained via the culture's collective consciousness. It was because they have always done it that way. People had common



thinking and strong kinship bonds. He argued that when people are into the doing of the same work and share the same morals, they think and act the same. However, in industrial societies, organic solidarity dominates, and social order gets based upon acceptance of economic and social differences. Division of labor makes everyone do different things and allows people to exist with differing values.

Though this transition is advantageous in the long run for a society to work in a smooth flow, this may also lead to chaos and normlessness.

Durkheim's ideas allow us to ponder upon present-day law-making and improve our understanding of the motives by which other people live and the conditions under which they exist. It allows us to seek a rational approach towards concerning our differences and bringing out solutions that can maintain social harmony.

3.2 Karl Marx and Conflict Theory

Karl Marx is undoubtedly one of the greatest important social theorists, amid all the critics. For him, it is the base that determines what society will be like (Griffith). He saw conflict in society as the primary means of change. He saw an economic conflict between the owners and their workers. He argued these conflicts to be heating with time, ever since one class has been predominant over the other. He thus started the society to be divided into two great classes facing each other with enemy eyes.

His proposal for change was thus radical: revolution. He believed the workers to unite and break the bondage. The revolution will be bloody, but it will free society from exploitation and lead to a classless society. The work will be given to people as per their abilities and they will receive services according to their needs.

Hence, the ideas proposed by Karl Marx allows us to introspect our attention to the intrinsic worth and dignity of man. Sociology thus paves the way for changing our attitudes towards our fellow human beings and reduce the 'mental-gap' between people and communities.

3.3 Max Weber and Social Elements

Max Weber was another early sociologist who left a deep imprint on sociology.

Weber primarily emphasized society's structure, considering the elements of class, position, and power. He believed class to be economically divided, while status was constructed on uneconomical factors such as schooling, religion and kinship, and both of these determine the power of an individual. Weber held these ideas to form basis of society and focused on the concept of rationalism. Rational society is built on logic and efficiency rather than morality or tradition. Hence, capitalism was entirely rational for him (Griffith).

While this may increase efficacy or distinction-based success, it may negatively impact if taken to extremes. These theories thus help us evaluate practical situations. Sociology thus is of paramount importance in solving social problems.

4. CONCLUSION

Sociology is not just a subject to be studied. It opens the doors of society to allow us to see what goes behind them. We are not born with pre-decided notions and instincts. Uncovering the "whys" and "hows" of life can all be uncovered through sociological understanding. From how people become homeless to how they become presidents, why people commit suicide, to how



some people find satisfaction with everything in their marriage is part of sociology. It covers every dynamic of social understanding, and it is what makes sociology so intriguing.

Sociology does not try to attempt what something is or what it should be. It never tries to confine it to value-based analysis. Instead, it is more of a science that deals with how specific fundamental ideas govern any social process. For example, a scientist may claim a specific medicine to cause an inevitable reaction or predict its use against a particular disease, but the doctor can only try that and not claim any certainty.

Similarly, sociological studies give suggestions, and it is a social activist who applies them to bring about a change in society. In the present society, we see that sociological studies suggest ideas and reasons for the government for framing policies and apply them through law. Because it is not sociology that will provide direct application, but the law, which creates implication. Hence, sociology acts as a tool for bettering society and formulate our social understanding.

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