

SOCIOLOGY AS A DISCIPLINE

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1.0 OBJECTIVES:-

- To give a basic understanding of sociology.
- To know the meaning and subject matter of sociology
- To understand the nature of scientific study
- To know the nature and scope of sociology
- To study the contribution of early thinkers towards the development of sociology

- To familiarize the students with various sociological perspectives

1.1. INTRODUCTION:

In the family of social sciences, Sociology is comparatively a new entrant. But because of its dealing with social problems, social relationships and social interactions the importance of the study of this subject has considerably increased. It has considerably developed in methodology, scope and approach. Attempts are now being made to study every social problem scientifically and objectively, eliminating subjectivity to the extent possible a distinctive way of examining human interactions. **Sociology** is the systematic study of social behavior and human groups. It focuses primarily on the influence of social relationships upon people's attitudes and behavior and on how societies are established and change. As a field of study sociology has a very broad scope. It deals with families, gangs, business firms, computer networks, political parties, schools, religions, and labor unions. It is concerned with love, poverty, conformity, technology, discrimination, illness, alienation, overpopulation and community.

1.2. DEFINITION:

Sociology is being defined differently by our sociologists and other's each one of course, has its own news about the nature and scope of the subject, as he conceives it.

According to **Ward** "**Sociology is science of society**".

George Simmel opines that **it is a subject which studies human inter-relationship**.

Giddins is of the view that "**Sociology is scientific study of society**".

Max Weber has viewed sociology as "**Science which attempts imperative understanding of social actions**".

Sorokin is of the opinion that **sociology is a study first of all the relationship and correlations between various classes... second between the social and non social aspects of life and third it studies general characteristics common to all classes of society**.

Ogburn has said that, "**Sociology is concerned with the study of social life and its relations to the factors of culture, natural environment, heredity and group**."

Durkheim while defining sociology has said that, **"It is the science of collective representation."**

We may thus **conclude** these definitions with the definition of **E.S. Bogardus** when he says that, **"Sociology may be defined as the study of the ways in which social experiences function in developing, maturing and repressing human beings through inter-personal stimulations."**

From all these definitions it becomes clear that sociology is concerned with social relationships and studies society, human interactions, inter-personal and intra-personal relations. It tries to study scientifically social institutions, organizations and systems. These definitions also make it amply clear that sociologists view the subject differently and that there is no unanimity in this regard.

1.3. SUBJECT MATTER OF SOCIOLOGY:

while discussing its subject matter of sociologist, **Sorokin** said that, **"It seems to be a study, first of the relationship and correlation between various classes of social phenomena"** (correlation between economic and religious, family and moral, judicial and economic, mobility and political phenomena and so on); second that between social and non social (geographical, biological) phenomena; third the study of general characteristics common to all classes of phenomena. Thus according to his view point sociology studies social events, relationships between social and non social phenomena and generalized study of facts common to all aspects of social life.

In his book **'Society, Culture and Personality'** he has said that sociology is more or less concerned with the working of human beings. In this study he covers the study of human behavior, social organizations, social phenomena and social values. He is thus altogether opposed to formal school of thought.

Check Your Progress

1. Define Sociology.
2. Discuss its subject matter.

1.4. IS SOCIOLOGY A SCIENCE?

There is a continuing controversy about the nature of sociology. According to some sociologists it is a science, while others strongly refute this claim.

What is a scientific study? For a scientific study it is essential that the whole study should be systematic and without any subjectivity. A scientist is supposed to have a clear vision and a pointed approach. He should have capacity to record unbiased decisions and properly classify data's. He should also have vision to collect only such data as is useful for his study. He should conclude his findings after verification of data's and not on morality or certain pre-supposed philosophies, nations and ideas.

The most important element of a scientific study is that a scientist should deal with bear facts and not with ideal situations. Thus this study should be both factual and systematic. Then another element is that its results should have universal application. Then in a scientific study there should be cause effect relationship and it should also be capable of making certain safe predictions.

Is Sociology A Science? Now a question arises as to whether sociology is science or not. Those who support the cause of sociology as science plead that a present day sociologists must be methodological. He must base his conclusions on impartially collected, analyzed and interpreted data. He should also be willing to get his data tested anywhere to established its validity. They also argue that like natural scientists, Sociologists are concerned with hard facts and not with ideal situations. They try to analyses facts of social life as these are. They also believe that there are many social facts and theories which the sociologists have developed after hard labor and these are universally applicable, under similar circumstances. They also point out that like natural scientists, the sociologists are very much concerned with cause effect relationship e.g. social stratification and social disorganizations are the outcome of certain causes, which have their effects as well. As with the natural scientists, so with the sociologists, it is equal true that like the former the latter can make some safe predictions. They thus argue that "sociology is a science which attempts the interpretative under-standing of social action in order to arrive at a casual explanation of its causes and effects."

Sociology- Not a Science: there is other side of the picture as well. Many believe that society is not a perfect science. Like the results of natural sciences, the results obtained by social scientists cannot be generalized and these also cannot be same under all circumstances and at all places. The conditions always differ from

society to society and social changes are unavoidable. These are also very complex. Then it is said that each human beings has his own limitations and he provides information keeping those limitations into consideration. He is not prepared to disclose secrets and thus the information provided is not factual. It is also said that the many situations are not within the control of sociologists and repeat experimentation is almost impossible.

Each sociologist has subjective approach to the problem under investigation. There is no stage of investigation in which there is no subjectivity. Each one has some secrets which he is not prepared to disclose to the investigators. Unlike natural scientist, a sociologist has no laboratory facilities and also has no control over material to be experimented i.e. human beings. Not only this, but it is not possible to repeat experiments. It is more or less not possible to make the safe predictions because nature of social problems with which the sociologists are not the same all over the world.

Check Your Progress

1. Is sociology a science? Discuss it through the difference between natural and social sciences

1.5. NATURE OF SOCIOLOGY:

What is real nature of sociology about this controversy is likely to continue. According to Robert Stead Sociology is a social science and not a natural science, because it deals with human beings and social phenomena. It is positive and not normative science because it studies social phenomena as it is and not as it ought to be. It is pure and not applied science because it studies underlying factors of a social phenomenon. Sociology is an abstract and not a concrete science because it studies society in general. It deals with society, which in itself is abstract and as such the subject cannot be concrete. It is a science of generalization and not that of particularization because it studies a social problem in general and not in particular way. It does not study a social phenomenon from a particular angle. It is an empirical or rational science because it tries to follow logical method of data collection.

1.6 SCOPE OF THE SOCIOLOGY

Sociologist and others differ what should be the scope of sociology. August Comte makes us believe that sociology should try to study social phenomena on scientific lines. He has thus laid stress on scientific approach. Emile Durkheim has tried to separate sociology from other social science subjects and also tried to give an independent status to this subject. In his own way Pareto has tried to give it scientific orientation. According to him in sociology there should be no place for inferences. He is sure that there is basic unity among various social phenomena. He is of the view that sociology is much of science and social problems should and can be scientifically studied. Max Weber has however said that sociology should merely be interpretative understanding of social actions and nothing beyond that.

Former or Specialist School of Thought: There are two main schools of thought about the scope of sociology. Formal school of thought believes that scope of sociology should not be generalized but confined to the study of some specific aspects of society. The exponents of this school wish to keep the subject pure and independent. According to them it should deal with social relationships, social activities and processes of socialization.

Max Weber, who is the chief exponent of this school of thought, has said that sociology should deal with interpretations of social behaviors only.

Vier Kandt, , who is another exponent of this school of thought, is of the view that sociology should confine itself to the study of formal and not the actual behavior of the people in the society.

Simmel has given an abstract concept of sociology, in which stress has been laid on social relationship and social inter-actions. For him, every society is the mix of this two. Social relations are nothing but social interactions between two individuals. He has said that society is not collections of individuals but it is essentially a psychic inter-action between the individuals. It is sum total of social relations between the individuals living in it.

According to Simmel sociology should not be made a general science devoted to the study of social relations in general. It should be confined to the study of specific social relations because now these are being studied in the context of social production and social heritage.

Vone Wiese is another exponent of this school of thought. He believes that subject matter of sociology is different from other social sciences. He does not agree with the idea that sociology is combination of social sciences but it is a subject which combines different social science subjects. For him sociology as a special science has more importance than general sociology.

It should separate its subject matter from other social sciences.

Synthetic School of Thought: The school of thought believes that sociology should study society as a whole and not confine itself to the study of only limited social problems. Auguste comte believes that the scope of sociology should be considerably widened. According to him the study of one aspect of society can lead to misleading results because all aspects of society, like parts of human body, are inter-linked. Hobb-House and Sorokin also contribute to this view point. They too believe that Sociology should study society as a whole. The supporters of this school of thought agree that in our modern times no social science subject can remain isolated altogether ignoring other subjects of study. The scope of sociology, they argue should be general and not narrow. Durkheim has gone to the extent of saying that "Sociology is science of collective representation."

Sorokin is the main exponent of this school of thought. He is not satisfied with the traditional views about sociology and thus wants to give it a new approach. According to him sociology is a systematic science and it has manifold inter-actions. It is concerned with general facts of social life. He is keen to give systematic interpretation of society.

Check Your Progress

Examine the nature and scope of sociology in detail

1.7. EARLY THINKERS:-

August Comte :

In France, the 19th Century was an unsettling time for the nation's intellectuals. French monarchy had been deposed in the revolution of 1789 and Napoleon had suffered defeat in his effort to conquer Europe. Philosophers and intellectuals were finding the ways out to improve the society. August Comte is considered as the most influential philosopher of the early 1800s. He believed that in order to improve society the theoretical science of society should be developed and a systematic investigation of behavior should be carried. He Coined the term sociology to apply to the science of human behaviors. The term Sociology has been derived from Latin word 'socius' means 'society' and Greek word 'logus' means 'science'.

Comte hoped that the systematic study of social behavior would eventually lead to more rational human interactions. In Comte's hierarchy of the Sciences, Sociology was at the top. He called it the "queen", and its practioners "scientist-priests."

Emile Derkheim :

Durkheim is considered as one of the founding fathers of sociology. He made many pioneering contributions to Sociology including his most important theoretical work on Suicide. Durkheim (1858-1917) was son of a rabbi he was educated in both France and Germany. He has an impressive academic record and was appointed as one of the first professors of the Sociology in France. Durkheim asserted that behavior must be understood in the larger social context, rather an individual action.

Though intensive study of Arunta tribe, he focused on the important functions of religion in reinforcing group Solidarity. According to Durkheim the growing division of labor in industrial society and increasing specialization leads to what he called as Anomie. In the state on anomie the confusion and the inability to cope with the circumstances also results in cases of suicide.

Max Weber:

Max Weber was born in Germany (1864-1920). He studied legal and economic history, but gradually developed an interest in sociology. Later he became professor and taught at various German universities. He taught the "Verstehen", to his students. He said that in order to fully comprehend behavior, we must learn the subjective meanings people attach to their actions- how they

themselves view and explain their behavior. He is also credited for his key conceptual tool: the Ideal type. The concept of ideal type can be used to study the family, religion, authority, and economic systems, as well as the analyze bureaucracy.

Karl Marx:

Karl Marx (1818-1883) was a critique of existing institutions that a conventional academic career was impossible. He was a revolutionary and spent most of his life in exile from his native Germany. He was very much influenced by the ideas of Friedrich Engels (1820-1895) with whom he formed a lifelong friendship.

Marx lived in extreme poverty in England. He pawned most of his possessions, and several of his children died of malnutrition and disease.

In Marx's analysis, society was fundamentally divided between two classes i.e. Bourgoise and Plorotariate who have opposite interests. In his examination of industrial society, he saw the factory as the center of conflict between the exploiters (the owners of the means of production and the exploited (the workers).

Mar'x influence on contemporary thinking has been dramatic. His writings inspired those who led the communist revolutions in Russia, Vhina, Cuba, Vietnam, and elsewhere.

Check Your Progress

Briefly analyze the contribution of early thinkers to the development of sociology.

1.8. PERSPECTIVES IN SOCIOLOGY:-

Sociologists view society in different ways. Some see the world basically as a stable and ongoing entity. They are impressed with the endurance of the family, organized religion, and other social institutions. Some sociologists see society as composed of