

Sociological Imagination

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1 The 'Promise'

- C. Wright Mills says that the The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise.
- Sociological Imagination can also be defined as "the vivid awareness of the relationship between personal experience and wider society".

2 Asking the 'right' questions

Mills says that these are the types of questions that should be raised by any mind possessing social imagination. These fall into three categories.

Asking right questions help us to shift from one perspective to another perspective - from political to psychological, from examination of single family to comparative assessments of national budgets of world etc.

It is the capacity to range from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of human self - and to see the relations between the two.

2.1 Structural characteristics

- What are its essential components, and how are they related to one another?
- How does it differ from other varieties of social order?
- Within it, what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?

2.2 History of the space

- What are the mechanics by which it is changing?
- How does any particular feature we are examining affect, and how is it affected by, the historical period in which it moves?
- How does it differ from other periods?
- And this period... what are its essential features?

2.3 people inhabiting the space

- And what varieties are coming to prevail?
- In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted?
- What kinds of "human nature" are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period?
- And what is the meaning for "human nature" of each and every feature of the society we are examining?

3 Trouble vs Issues

Mills says that the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between *the personal troubles of milieu* and *the public issues of social structure*.

3.1 Troubles:

A Trouble is a private matter: values cherished by an individual are felt by him to be threatened.

3.2 Issues:

An issue is a public matter: values cherished by public is felt to be threatened.

3.3 Obesity in America - Is it an issue or trouble (1):

- According to center of disease control, 35% (34.9% to be precise) of adults are obese and 69% (68.5% to be precise) are either obese or overweight.
- Social structures that contribute to obesity include **Food Desertes**, which are areas of U.S where people donot have access to healthy foods like fruits etc and these are also the places where we cannot grow these types of foods. So little access to healthy foods.
- Governament subsidies: Research shows <1% goes towards the fresh fruits or vegetables while majority of subsidies are given to **Meat, Diary and grain** production.

3.4 Obesity in America - Is it an issue or trouble (2):

- This basically makes vegetables costlier compared to Meat etc. This leads to more people consuming heavy foods, in these areas it now becomes an issue.
- In other areas(i am generalising here not taking many factors) it is more of a private trouble.

4 Various 'states' of people

4.1 Well being :

People experience this when they have some set of 'values' and do not feel any threat to them.

4.2 Crisis :

People experience this when they cherish values but do feel them to be 'threatened', they experience a crisis - either a personal value or public issue.

Ex: People in the LGBT community feel threatened and experience 'crisis'.

4.3 Indifference:

People experience this when they are neither aware of any cherished values nor experience any threat.

If this involves all their values, it becomes **apathy**.

The question of apathy has come up in India again and again, cases where

- Woman on busy chennai railway platform was attacked by a machete-wielding man and lay dead in a pool of blood for two hours while people went about boarding trains.
- A teenager in Karnataka bled to death after being hit by a state bus, while passersby huddled around him to take videos and pictures on their mobile phones.

4.4 Uneasiness:

People experience this when they are unaware of any cherished values but experience threat.

Ex: How we felt when Trump decided to build a 'border wall' between Mexico and U.S.A.

5 References:

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Thank You!