

DEFINITION AND ORIGIN OF SOCIOLOGY

In literal terms; the word “sociology” has been derived from the Latin word “COCIUS” meaning ‘associate’ or ‘companion’ and the Greek word ‘Logus’ meaning “theory.” Thus, etymologically sociology can be defined as a theory or science of association or society.

Sociology is systematized and scientific study of man in groups, or sociology is a social science; which makes a factual study of the social structure with its substructures, customs, and institutions, in order to understand how these factors function, their meanings, and the process by which they change.

In other words; sociology is a perspective that tries to give a sophisticated and factual explanation of why people act as they do. It is an explanation of human action and interaction that focus on our social life, and as a result, sees humans as being enormously flexible in what they are capable of doing. Its ultimate purpose remains to understand social existence of man or humans in society.

Every social science has a focal point, a defined territory that it concentrates on. Sociology is interested in what happens when individuals meet, talk, cooperate, compete, quarrel, love or hate one another. Thus, its chief-interest is nothing but “interacting individuals.”

SOCIOLOGY AS A SCIENCE

Science refers to the logical, systematic methods by which knowledge is obtained and to the actual body of knowledge produced by these methods. The sciences are usually divided into two main branches: the natural-sciences; studies the physical and biological phenomena and social sciences-sciences; studies the various aspects if human behavior.

All sciences assume that there is some underlying order in the universe. They follow a pattern that is sufficiently regular for us to be able to make generalizations --- statements that apply not just to a specific case but to most cases of the same type. Generalizations are crucial to science because they place isolated, seemingly meaningless events in pattern we can understand. It then becomes possible to analyze relationships of cause and effect and thus to explain why something happens and to predict that it will happen again under the same conditions again in the future.

Sociology is able to employ the same methods of investigation that all sciences do, and use its finding to make reasonably reliable generalizations. Sociologists construct theories, collect analyze data, conduct experiments and make observations, keep careful records, and try to arrive at precise and accurate conclusions.

SCIENTIFIC STATUS OF SOCIOLOGY

Sociology is relatively less advance as a discipline than most of the natural sciences. There are two reasons for that. First; the scientific method has been used to study social behavior only in recent times. Second; and more important, the study of human behavior presents many problems. Sociologists are dealing with people. People are subjects who are self-aware and capable of changing their behavior and attitude when they choose to. Unlike rocks and other non loving things, people may be deliberately uncooperative. They may behave in unforeseen ways for private reasons of their own. They may change their behavior when they know they are being studied. Their behavior usually has extremely complex causes that may be difficult to pinpoint.

The natural science can generally offer more precise explanations and predications than sociology. But the accumulated results of sociological research are already extensive, solid and important. Sociological research methods are constantly being improved, and we can expect that they will achieve still greater precision in future.

Sociology is not less scientific than biology or chemistry or astronomy. It just faces greater problems of generalization, explanation and predication. Many scholars are suspicious of Sociology not being a science. The origin of the suspicion probably lies in the fact that few people exert in molecular biology or planetary motions, but all of us can consider ourselves experts on society, because we have had years of experience in social living.

ORIGINS OF SOCIOLOGY

The sociology or social thought is as old as society itself, yet the origins of sociology as a discipline lie entangled in 19th century Europe. Certain developments in Europe paved the way for the emergence of sociology as we have today. The most important of these events are as follow:

1. Enlightenment
2. French Revolution
3. Industrial Revolution
4. Colonialism
5. Developments of Social Sciences

1. ENLIGHTENMENT:

The intellectual heritage of enlightenment which facilitated the way of sociology is discussed as under:

a. SOCIETY: A HUMAN, NOT DIVINE, AFFAIR:

Before enlightenment people believed that social structure was divinely devised. Anything from inequality to social disorder was believed to be due to God's interference in human affairs.

The enlightenment thinkers were the first to understand that humans could alter society, eliminate poverty, crime, injustice and inequality etc. This concept greatly influenced the development of sociology in 19th century.

b. DIFFERENTIATING STATE AND SOCIETY:

Describing the thinking and action of ordinary people became significant for understanding the general conditions of society. Such an approach made distinction between State (Political Order) and Society Cleaner.

c. SCIENTIFIC APPROACH:

The enlightenment also emphasized on scientific approach for understanding society. It shifted "source of evil" from our evil nature to the evil forces of the society. In other words it helped in studying cause & effect of the evil in the society and bring for the facts, by eliminating the past myths. Through scientific approach these evil forces in society could easily be understood, isolated and altered for the well-being of society.

Thus, Enlightenment Sociology took many believes and ideas; studied them, refined them and changed them. It also began the study of Society as a phenomenon.

2. FRENCH REVOLUTION:

In 1789 the French Revolution began, and when it was finally over, Europe and the World were transformed. This also brought great changes to society and was largely responsible for the development of sociology after 1814 A.D. The French revolution also formed the basis for two important traditions which became integral part of its study.

a. BIRTH OF DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY:

The French Revolution brought end to feudal society, tradition, power of church, absolute monarchy and also to other exploitative elements in society. It ensured the triumph of middle class and hence proved to be a harbinger of democracy.

b. INSPIRING NEW SOCIOLOGICAL TRADITIONS:

After eliminating the old traditions, the French Revolution introduced two new traditions. The first is "Conservative Tradition." This emphasized on concepts such as order and solidarity. The other is "Liberal/Radical Tradition." This focused on problems of inequality and conflict, power and social change. Society is described as a struggle between the powerful and powerless.

Thus, the social changes and new social thought which are associated with French Revolution provided rich material to the infant study of sociology at that time.

3. INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION:

The industrial revolution changed the European economy from agriculture based to more on manufacturing, trading and money based. It also provided greater social, cultural and political changes. These changes are as follow:

a. CHANGE IN SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND THE POWER STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY:

After the industrial revolution, the socio-economic power shifted from feudal to industrialists of urban areas who owned large factories. The change in power structure of society and the emergence of new hectic and fast living style with increased economic needs led to change in social relationships as well.

b. MASSIVE URBANISATION:

The industrial revolution also brought forward massive urbanization. This left far-reaching impacts on the pattern of social life. The socio-economic need manipulated. The secondary relationships replaced the primary ones. The population in cities grew. But this also narrowed down the job opportunities, competition between haves and have-nots increased to such extent that it became a game of "Survival of fittest." The unemployment increased along with the inflation and poverty. These disturbances paved way for social unrest and movements in political revolutions which provided a new material for the science of sociology. The changes in social structure, social relationships and the massive urbanization also paved way for rural and urban sociology.

4. COLONIALISM:

The European colonies in Asia, Africa and America brought Europeans into close contact with the societies very different from their own. This gave birth to curiosity in Europeans to study these societies. The thinkers and scholars of the time showed keen interest in the nature of the newly discovered societies, this in turn inspired the development of sociology.

5. DEVELOPMENT OF OTHER SOCIAL SCIENCES:

The study of other social sciences like psychology, political science and economics greatly contributed to the birth of sociology. The development of these sciences encouraged interest in society. Within due time; the scientists, thinkers and scholars came to a notion that society and sociology needed to become a specialty area in its own right.