

EMERGENCE OF SOCIOLOGY

Sociology is one of the newer of the academic disciplines, tracing its origins no further back than the middle of the nineteenth century. It has a short history. Sociology, the science of society, is the youngest and it came to be established only in the nineteenth century. The French philosopher, August Comte gave sociology and a programme for its development. For thousands of years, society has been a subject for speculation and enquiry. Yet sociology is a modern science which originated only within last hundred fifty years or so.

The study of society, however, can be traced to the Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle. The philosophical basis of Plato and Aristotle characterised the observations of man for a very long period of time. The literature concerning society and its problems found place in the Republic of Plato (427-347 B.C.) and in the Politics and Ethics of Aristotle (388-327 B.C.).

Plato was the first Western philosopher who attempted a systematic study of society. In the Ethics and Politics of Aristotle we find the first major attempts of systematic dealing of law, the society and State. In his book Cicero, the Roman thinker, brought the great Greek ideas in philosophy, politics and law in the West.

In the sixteenth century, a precise distinction was made between State and society. Thomas Hobbes and Machiavelli were the outstanding contributors of the realistic approach to social problems. Hobbes in his Leviathan and Machiavelli in his Prince analyses the system of statecraft and also put forward conditions for success of State.

Notable among those who made contribution towards the specific investigation of social phenomena are the Italian writer Vico and French writer Baron de Montesquieu. Montesquieu explained in his The Spirit of Laws that many external factors, particularly climate, play significant role in the life of society.

The various social sciences gradually evolved in response to the varied needs of human living. The writings in philosophical tradition laid foundation for development of social sciences. With the passage of time various social sciences developed one after another and began to pursue separate and independent path of their own. Political philosophers inquired into the evolution of State, the growth and nature of State authority and various other problems of political nature.

Similarly, economics as separate and independent science inquired into the problems concerning production and distribution of commodities as well as the larger question of economic growth. Thus, study carried on by man about different aspects of society gave rise to different social sciences like History, Political Science, Economics, Anthropology and Psychology etc. August Comte created the new science of society and coined the name sociology in 1839.

Emergency of Sociology:

Sociology has a long past, but only a short history. The study of human society in scientific way is said to have begun with August Comte. The emergence of sociology as a discipline of academic interest is of recent origin. Its emergence as a discipline can be attributed to the vast changes that took place in the nineteenth century.

Various strains and tendencies, some intellectual and some social, combined to form the science of sociology. To quote Bottom ore, "The conditions which gave rise to sociology were both intellectual and social".

The chief intellectual antecedents of sociology are summed up by Ginsberg in the following words: Broadly it may be said that sociology has had a fourfold origin in political philosophy, the philosophy of history, biological theories of evolution and the movements for social and political reform which found it necessary to undertake survey of social conditions.

Over the time, there had grown the intellectual tradition described as the historical tradition or the philosophy of history, which believed the general idea of progress. To combat the influence of theology on history, the thinkers of the Enlightenment introduced the idea of causality into history of philosophy, elaborated the theory of progress. But philosophy of history as a distinct branch of speculation is a creation eighteenth century.

The philosophical historians introduced the new conception of society as something more than the political society' or the State. They were concerned with the whole range of social institution and made a distinction between the State and what they called 'civil society'.

They were concerned with discussions of the nature of society, classification of societies into types, population, family, Government, morality and law etc. In the early part of the nineteenth century the philosophy of history became an important intellectual influence through the writings of Hegel and Saint-Simon. The features of writings of philosophical historian reappeared in the nineteenth century, in the works of Comte and Spencer.

“A second important element in modern sociology” to quote Bottom ore is provided by social survey which itself has two sources. The first was the growing conviction of the applicability of the methods of natural sciences to the study of human affairs.

The second was the movement for social and political reforms which made it necessary to undertake surveys of social problems like poverty which arose in the industrial societies of Western Europe. The social survey came to occupy an important place in the new science of society and it was one of the principal methods of sociological enquiry.

These intellectual movements, the philosophy of history, and the social survey were themselves the product of social settings of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Western Europe. The Philosophy of history was not merely a child of thought. It was born of two revolutions, the Industrial Revolution and the Political Revolutions in France. Similarly, the social survey emerged from a new conception of evils of industrial society.

All intellectual fields are profoundly shaped by their social setting. This is particularly true of sociology, which is not only derived from that setting but takes the social setting as its basic subject matter. We will focus briefly on few of the most important social conditions of nineteenth and early twentieth century that were of type utmost significant in the development of sociology.

The long series of revolutions ushered in by French Revolution in 1789 and carrying over through the nineteenth century, and the Industrial Revolution were the important factors in the development of sociology. The upheaval of French revolution was a turning point in the history of thinking about society. It was also largely responsible for the development of Sociology.

According to Berger and Berger, So is one of the intellectual products of the French Revolution. The impact of these revolutions on many societies was enormous and many changes were resulted which were positive in nature. But these revolutions have also brought about social changes which had negative effects.

The negative effects of social change brought by French Revolution manifested in forms of chaos and disorder. Similarly, Industrial Revolution brought many social problems and evils such as labour-capital dispute, the problem of housing, increasing concentrations of people in urban areas etc.

The chaos and disorder resulted by political revolutions in France and the problems unleashed by tremendous changes brought by the industrialisation led to the study of social problems and to find new bases of order in societies. The interest in the issue of social order was one of the major concern of August Comte who created sociology as a separate science.

He felt a need for a social science which is concerned with society as a whole or with total social structure because all other social sciences deal with particular aspect of the society. He was the first man to create a new science of society and to distinguish the subject-matter of sociology from all other social sciences. Comte developed -the first complete approach to the scientific study of society.

Other social sciences may give a snapshot view of society from various angles but never a view of society in its comprehensive totality. Sociology appeared when it was felt that the other fields of human knowledge do not fully explain man's social behaviour.

Comte decided to study the whole series of theoretical sciences which he identified with positive philosophy. From the result of such study Comte sought to formulate a system of laws governing society so that he could postulate a cure for society on the basis of these laws.

From 1817 to 1823 Comte and Saint-Simon collaborated and this collaboration was specially marked in the work 'plan of the scientific operations necessary for the reorganisation of the Society'. In the latter years Comte called this work "the great discovery of the year 1822". In 1822 when he (with Saint -Simon) conceived the necessity of the new science, he intended to name the new science social physics.

He wrote, "I understand by social physics the science which has for its subject the study of social phenomena considered in the same spirit as astronomical, physical, chemical or physiological phenomena that is subject to natural invariable laws the discovery of which is the special object of investigation". Thus, the programme of a new science (later to be renamed sociology) was clearly stated.

Soon after the publication of their work, Comte and Saint – Simon dissolved their partnership and began bitterly to attack each other. Comte's lecture notes were gradually published between 1830 and 1842, forming his voluminous master work, Course of Positive Philosophy in six volumes. Very reluctantly Comte changed the name of the new science from social physics to sociology.

In the latter part of his Positive Philosophy he explained that he had invented a new name because the old one had been usurped by Belgian scientist who chose it as the title for a work. The work has referred to was Quetelet's An Essay on Social Physics.

In Positive Politics, Comte attempted to give more flesh and blood to rather formal definition of sociology implied in Positive Philosophy. Between the years 1851 and 1854, he wrote a treatise entitled System of Positive Politics in which he applied the findings of theoretical sociology to the solution of social problems of his time. Thus, accomplished his initial goal, the improvement of society.

Development of Sociology:

Sociology as a science of society originated with August Comte in the nineteenth century. He worked out a general approach to the study of society. He called sociology the "queen of all sciences" and recommended that as the highest of all sciences, it would use the 'positivist' method of observation, experimentation and comparison to understand order and promote progress. Sociology as a separate discipline originated with Comte in the middle of nineteenth century. Since then a galaxy of thinkers and scholars have contributed for the development of sociology.

There are four men, however, whom everyone in sociology regardless of his special emphasis, bias, or bent will probably accept as the central figures in the development of modern sociology. They are: August Comte, Herbert Spencer, Emile Durkheim and Max Weber.

Together, they span the whole of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, during which modern sociology was formed. They represent the main national centres France, England and Germany in which sociology first flourished and in which the modern tradition began. Each exerted a profound personal influence on the conception of sociology as an intellectual discipline.

The theory of scientific evolution was brought into sociology by Herbert Spencer (1820- 1903) in his book Principles of Sociology (1876). Spencer observed that the study of sociology was, the study of evolution in its most complex form".

The nineteenth century sociology was evolutionary because it attempted to identify and account for the principal stages in the social evolution. At the same time that evolutionism blossomed, a new analytical approach to sociology emerged.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, four men made outstanding contributions to this trend. The three pioneers of analytical sociology were Ferdinand Tonnies, George Simmel, and Gabriel Trade. Durkheim was one among them. Each of them has contributed significantly to modern sociological theory. Tonnies inaugurated the study of basic types of social groups and suggested a system for their classification. Simmel initiated the study of types of social processes.

Trade was the first to provide what, according to many thinkers, is a sound basis for a theory of social and cultural change. Efforts of these pioneers prepared the way for systematic sociological theory based on empirical investigation.

The writings of Herbert Spencer had a remarkable impact on the psychologists who had displaced his biological interpretation of social phenomenon to psychological interpretation. The notable among them were Graham Wallace and Mc Dougol (England); Wars, Codings, Mead and Deway (America)

In the early twentieth century, Durkheim made valuable contributions to sociological theory and method. His theory was fairly systematic and has been highly suggestive for his successor in France and elsewhere. Durkheim was aware that most of the earlier social theorists had neglected the problems of the appropriate method to be used in analysing social phenomena.

The Rules of Sociological Method, one of the Durkheim's principal work is specifically concerned with methodological problems.

Further, sociology was enriched by the contribution of Max Weber. The development of sociological theory was advanced by Weber's use of the comparative method, for he contributed more to comparative sociology than almost any other scholar. Weber gave a new start with his work on important subjects such as bureaucracy, sociology of law and religion.

It is a fact that the European classical scientists, particularly Marx, Max Weber and Durkheim sought to establish the scope and methods of sociology to show its value by investigation and explanation of major social phenomena.

Karl Marx sought to discover the objective laws of history and society and attempted to show that the development of society is natural historical process in which various social systems succeed each other.

But Marx introduced an entirely new attitude and orientation in the study of society. It is this attitude and orientation that has made significant contribution to the development of sociology, for it has compelled thinkers to give their attention on social (including economic) relationships than the social thought.

In the early twentieth century, important contributions have been made by the giants-Cooley, Thomas and Pareto. Many of their formulations guide sociological work today.

In the mid of the twentieth century, sociological theories were developed by the representatives of systematic sociology. Most important among them are Sorokin, Parsons, Florian Znaniecki, Maclver, Gerge C. Homans, Charles P. Loomis and others. All the major representatives of present-day systematic sociology are concerned, though in varying degrees, with both social structure and function.

All the proponents of systematic sociology agree that abstract theory must be tested by empirical research. In contrast to Spencer who accepted the significance of individuals and Durkheim who stressed emphasis on the significance on the group, the systematic sociologists seem to be in fundamental agreement about the relationship of society and individual.

It is noteworthy that systematic sociologists including Maclver were in basic agreement about the interdependence of individual and society. The systematic sociologists mainly developed elaborate conceptual schemes.

Sociological studies acquired a system at the hands of Talcott Parsons. He laid emphasis on conceptual schemes such as social system, cultural system, personality and such other in sociological theory and for their relevance to modern life.

On the other side there developed modern empirical sociology based on the social survey tradition. Sociological research developed rapidly after World War-I and even more so during and after World War-II, especially in USA.

Theoretically, sociology emerged historically as a kind of speculation about general laws, as illustrated in the broad theoretical schemes of August Comte, Herbert Spencer and other pioneers. In the twentieth century, most sociologists shifted their attention to much less ambitious problems and particularly to the gathering of empirical data about social life.

In recent years, however, the sociological quest once more has become focused upon broader generalisations and theoretical systems. Since the 1960's an unmistakable sign of a renaissance of the classical tradition in sociology, as it was fashioned by Max Weber and Durkheim, is discernible not only in advanced industrial societies but also in developing countries of Third World .

On the one side the growing interest in social change in the industrially advanced societies is encouraging the wider acceptance of Weber's method in the formation of problems, in the ideal-type of definition of concepts .On the other side, there has been a resurgence of Marxism as a general theory of society.

Initially concerned primarily with the problem of industrial society, sociology continued to expand its scope, making its concern comprehensive enough to include not only the sociology of politics, but also those of many other branches such as law, education, religion, family, art, science, medicine, leisure and knowledge, says R.K. Merton.

The recent changes in world situation have altered the attitude to the study of society. There is a change-over from the encyclopedic conception of society to a segmental interest of societies. Instead of studying the entire social structure, sociological knowledge is directed to a specific approach of the types of society of microscopic and macroscopic nature.