

# 1. Introduction to Sociology

## 1.1 Sociology: Definition and Nature

## 1.2 Emergence and Scope of Sociology

## 1.3 Importance of Sociology

### Introduction

In this first unit, students will learn how Sociology is a different discipline of knowledge. It attempts to give an overall idea of the nature of Sociology. To understand the field or scope of Sociology is also an important objective of our study.

This unit will attempt to trace the relationship between the emergence of Sociology and the social and intellectual conditions of 18th and 19th century in Europe. Initially, Sociology as a discipline emerged in Europe.

Sociology emerged as an independent and separate discipline only around the middle of the 19th century. The emergence of Sociology, no doubt has changed the approach to the study of human society. It became a distinct, unique and young social science.

The major concern of Sociology is society, particularly human society, hence it is popularly known as the science of society. Hence, it is a social science. It has acquired a distinct status for itself. Today, its importance and practical usefulness is widely recognized all over the world.

Sociology is also concerned with the life and activities of human beings. It studies the origin and development of human society - its structure and functions. It determines the relationship and

interdependence between different elements of social life. It focuses on stability and change in society, evolution and revolution as well.

Sociology is an independent social science which stands on scientific inquiry of social phenomena. In short, Sociology is the science of social relationships and social behaviour.

## 1.1 Sociology: Definition and Nature

Sociology is the science of society. It studies social relationships and society. We study social relationships, its forms, varieties and patterns, as well as social groups, social structure, social status, social norms, social problems, the changing nature of society and a number of other things.

We shall begin with a very simple question: 'What is Sociology?' The answer is also very simple : 'Sociology is a study of man in society' or 'Sociology is a scientific study of social events in society'. To understand the exact and scientific definition of Sociology, we first have to take into account how the word 'Sociology' is derived, i.e. the etymology of the word 'Sociology'.

The French philosopher Auguste Comte is considered to be the 'Father of Sociology'. He is accredited with coining the term Sociology, in 1839. He wrote the book 'Positive Philosophy' and in its fourth volume he mentioned for the first time, the word 'Sociology'.

Sociology is composed of two different words; a Latin word 'Socius' meaning

companion or associate and which eventually was referred to as society, and a Greek word 'Logos' meaning science or study. The etymological meaning of Sociology is thus 'the science of society'. Previously Comte termed this science as 'social physics.' Later on it popularly came to be known as Sociology. He found the need for a new science to study social phenomena from a scientific approach.

### 1.1.1 Definitions

1. **Auguste Comte** : "Sociology is the science of social order and progress".
2. **George Simmel** : "Sociology, is the science of the forms of human interrelations".
3. **Oxford Dictionary** : Sociology is "the study of the development, structure, and functioning of human society".

When we analyse these definitions we come to know that most sociologists have emphasised social relations and social events as the subject matter of sociology. There is no consensus among sociologists regarding one common definition because of the complexity of the subject and subject matter. However, these definitions indicate three major points:

- (i) They emphasise the scientific nature of Sociology.
- (ii) They stress on the relation between human beings and society.
- (iii) It is clear that Sociology is a complex social science which differs from all other social sciences.

### What is the "sociological imagination"?

"Do fish in the sea know anything about ocean currents or marine biology?"---Probably not.

Most humans are more like fish. We do not generally understand the societies and cultures which are created by us. We need to know something more than the common sensical knowledge, to understand the world around us. The "sociological imagination" is a means to see through our everyday knowledge and make adequate sense of our own lives.

'The Sociological Imagination' is a book written by sociologist C. Wright Mills in 1959. According to Mills, the best sociologists seem to possess a special way of thinking. This special perspective allows them to understand the interrelationship between individual lives and societies. Mills argued that we needed a sociological imagination not only to make sense of our problems but also to be able to act towards these problems in an effective manner.

### 1.1.2 Nature of Sociology

Sociology is a social science; it is a branch of knowledge that provides us information about social life of human beings and society at large. In many respects Sociology differs from all other social sciences. To understand the nature of Sociology, it is essential to look at the following points:

1. **Sociology is an empirical science:** Sociology studies and analyses social

facts on the basis of scientific method. It is not based only on ‘arm-chair’ philosophy, or speculation. Rules are framed in Sociology with the help of observation and experiences. Sociology holds that empiricism is its central feature as a science.

**Empiricism:** Empiricism is the philosophical doctrine that all human knowledge is derived from experience. Empiricism holds that knowledge is based on actual experience of the researcher.

## 2. Sociology is a theoretical and applied science:

There is a systematic development and formulation of sociological theory. Verification of already existing theories and formulation of new theories is a constant process in Sociology. Hence, it was known as a ‘pure science.’ However, today we can not call Sociology only as a pure science, since many branches of Sociology are based on the application of sociological knowledge to the field. Hence, it is a ‘pure’ as well as an ‘applied’ social science.

**3. Sociology is a factual science:** The aim of Sociology is to find out the reality of society. Sociology understands society ‘as it is.’ It confines itself to ‘what is’, and not, ‘what should be’ or ‘what ought to be’ e.g. Sociology studies the constructive part and destructive elements in society, moral and immoral, organised and disorganised aspects of society.

**4. Sociology is a holistic science:**

Sociology studies society as a whole. It does not limit itself to the study of any specific or particular aspect of society; rather, it studies all aspects of social life.

## 1.2 Emergence and Scope of Sociology

### 1.2.1 Emergence of Sociology

To understand the emergence of Sociology, we must understand the relationship between society and ideas. There is always a link between social conditions of a period and ideas which arise and are dominant in that period.

The roots of ideas developed by early sociologists lies in the social conditions that prevailed in Europe. The emergence of Sociology as a scientific discipline can therefore be traced to that period of European history which saw such tremendous social, political and economic changes embodied by the French Revolution and Industrial Revolution. This period of change in European society is known as the ‘**Enlightenment period**’ because it embodied the spirit of the French philosophers of the 18th century.

The enlightenment period marked a radical change from traditional thinking to new ways of thinking and looking at reality. Individuals started questioning each and every aspect of life. Scientific and rational thinking remained the prominent way of life. The new outlook developed as a result of the commercial revolution; the scientific revolution crystallised during the Industrial and French revolutions, which gave birth to the discipline of Sociology.

**Enlightenment:** The period of European thought, which is equated with an emphasis on reason, experience, challenge to religious and traditional authority and gradual emergence of the ideals of secular, liberal and democratic societies. The intellectual forces of this period produced positive, logical, rational and scientific thinking. They also emphasised causal relations (focus on the cause and effect relationship). Among the intellectuals we can mention Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Francis Bacon, Cicero, Machiavelli and many more.

The Industrial and French Revolutions challenged the central features of old Europe. Classes were reorganised; old classes were overthrown and new classes came into existence. Religion was questioned and lost its important position. Family structures and values were changing. The position of women also started changing. Monarchy was overthrown and democracy was introduced. Religion, community, power, wealth and the concept of society took a new form.

Here onwards, we are going to understand the different conditions under which Sociology emerged. The social conditions, commercial and scientific revolutions, the intellectual forces, Industrial and French revolutions, all had tremendous impact for radical change in Europe, which resulted in the emergence of Sociology.

### **Factors that influenced the emergence of Sociology**

**1. Commercial Revolution :** This

revolution refers to a series of events between 1450 CE and 1800 CE. These events signalled a change from the largely subsistence and stagnant economy of Medieval Europe, to a more dynamic and worldwide system. The commercial revolution refers to the expansion of trade and commerce to large scale production, which resulted in consolidation of economic and political power of European countries. The shift from land routes to sea routes began. European markets were flooded with new commodities, spices and textiles from the East.

Expansion of Banking Services took place and it was an important feature of commercial revolution. Paper currency was introduced. This revolutionary change also promoted the rise of the middle classes to economic power, which became very influential.

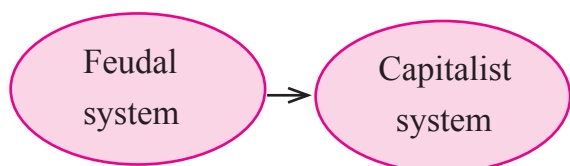
All these changes have resulted in changing social relationships in society. The nature and forms of such changes have become the subject-matter of Sociology.

**2. Industrial Revolution :** The Industrial Revolution that took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in England, brought about great changes in the social and economic life of the people. First in England, then in other countries of Europe and later in other continents. The industrial revolution was not a single event. There were many interrelated developments that affected the social setting.

During the Industrial Revolution new tools and techniques were



discovered, which could produce goods on a large-scale. During 1760-1830, a series of inventions of tools and techniques, and organisation of production took place. This gave rise to the factory system of production. Thus, a change in economy from feudal to capitalist system of production.



A class of capitalists emerged, which controlled the industrial system. Due to this revolution, society moved from age-old handmade goods to the 'new age' machine-made goods. The Industrial Revolution affected society to a great extent.

**The Guild System :** The Guild system refers to a particular type of productive system which was at its peak in the 13th century in Europe.

The closure of guild system, introduction of factory system, division of labour, and migration from rural to urban, class system, labour organisation, economic inequality and the democratic pattern were the outcomes of the industrial revolution.

Large numbers of people migrated to urban areas in order to work in factories. Large industrial bureaucracies arose to provide services to industries and to the emerging capitalist economic system. In this economy, the ideal was a free marketplace where many products of the industrial system could be exchanged.

The industrial revolution, capitalism and the reaction against them led to an



**Industrial Revolution**

enormous upheaval in Western society, which affected sociologists immensely. Auguste Comte, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, Max Weber, George Simmel were preoccupied with these changes and the problems they created for society as a whole.

The significant themes of this revolution which concerned the early sociologists were:

- a) The conditions of workers
- b) The transformation of property
- c) Urbanisation

### 3. The French (Political) Revolution:

The long series of political revolutions started by the French



**French Revolution**

Revolution in 1789 were the immediate factors in the emergence of Sociology.

Most writers during this period were disturbed by the disorder and chaos in society, particularly in French society.

They came together to restore order to society. Many of them sought to find a new basis of order in society

which was affected by political revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries. Their interest in 'social order' was one of the major concerns of 'classical Sociology,' especially Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim.

The French Revolution which occurred in 1789 marked a turning point in the history of human struggle for freedom and equality. It put an end to the age of feudalism and introduced a new order to society. This revolution brought about far reaching changes not only in French society but all over Europe. Other countries like India were also influenced by ideas generated during the revolution. Ideas like liberty, fraternity and equality, which now form a part of the preamble to the Constitution of India, had their origin in the French Revolution.

**4. Scientific Revolution:** Europe produced a 'Scientific Revolution' in the Renaissance period. There was increased emphasis on science in society as a whole. The technological advancement influenced every sector of life. Science in general was acquiring very high prestige and those who were associated with science were considered successful and were honoured.

The impact of the scientific revolution was crucial not just in changing material life, but also on ideas about nature and society.

The emergence of Sociology in Europe is owed majorly to the ideas and discoveries contributed by science. Sociologists from the very beginning

were preoccupied with science and many wanted to design Sociology on the lines of natural sciences like Physics and Biology.

The **Enlightenment** period saw the beginning of the scientific revolution. Science was considered in the social context and looked at as a tool for satisfying the needs of humanity. New scientific discoveries helped in the eradication of blind beliefs. This period has made a significant contribution to shaping a scientific attitude in Sociology.

**5. Urbanization:** Partly as a result of the industrial revolution, large numbers of people were uprooted from rural areas and they migrated to urban settings. This massive shift was caused because of jobs created by the new industrial set up in urban areas. However this migration and expansion of cities resulted in endless problems such as overcrowding, pollution, traffic, lack of health care, growth of slums etc.

The nature of urban life and its problems attracted the attention of many early sociologists, especially Max Weber and George Simmel. The first major school of American Sociology, 'The Chicago School' assigned its emergence to the problems created by urbanization.

#### ACTIVITY - 1

You have read about commercial, scientific, industrial and French revolutions which were responsible for the emergence of Sociology as a discipline. Identify the effects of industrial development on Indian society.

### 1.2.2 Scope of Sociology

Scope is also known as the field of study. Scope of any subject also refers to the range of subjects under study. The subject matter of Sociology is very wide because all aspects of social interactions are included in Sociology. The scope of Sociology can be understood with a brief introduction to following new areas in Sociology.

- **Bio-Sociology:** Bio-Sociology is a subject that has emerged relatively recently in Sociology. Researchers in the area use a variety of sociological methodologies to study the role of biology in human social life.
- **Sociology of Art:** The Sociology of Art is a field concerned with the social worlds of art and aesthetics. This field seeks to understand the social context of the production and consumption of art.
- **Sociology of Market Research:** This is an applied field which connects marketing and sociological strategies to understand the market in a meaningful way. It incorporates theoretical knowledge of Sociology in marketing, segmental division of customers, needs analysis etc.
- **Visual Sociology:** Visual Sociology is an area of Sociology concerned with the visual dimensions of social life. Visual Sociology aims to normalize the use of visual imagery as a valid and relevant type of data for sociological research.
- **Diaspora Studies:** Diaspora Studies is a new interdisciplinary area that

has emerged in Sociology. It deals with the study of migration and its cultural, literary, social, demographic, anthropological, political, economic impact and international relations.

#### Diaspora

A **diaspora** is a scattered population whose origin lies within a smaller geographic locale. Diaspora can also refer to the movement of the population from its original homeland. Diaspora means “to scatter” in Greek, but today we use the term to describe a community of people who live outside their shared country of origin or ancestry but maintain active connections with it.

The new emerging areas given in this section are not comprehensive. These are few examples of various recent areas explored under the broad discipline of Sociology. The scope of Sociology is widening in a changing modern complex society.

#### Film Studies

Film studies as an academic discipline is a new concept of the twentieth century. It is an interdisciplinary academic discipline that deals with various theoretical, historical and critical approaches to films. It mainly deals with exploring the narrative, artistic, cultural, economic, and political implications of cinema. In sociology, films serve as text, to study important social categories like class, race, ethnicity, gender. Within Sociology courses like Sociology through films or Cinematic Sociology have been introduced in various universities.

## Development Studies

Development Studies is an interdisciplinary field that examines the patterns of inequalities in world development. It examines the historical context, and the problems and processes of international development. The discipline pays particular attention to the relationships between 'developed' and 'developing' societies, the roles played by various institutions within them and their effects on processes of social, political, economic and environmental change.

Development Studies has tremendous scope as a professional field. Careers may include: public sector research and policy analysis; NGOs and humanitarian work; education; development programme planning and implementation; managing volunteers; local and international journalism; immigration and refugee services; travel and tourism work; cross-cultural relations consultancy; public relations and communications; urban planning; international development; public health; community work; environmental and climate change research to name a few.

## ACTIVITY - 2

Interview two people from your local area, who have migrated from another place. Find out the reasons for shifting and ask about their experiences and problems (if any). Share your findings with your class.

## Cultural Studies

The growth of Cultural Studies is linked to the rise in interest in 'popular culture' in Western societies in the 1960s. Cultural Studies finds its origin in the 'Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies in UK.' Cultural Studies offers us a set of ways for reading a wide variety of contemporary popular cultural phenomena. It asks questions that enable us to understand questions of identity, labelling, consumption, regulation and censorship.

Contemporary Cultural Studies takes everyday life very seriously. It studies lifestyle, consumption and social relations in metropolitan cultures. According to Cultural Studies, culture is produced through everyday living - the food people eat, the fashion they adopt, the entertainment they prefer or the festivals they celebrate. Thus, Cultural Studies investigates the process of making culture. It believes that this process is linked to relationships of power.

Cultural studies borrow methods and theories from various disciplines.

## 1.3 Importance of Sociology

We can understand the importance of Sociology as follows:

- 1. Sociology studies society in a scientific manner:** Sociology has made it possible to study society in a scientific manner. Scientific knowledge about a complex human society is needed in order to achieve progress



in various fields. The science of society assists us to understand our self, our capacities, and talents. It enables us to adjust ourselves to the changing environment. It guides us in understanding social life.

- 2. Sociology gives knowledge about social diversities:** Sociology provides us with knowledge of different types of societies, groups, communities, their way of life, cultural differences, religious and regional differences, plural nature of society.
- 3. Sociology develops a scientific approach:** With the help of Sociology we can develop a scientific approach to know social reality. It makes us more objective, rational, critical, prejudice-free, and positive in our thinking.
- 4. Sociology is career-oriented:** The utility of Sociology is increasing day by day. It is essential at present, to have sociological knowledge to study our dynamic society. The occupational nature is also changing in a changing society. The knowledge of Sociology can perfectly be matched with a changing society, changing needs and changing nature of occupations. From this perspective, the importance of Sociology increases. Sociology is not confined to the classroom. It's application is increasing in the field of industry, social services, social work, law, competitive examinations, marketing, public relations, journalism, broadcasting, skill development, communication fields, NGOs, labour welfare, social security, insurance sector, rehabilitation, social welfare,

rural development, tourism, family welfare, census operations, policy and planning, public health, social research, counselling, police department, tribal welfare, inclusive education, correctional administration, consumer research and so on.

- 5. Solution to social problems:** The present society is facing several social problems like poverty, unemployment, terrorism, overpopulation, migration social unrest, addiction, social disorganisation, racial and caste conflicts, communal riots, delinquency etc. To solve all these problems, balanced knowledge is needed. Such analysis can be made using a sociological outlook.
- 6. Sociology keeps people updated and alert:** Sociology has a practical value. It keeps people updated and alert about social situations, social phenomena, changing society and it invites our attention for an effective response to such conditions.

### ACTIVITY - 3

Visit any nearby NGO and collect information about their work. Prepare a PPT and present it in your class.

In this chapter you have become familiar with the meaning of Sociology, the nature and usefulness of studying Sociology. We hope you are now excited to learn about the thinkers who have contributed to the development of Sociology.

## SUMMARY

- Sociology studies human social behaviour and social relationships.
- Auguste Comte is known as the Father of Sociology as he first coined the word 'Sociology'.
- The word 'Sociology' is derived from a Latin word '*socius*' and Greek word '*logos*', which means 'Science of studying society'.
- Along with Comte, Spencer, Durkheim, Marx, Weber are also known as pioneers of sociology.
- Sociology has great importance in a modern complex society.

## EXERCISE

### 1. (A) Choose the correct alternative and complete the statements.

- (1) The term 'socius' means \_\_\_\_.  
(science, companion, social)
- (2) The term 'logos' means \_\_\_\_.  
(associate, science, methodology)
- (3) \_\_\_\_ is often regarded as the Father of Sociology.  
(Durkheim, Weber, Comte)
- (4) When sociologists make an effort to understand practical problems of daily life it is a/an \_\_\_\_ science.  
(pure, application, theoretical)

### 1. (B) Correct the incorrect pair.

- (1) (i) Study of role of biology in human life - Bio-Sociology.  
(ii) Study of social words of art and aesthetics - Sociology of Art.  
(iii) Theoretical of knowledge in Sociology in marketing segmental division of customers, needs analysis etc. - Sociology of Market Research.

- (iv) Study of visual dimensions of social life - Diaspora Studies.

### 1. (C) Identify the appropriate term from the given options.

Diaspora Studies, The Positive Philosophy, Theoretical science

- (1) Comte coined the term Sociology in this book.
- (2) Sociology is concerned with developing sociological theory.

### 1. (D) Correct underlined words and complete the sentence.

- (1) When sociological research is done for its own sake it makes Sociology a/an applied science.
- (2) Rape, hate crimes and terrorism are examples of social institutions.

### 2. Write short notes.

- (1) Nature of Sociology
- (2) New emerging areas in Sociology
- (3) Enlightenment period

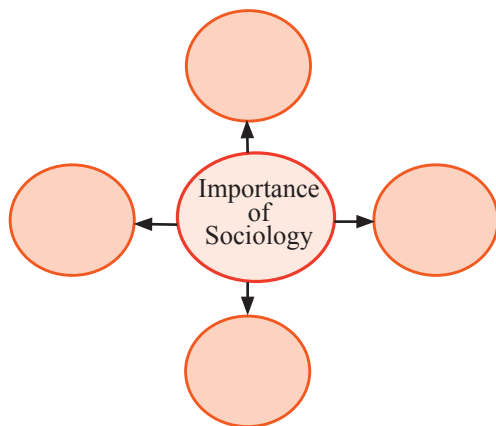
**3. Write differences.**

- (1) Natural science and Social science.
- (2) Theoretical science and Applied science.

**4. Explain the following concepts with examples.**

- (1) Diaspora
- (2) Bio-Sociology

**5. (A) Complete the concept map.**



**(B) State whether the following statements are True or False with reasons.**

- (1) The French revolution led to changes in society.

- (2) The developments in natural science has had an impact on sociology as a discipline.

**6. Give your personal response.**

- (1) Is India in the 'scientific' stage of growth? Explain why you hold the view that you do.
- (2) Explain in brief the link between Cinema and Society.

**7. Answer the following question in detail (about 150-200 words).**

Discuss with suitable examples, the scope of Sociology in today's world.

**ACTIVITY:**

**Class discussion:** Divide the class into groups of 5-7 students. Each group will discuss one statement listed: (i) Sociology is practical and related to life. (ii) Careers in Sociology.

