
Chapter 1

Sociology and Society

❖ Sociology

- Sociology is a branch of knowledge that deals with the activities of the society as a whole and their influence upon individual actions. It is a systematic study of scientific concepts, terms and knowledge about the society.
- The subject matter of sociology is the behaviour of humans as social beings.
- The ideas and material developments that led to the emergence of sociology were mainly western but they had an influence upon the whole world.

❖ The emergence of sociology

- Sociology studies the society on the basis of scientific methods and its facts are backed by scientific reasoning that is distinct from philosophical, religious and common sense observations.
- The intellectual movement of Enlightenment in Europe in late the 17th and 18th centuries gave rise to individualism and advancement in scientific knowledge that was extended to the study of human affairs.
- Early sociologists like Marx, Comte and Spencer tried to categorise societies and distinguish the stages of social development.
- It was also believed that knowledge accumulated through sociology would solve social problems.
- Darwin's ideas about organic evolution exercise a dominant influence on earlier sociological thoughts and society was studied as Darwin studied the evolution of organism.
- Industrial revolution in the 18th century in Europe gave birth to capitalism and led to the rearrangement of social interactions among various classes.
- It also led to the emergence of new classes and consequently, modern and complex societies.
- Manufacturing became the primary source of employment in urban areas. The division of labour acquired new contours.
- The phenomenon of capitalism was associated with colonialism. Both had a far-reaching impact on the rest of the world.
- India was the colony of Britain. Therefore it became important to study birth and growth of sociology in Europe to understand its impact on the development of sociology in India.
- Indian sociology had to deal with western notions and ideas about Indian society which were not always accurate.
- The diversity of cultures in India led to the convergence of study areas of sociology and social anthropology.

❖ Relationship of sociology with other disciplines

- Political Science studies the political theories and administration. Sociology focuses on the interrelationships between political institutions along with political behaviour as a manifestation of social behaviour.
- Economics studies economic activities, economic policies and allocation of resources in a precise form. Sociology seeks to link economic behaviour to social norms, values, practices and interests.
- Polity, economy and society are interrelated and affected by each other. Social, political and economic policies are formed, decided and implemented on the basis of the study of polity, society and economy of the nation.
- Historians study the concrete reality and sociologists try to abstract from the concrete reality, categorise and generalise. Social history studies social patterns, gender relations, customs and institutions from a historical perspective.
- Psychology is the science of behaviour. Sociology tries to understand behaviour of the individual in the framework of society.
- Anthropologists study simple societies whereas sociology studies complex societies. Social anthropology and cultural anthropology are of concern for sociologists. Anthropology and sociology almost use the same methods to study societies. Both the disciplines use qualitative and quantitative techniques, macro and micro approaches to study societies.
- It was believed that anthropology would merge with Sociology as simple societies are disappearing during the age of globalisation. However, anthropology adapted itself to study matters related to state and globalisation which were different from its traditional subject matter.

❖ Important Terms and Definitions

- **Capitalism:** It is a social system based on market exchange, private ownership and a profit motive. Capital refers to any asset (property, money and machines) which can be used to produce commodities for sale or invested in a market to achieve profit.
- **Dialectic:** The antagonistic social forces in the society. For example, social constraint and individual will.
- **Empirical Investigation:** An enquiry that is factual root study in nature, which is carried out in any given area of sociological study.
- **Social Constraint:** The societal norms that exert pressure and regulate behaviour of the individuals present in it.
- **Values:** The ideas and notions of an individual or a group in the society concerned with the questions of what is desirable, proper, good or bad.
- **Feminist Theories:** The theories arguing towards centrality of the notions of gender that prevails in the society.
- **Conventional History:** History related to the facts about kings and wars. Particularly referring to the 'exciting' part of the past.
- **Enlightenment:** The stage of rational and scientific thinking in the human societies.
- **Common Sense:** Naturalistic or individualistic understanding.