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Sociology & it's Scientific Status: A Brief Study

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Abstract:

In this study of paper, the study of scientific status of sociology is attempted since it, basically makes us make out the complexities of human behaviour not only at individual level but also at community level as well as it enables us to probe into the tracts with which our attitudes, values and beliefs form the way we interact with one another, and consequently the behaviour of others can be better understood along with social trends can be better explained and predicted. Starting from the early 19th century many scientists, in particular Auguste Comte, coined the word "sociology" and attempted to develop a discourse that involves the methods used in the natural sciences in studying human society. In regard to the status of sociology, there were three groups of sociologists who have given three views. One group says sociology is a science and it is quite similar to natural sciences. Another group is of the opinion that sociology is not a science at all. The other group opines though sociology is a science but it can hardly be treated as the natural science. So, since sociology is a separate branch of knowledge, its scientific status is focused in this study. For the purpose, secondary sources are used for collection of necessary and related data. This paper may be useful for academic purpose. The scholars studying sociology can understand the stand as a sociology pure science from this study.

Keywords: Sociology, Science, Scientific method, Society, Research, Social Science

Introduction:

Sociology can be defined as a science based on the study of humans and then culture. It is one of the first social sciences to be acknowledged. Precisely, sociology is the scientific study of the development, structure, interactions and collective behaviour of organised groups of human beings. According to Ibrahim (2000) Sociology is a social science which studies the relationship between people as individuals and as a group studies the influences of social conditions on these relationships. Otite (1994) elucidates "sociology" as the study of human interactions and

organization of social institution which deals with social process & social relationship particularly in their institution contexts.

However, different sociologists have defined sociology with different interpretations. Max Weber defines sociology as "science of action". Emile Durkheim expounded sociology as "science of institution". A. W. Small and Robert E. Park defined sociology as "the science of social process" and "as the science of collective behaviours respectively while Lester Frank Ward and William Graham Sumner explicated sociology as "the science of the society". Franklin Henny Giddings says sociology is the science of social phenomena.

It can be said that since sociology is a science of society, research conducted by the sociologists according to scientific theories so that precise & accurate results can be obtained.

Objectives of Study:

The objectives of any study is to summarize the achievement of the said study and these need be interrelated to the Research problem. So, the objectives of the study are to define the status of sociology as science and bring out the prospects and problems if there are any. For solution of any social problem, sociology is relied on. The present day society is replete with many problems but these could be solved with the help of the scientific study of the society. Hence, the key objective of the study is bring out the scientific status of sociology.

Research Methodology:

In its most commonest sense, methodology means a proper analysis of all the methods used in the research, so research methodology is the practical strategy research adopted in the study by the scholars. In study, information and evidence have been gathered from two types of sources like primary sources and secondary sources. Works of art, theses, articles, research reports, etc have been some of used as primary sources which give direct access to the subject of research. Second hand information & commentaries from other researchers which have been collected from academic books, reviews, journals etc are the secondary sources used for the purpose that synthesis or primary sources.

Discussion Perspective:

Sociologists don't agree with one another in their opinions as they put forth their own views regarding sociological concepts and hence the opinion of any particular sociologist may not be taken into account, on the other hand the opinions of various sociologists can be discussed. Let the meaning of science be discussed at the beginning.

Science and Sociology:

It is vital to know what science is before making out the correlation between science and sociology. Systematic methods factual investigation methods, conceptual thinking, logical estimation of arguments for forging comprehensive of a specific subject and the scrutiny of facts are science it

means science encompasses systematic perspective while studying any prodigy. Since study of human nature is not similar to the study of world of nature, sociology cannot be designed after the natural sciences. Nevertheless, when sociology studies society, it makes use of a systematic attitude thereby shapes a sphere of knowledge. Social behaviour is judged from conventional motifs of interrelationship. Sociology probes into the social rules and procedures which tie up as well as dissociate a person from a group or union. As sociology utilizes scientific method along with factual research features compilation and assessment, it is regarded as science of society, but so far as the study of society is concerned, the systematic approach to it makes sociology a science of society.

It can't be said that sociology includes all in its purview or it is an all pervasive science of society which may bring anything special of social sciences in its sphere. Although sociology appeared as the latest science in the scene, yet it can't be considered to be insignificant than other social sciences. It has its intelligible scope in respect to terms, approach, physiography and concept since inception. Since sociology accumulates transparent and systematic information of social reality, researches approve of scientific status of sociology. Unlike science, sociology cannot do any direct experiments on men as it has no laboratory so social interaction is relied on for scientific research considering the entire society as its laboratory.

Challenges to the scientific status of sociology:

Attempts have been made to view sociology as science but some of the following limitations have posed challenges to it:

1. Lack of Impartiality:

Lexically, impartiality is the quality of not being biased or prejudiced. It is after objected study of it is not possible impartial observation is a vital necessary in case of a researcher to see things as these are. So a researcher should be impartial, detached and unprejudiced while observing and judging a phenomenon. It is claimed that sociologists cannot make unbiased and objective study since they give vent to their perceptions to be distorted by cultural and personal biases.

Moreover it is said as sociologists are part of the society which they critically observe, they can hardly be objective in their views. However, impartiality is supposed to be an elusive phenomenon to be maintained by a researcher at the practical level because any research is replete with viewpoints and these mostly tinged with subjectively. During sociological research personal views and observations may creep in the certain levels. So sociological researches need to be impartial in their study. Their research should be devoid of considerations of colour, race, creed, sex, ideology, etc. Durkheim pointed out in "The Rules of the Sociological Method" that "social facts must be treated as things and all preconceived notions about social facts must be abandoned". Max Weber is of the view regarding impartiality "sociology must be value free." Mannheim says Value-free research is an desirable goal towards which social scientists can strive without any necessary

expectation of actually attaining it. However, according to Mills and Wordsworth “Disclosing bias or personal belief is less dangerous than pretending to be value-free and social sciences are normative”. So, the practice of view methods of scientific research should be used to maintain impartiality.

2. Lack of Precision and Credibility:

While studying the scientific status of sociology, the subjective data which are accumulated from interviews, surveys, etc are taken into consideration. Consequently, the research view point may not be precise. Moreover, as the whole population are not included in it, the observation may remain esoteric and hence may be credible. Further, the data collection processes cannot be always impartial and hence credibility of data may be questioned. Since individual observations are compiled in the views used in sociology, these may lack in factual testimony and hence credibility in scientific status of sociology may be implausible. The precision of observation may be questioned as sociology basically associated with human beliefs, opinions, behaviour, etc.

3. Lacks of Foreseeability:

It is a well-known fact that the scientific status of sociology cannot be predicted as social issues are unforeseen and variable. So complexity of human nature is too difficult to predict and it poses challenge to the researcher. A person has his/her own personal pragmatism towards society where he/she lives and it is instinctive and hence future predictions by the sociologists become complex tasks.

4. Lack of Lab Research Facility:

According to Yilliw and Yillin, “the laboratory method is only general procedure of accurate observation.” Lab research enables a researcher to have objective observation and chances to repeat experiment when he/she wishes to have. But paradoxically, there is no chance of laboratory research facility in case of sociological studies unlike that of physical sciences since human beings cannot be used for laboratory tests. Different elements of society cannot be deselected and analysed as it is done in physical sciences because of complex and changing character of society.

5. Problem of ex-activity:

There is hardly any scope of academic research in scientific study of sociology. Many factors are responsible for such lack of activity like integration nature of sociology and also sociology includes various losses and theories that come from Domain Hypothesis become difficult on the part of researchers since the study of sociology poses challenges to evaluate. Though the established disciplines are traditional and there is no scarcity of winding for research whereas it is no so in case of sociology, consequently there is chance of lack of activity. Hence, researchers need to strive for more meliulous scientific approach to the study of sociology.

6. Lack of Clinical-trial:

One of the vital elements of physical science is clinical trial or experimental. But lack of

clinical- trial in the study of scientific status of sociology is a cause of concern since, it draws the researchers back from reaching conclusions from the accumulated data. Clinical -Trial, on the other hand validate the results of study, inspiteof lack of required of instrument for clinical trial, sociology can't be kept away from the preview of science. For instance astronomy is a branch of science though clinical trial possible in society may not require clinical trials.

7. The Lack of Measurement:

Sociology, being a complex field of study, the scientific status of sociology is difficult to be measured. The cause of difficult in aptly measuring the vital elements of the scientific status of sociology is that the ideas relating to it vary from researcher to researcher. Though the contexts of physical sciences like physics and chemistry can be assessed by instrument but social factors like modernization and cultural incorporation can be measured since sociology doesn't have such instrument and hence can be said that sociology is not science. As sociology is a qualitative field of study the measurement of its scientific status is a complex one. However, with the passing of time, the qualitative nature of sociology advances and likewise the measurement device get antidote. Now-a-days the more use of quantitative measurement along with statistical methods is given and also different measuring methodologies are adopted.

8. Unpredictability as a drawback:

Science, basically physically sciences are predictable to a large extent and so have reliable but sociology is mostly unpredictable as social behaviours are variable as well as volatile and hence it is said that these can't be predicted. But such a drawback in case of sociology is not always acceptable because the behaviours of a group of individuals can universally be correctly predicted though it is not possible in case of a single individual. So researchers are using such methods as surveys, observation and experiment to assess the interaction among people to predict their behaviours thus behaviour of people in some given situation can be predicted using the predictive models. So Lundberg says "..... As our knowledge of social phenomena increases and we are able to judge the effects of various variable involved, it will be possible for us to predict social events with greater accuracy".

9. Lack of Generalization:

As sociology makes use of qualitative research methods like surveys, interviews, participant observation, generalized statements regarding any social phenomenon can hardly be made. The nature of sociology is context-based. The social value and norms are unique for a particular society. So, as per the context the social phenomenon is differently understood. Therefore, it is quite hard to formulate generalized statement on a particular phenomenon. Subjective nature of human behaviour has impact on human sociology because individual experiences and beliefs vary from person to person. So, obviously, the study of one group of people will not be pertinent to another group. Unlike

physical objects, human behaviour does not have uniform patterns. So it is difficult to measure the behaviour of individuals with a general standard. Though sociology is not a natural science like physics, chemistry, etc yet can be considered as science since scientific methods like research, enquiry, observation, etc. As well as other modern and developed methods are used.

10. Lack of terminology:

It is also a problem that there is no appropriate terminology in sociology so that different lexical meanings can be conveyed. So the use of different terms by various researchers often gives way to confusion since such terms means differently in various contexts. Moreover, some terms which are used, do not have consistency with the definitions in sociology that are generally accepted.

VISTAS OF SCIENTIFIC STATUS OF SOCIOLOGY:

The scientific status of sociology is now being recognized and it is acclaimed as one of the important fields of study because of growing research possibilities and methods. Following are the vistas of sociology which have called for research regarding scientific status of it;

A. Scientific method:

The scientific method is used in the study of then scientific status of sociology and thus the hypothesis and theories are authenticated with the help of data that are obtained from surveys, observations, interviews, etc. After this, the data lead to conclusions relating to social phenomena. According to Karl Pearson “the unity of all science consists alone in its method, not its material,” (17i). So scientific methods are used in the study in the study of sociology. The techniques which are employed in the sociology using quantitative measurements are compared with the methods of experimentation. Both sociology and physical sciences use the same scientific methods in their respective studies but their techniques and methodology differ. The various steps of scientific method used in sociology are hypothesis testing, data collection and their tabulation as well as classification, generalization, problem of study formulation etc.

B. Confirmable Principles of Sociology:

The principles of sociology can be confirmed through the collection of data and their analysis. More accurately, quantitative analysis can be used to test hypothesis and theories in sociology. For this, surveys, observations and interviews are used to find out patterns in social behaviour. Moreover, the principles of sociology are confirmed by analysing existing data so that population bent and mobility can be understood.

C. Casual nexus in sociology:

Sociology finds out nexus between cause and its effect in the social phenomena. In this way, the impact of social structure and behaviour of individuals and the society at large, is determined. The sociologists witness how the underlying factors bring some outcomes and try to make out the dynamics that effect social changes. They, thus, not only the identify the causes of various social

hindrances but also provide their reasonable solutions. For instance, if a social researcher tries to find out the nexus between poverty and crime and the cause of rampant crimes in a specific area, he/she may give the suggestions for reduction of crimes in such an area.

D. Predictions are possible in Sociology:

Behaviour of individuals as well as groups in future can be foretold by studying social norms and values, and social structures. Social vogues of past and present can be examined and keen knowledge about whether such vogues will change or persist in future can be gained. Such research may be helpful in framing public policies and this can be predicted by sociology.

E. Sociology makes exact observations:

Like natural sciences, sociology does not have laboratory research scope; yet, observations can be made in sociology. Exact observations of social behaviour and happenings can be made outside the laboratory. Though the observations are made in their respective laboratories in case of the natural sciences but in case of sociology, the whole social world is considered to be the laboratory. In spite of not having a laboratory, sociology makes exact observations and since laboratory experiment is not the sole ethos of science, sociology is a science.

F. Impartiality in sociology in sociology:

Without any bias or assumption, sociology can make impartial study of social phenomena. While doing research, collection any data and analysing results the researchers try to be impartial and impartiality ensures accuracy as well as reliability of findings of the research. Researchers need to put aside personal bias and preoccupied notions in order to maintain impartiality. During the research process, a researcher shall have to keep his/her own values and beliefs intact while validity and reliability of data should have to be ensured. So impartial study of sociology characteristics is carried out with the help of new techniques and methods for which sociology is considered to be science.

G. Sociology can make flawless measurement:

Like natural science sciences, sociology makes measurement of social phenomena without any flaw. So accurate measurement in sociology is possible. Social relationship can be measured with the help of statistical methods scales measurement, sociometry and hence sociology is a science.

THE CHIEF TRAITS OF SOCIOLOGY AS A SCIENCE:

Sociology, basically, is the scientific study of society and behaviour of humans in society. In order to have a comprehensive knowledge about social strata and their change sociology, as science, uses varied empirical investigation and critical analysis methods. Being an ever-changing and diverse field of study, sociology has a long history of research and critical study. It throws light on the complicated ever-changing human relationships in the society. Being a social science like economics and anthropology, sociology has its own specific traits as under:

1. Study of social relationship:

Sociology studies the relationships which are found in society. Such relationships pertain to between individuals, organizations and groups and their relations with their environment.

2. Study of society and institutions:

Sociologists make study how human behaviour is influenced and shaped by institutions, structures and society. Sociology is an interdisciplinary field that records the interactions between culture, power, social institutions, etc and individuals, groups, organization, etc. The behaviour of individuals groups, organizations, are studied by sociologists so the interactions between social dynamics and social change are understood by them.

3. Sociology as a generalizing social science:

Sociology, unlike other particularizing sciences, encompasses economic s, political science, psychology, geography, education, etc. Thus, sociology tries to explain social phenomena from the point of view society. Many of the aspects of the other fields are being used in sociology. Psychology, anthropology, along with sociology nurse aspects of human behaviour as their subject matter. But their ways of thinking differ in respect of human behaviour and the difference can be marked in the variability of the respective aforementioned social sciences. For example, variability in behaviour in respect to personality of the particular human being is elucidated by the psychologists. Variability in Human behaviour in respect to valuations in culture can be expounded by the anthropologist while sociology has its own way of interpretation and the variability in human behaviour in the shape of variation in social structure is explained by the sociologist.

4. Sociology as Social Science:

Since sociology studies human behaviour, social structures and social institutions, it is social structure. As it coalescent the facets of social like anthropology, economics, political science, psychology, etc, sociology can be said to be said to be interdisciplinary. Sociology looks into the relationships between persons, behaviour, culture and environment and at the same time probes into the function and structure of society, how social how social changes takes place and their effect on human being in particular and the group in general. It makes research of the effect of globalization and various social policies on society. As sociology nurtures social facts, phenomena, man's social behaviour. Cover it all in his Research Methodology (New Delhi :S.Chand, 2010), 226 has rightly said, "Social science cannot escape value judgements, and their damaging influences can be mitigated only by subjecting the thought process to valid thinking procedures."

5. Sociology as Theoretical Science:

As sociology tries to acquire knowledge and doesn't take its appliance and usefulness into account, it is pure or theoretical science, it strives to aptly describe the relation of social phenomenon and their attributes and explain the formation of general statements. Thus, sociology enriches

knowledge with the addition of information and this knowledge can be helpful in administration social work legislation as well as solution of any social issues. Various theories are used to elucidate social phenomenon like symbolic interaction, structural function and conflicts. These theories are contingent on scientific testament and thus find out the cause behind information of human behaviour by norms values and structures. Hence sociology is theoretical or pure science which illustrates the social cosmos.

CONCLUSION:

From the above discussions, it can be concluded that inspite of some objections, sociology can be said to have the characteristics and basic principles of a pure science and hence deserves to be a science. In the words of Harry M. Johnson, sociology has such characteristics as science like, “it is empirical, theoretical, cumulative and non-technical, and progress is steadily made in these sectors.” (Harry M. Jhonson, *Sociology: A Systematic Introduction*” New Delhi: Allied Publishers Ltd. 1960)

2. So sociology is science in the sense that like science sociology is a mass of knowledge about a particular subject which is accumulated by systematic observations, experience and study and thus covered into a unified whole. Sociology tries to categorize the various forms of social relationships by studying facts with the help of scientific methods. As sociology makes provision of having intuition into the human relations, it is considered to be a priceless scientific field of study. It can probe into various social issues relating to race, colour, gender or class discrimination, Inspite-of there being some objections and skepticisms relating to social study methods, more number of researchers are found to have bent on sociological research that abets scientific credibility of sociology implies that sociology is a vital as well as precious realm of study.

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