

Emergency of Sociology: The, Socio-Political, Economic and Intellectual Context
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Lecture 5

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Emergence of Sociology: The
socio-political, economic and
intellectual context



Welcome to the second week of lectures. In this week, we will look into the socio-political, economic and intellectual history behind the emergence of the discipline of sociology. As we had discussed in the previous classes, there are certain requirements and factors that necessitate the emergence of a new discipline especially in the social sciences. The emergence of a social science is not the product of a single individual or a single intellectual. It must emerge from a particular context and the context must convince the existing intellectuals that the prevailing theories or the frameworks are unable to explain or unable to interpret the kind of changes that are happening around them by compelling them to look for better frameworks, theories and methodologies, which might consolidate over a period of time; thus, giving rise to the emergence of a new particular discipline.

In the case of sociology, this is exactly what happened. As we discussed in the previous class, there is a saying that sociology has a long past; but a very short history. A systematic and critical thinking about the society must have been there in many civilizations in the pre-modern societies.

But, the emergence of this kind of thinking in a more institutionalized, in a more systematic manner emerged only in Europe in the 18th and 19th century through the institutions of higher learning and through the writings of important scholars and thinkers. The fact that sociology emerged in Europe and specifically Western Europe in this particular time period itself requires quite a lot of examination. Sociology afterwards spread across the globe mainly through the process of colonialism. We will briefly look at the specific factors and contexts that generated this particular discipline in Europe.

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Resource materials



- Royce Edward. 2015. *Classical Social Theory and Modern Society*. Rawat Publication
- Morrison, Ken 2012. *Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought*. Sage Publications
- Tucker Kenneth H. 2001. *Classical Social Theory: A Contemporary Approach*. Wiley Blackwell.
- Conversation with experts



These are the following resource materials that we will be using for this lecture; 1. 'Edward Royce titled *Classical Social Theory and Modern Society*', 2. Ken Morrisons work '*Marx, Durkheim, Weber: Formations of Modern Social Thought*' and 3. Kenneth Tuckers book titled '*Classical Social Theory: A Contemporary Approach*'. We also hope to have a couple of conversations with with experts in in the field of history of science and technology and also in philosophy.

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Sociology emerged as a new discipline in response to the 'great transformation' which swept across the Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth century resulting in the demise of 'premodern' world and the rise of the 'modern world'



The triple revolution

- Intellectual and cultural revolution: the Enlightenment
- Social and political revolution: the French Revolution of 1789
- Economic revolution: the rise of capitalism and the subsequent process of industrialization

preceded by the Renaissance and the Reformation



Now, sociology emerged as a new discipline in response to the great transformation which swept across the Europe in the 18th and 19th century resulting in the demise of the premodern world and the rise of the modern world. We thus specifically situate the emergence of sociology with the emergence of the modern world. This modern world quite often indicates the emergence of a modern vis-à-vis that of a premodern or a traditional society.

We will see that in the coming lectures almost all social scientists, who we are going to engage with the subject, were all preoccupied with the questions of what constitutes this model i.e. how do society function itself in this modern field; in what way are they different from the traditional societies. A new modern emerged in Europe during this particular time and the old medieval or pre-modern social system; or social order began crumbling down. This was as a result of what is known as the great transformation, a complete, a comprehensive a thorough transformation that left nothing unchanged in the socio-political and historical context of Europe. Without understanding these transformations, we will not be able to comprehend why and how a new discipline like sociology emerged. What are the historical factors that necessitate the emergence of sociology? What were the socio-historical and cultural requirements or imperatives that necessitated the emergence of sociology?

So, this term great transformation is an important concept because it is a very overarching, a very comprehensive term. It indicates the kind of a transformation that happened almost in an

absolute sense. There were basically three revolutions or triple revolutions that took place in Europe during this particular time. One is widely known as the Enlightenment, the European Enlightenment, which indicates the kind of intellectual and Cultural Revolution. The transformations that happened are in the realm of ideas, in the realm of knowledge, in the realm of reasoning, in the realm of cultural ideas and then the intellectual engagements.

The second factor of transformation is a series of incidents most importantly the French revolution of 1789, which indicates the kind of radical changes happened in the fields of politics and society. We will take up each one of these developments in detail in coming lectures but, these are important factors to keep in mind.

Third factor is a complete transformation related with the rise of capitalism and the subsequent process of industrialization which again replaced an agrarian feudal system that was reigning in the medieval period in Europe. All these changes happened in the background of Renaissance and the Reformation. Reformation was a very important movement that happened in a Roman Catholic Church. It emerged as a protest against the perceived corruption and then decadence of Roman Catholic Church which led to the emergence of Protestantism with a very powerful theological and organizational challenge to Roman Catholic Church. Renaissance was also a very powerful movement that happened across the cultural, political, social and philosophical realm which brought in a new sense of arguments based on the ideas of humanism.

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"They gave rise to new worldviews and aspirations, new attitudes and orientations, new political and economic institutions, and new forms of social organization and patterns of living; they set into motion new social forces, new developmental dynamics, and new social movements; and they brought new problems and new possibilities onto the historical stage"



"industry, factory, working class, middle class, capitalism, socialism, communism, liberal, conservative, scientist, engineer, utilitarian, journalism, economic crisis, pauperism, strike, ideology, intellectual, humanitarian, statistics, bureaucracy, commercialism, masses, unemployment, and sociology"



A combination of all these three major factors; the cultural, the intellectual and the economic brought in large scale transformation which was unprecedented.

'They gave rise to new worldviews and aspirations, new attitudes and orientations, new political and economic institutions, and new forms of social organization and patterns of living. They set into motion new social forces, new developmental dynamics, and new social movements; and they brought new problems and new possibilities onto the historical stage'.

The above paragraph help us in understanding the magnitude and the depth of changes that swept across Europe during this particular time. It brings in new world views, it brings in new aspirations; especially aspiration regarding the political aspirations of ordinary people. These new attitudes and orientations were completely different from the traditional argument centered on religion. These were also the result of new political and economic institutions, emergence of, nation state, and new forms of social organizations and patterns of living.

We will discuss what kind of social transformations and changes happened, when people migrated in large scale from rural areas to urban areas; and then began to live in urban places. So, what does an urban living mean and how is it different from the way people live in rural societies and what are the differences in the kind of social relationships that people develop. They set into motion new social forces of the most important could be the working class movement.

The laborers who work in factories began to organize themselves which completely transformed the kind of social realities in several places. This was also accompanied by new development dynamics, the new social movements which brought in new problems and possibilities onto the historical stage.

Thus, this great transformation of these three centuries of historical period is seen as a specific turn in the history of Europe, and also that of mankind. What you understand in general terms as modernity emerged during this particular time. Here is the list of words, which emerged and became very prominent during this particular period of time.

‘And these words include industry, factory, working class, middle class, capitalism, socialism, communism, liberal, conservative, scientist, engineer, utilitarian, journalism, economic crisis, pauperism, strike, ideology, intellectual, humanitarian, statistics, bureaucracy, commercialism, masses, unemployment, and sociology’

One can easily understand that each of these terms have become so common in our everyday language. We cannot imagine to have a conversation or have a discussion about the contemporary society without invoking any of these particular terms because they are important and so ingrained in the contemporary discussions about the modern and contemporary society. They exist not only as terms but as extremely important institutions, ideas, processes as well as social forms of organizations. And then there is this final word sociology, is also one of the terms that emerged during this particular time and remain as very important one when we talk about the contemporary situation.

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Emergence of the 'social' as a distinct realm of inquiry that requires specific epistemological and methodological orientation



The social order or stability was seen as in disarray and the discipline emerged as an attempt to make sense of these changes and if possible restore the order and stability

Emergence of sociology as the science of society

To study society objectively so as to understand its transformations better



Now, what do we mean by this transformation and what are its consequences? And why these consequences are so relevant when you talk about the emergence of sociology. The argument is that these changes resulted in the emergence of the social as a distinct realm of inquiry which requires specific epistemological and methodological orientation.

So, one of the important takeaways from all these discussions that we need to keep it in mind or one of the most important consequences of these transformations is the emergence of the social. The social emerges as a distinct realm of inquiry. It is no longer seen as a side effect of certain political or economic or psychological or historical aspect. Rather, the social emerges as a distinct field, which requires specific epistemological and methodological orientation. It can no longer be seen as a side effect or as an epiphenomenon of any other human activity.

The social deserves to be studied exclusively with specific theoretical and methodological orientation. This led to the emergence of a new discipline called sociology and its subsequent development. One of the most important concerns of all these initial theories or the early theorists who began and developing sociology was the whole question of social order. We will come back to this term again and again because it is one of the most central themes of sociology, especially in the classical sociological theories.

What do you mean by social order? Social order is also explained by other terms like social equilibrium or social stability. It basically tries to understand how a society is able to maintain

itself. How a society is able to maintain its order? How a society is able to stay together, and then function efficiently. So, this whole question of social order or stability was seen as in disarray, and the discipline emerged as an attempt to make sense of these changes and if possible restore the order and stability. So, we have discussed the kind of transformation at least in brief.

We will discuss them more in detail in the subsequent classes. We saw a kind of a complete transformation that the European societies had witnessed so far through this notion of social order or social stability which led to disarray and was seen by many as a kind of a chaotic one without any order, without any control and nobody knew how and where it is leading to. Nobody was aware of its consequences. Many of these early thinkers were really worried about this lack of stability or lack of social order. And they wanted this discipline of sociology to emerge as a distinct discipline, which is capable of understanding these changes scientifically; and if possible to restore order and stability.

Thus, it is very important to keep in mind that at least among some of the thinkers, sociology was a very conservative discipline. It was a discipline which did not really approve of or encourage the kind of rapid social changes. It was very skeptical about many of these changes and many of them were conservative. They wanted to bring back social order; they wanted to at least to slow down the kind of changes, and they wanted to bring back the equilibrium or social order. This is a major debate; we will come back to that later.

This is followed by the debate on the sociology as a discipline, as a science of the society; and these terms science of sociology is very significant. Why should sociology be seen as the science of society? What is something so special about science? It is important to remember here that the term sociology is made up of two words; socius and logos and logos means science.

So, why was sociology imagined as a science? This has a long history and a very important context in the development of human knowledge. Sociology too claims that it studies society objectively so as to understand its transformations better. The word objectivity is very important. To study something objectively means not allowing your own biases and ideological inclinations to influence it.

There is a distinction between objectivity and subjectivity. Subjectivity is when you have an opinion different to those of others for example when you read a poem or when you watch a

movie. Since it is individual centric, it is subjective. But, science does not speak in the language of subjectivity it speaks in the language of objectivity. The length of this pen or the weight of this pen remains constant irrespective of the person who measures it. So, science is predominantly or science is completely centering on the idea of objective facts.

Sociology emerged with this claim that the sociologists will be able to understand the social phenomenon without being influenced by the person who studies it and also would be able to explain society without allowing his or her personal subjective dispositions to influence the kind of his subject that he studied. This again is a very controversial claim that somebody can study society objectively, as if to tell the truth what exactly that is.

Sociology emerged with this claim but later this claim was thoroughly questioned, and I do not think that any sensible sociologist at present claim that, they are studying things in a very complete absolutely objective manner. Because what is objective, what is subjective and how important this objectivity are all subjected to a series of very fascinating theoretical discussions and deliberations so, it's a more complicated field. But when sociology emerged it wanted to qualify itself as a science. It wanted to claim itself to be a discipline as science, which studies society in a completely objective manner.

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- Emergence of Empiricism

The philosophical strand that argues that knowledge of the material world must be based on straightforward observation and sense perception.

- Emergence of Positivism

Positivism is the view that social phenomena (such as human social behavior and how societies are structured) ought to be studied using only the methods of the natural sciences. So, positivism is a view about the appropriate methodology of social science, emphasizing empirical observation.



So, how was this argument about science and objectivity realized? What were the kind of arguments that came along with this idea that sociology is a science which studies things objectively? There are two terms or two epistemological positions about studying a particular subject. They are empiricism and positivism. These two terms in the development of human knowledge especially regarding epistemology, plays a very important role in the emergence of sociology and its later subsequent transformations.

Empiricism is the philosophical strand that argues knowledge of the material world must be based on straightforward observation and sense perception. When you talk about this in the contemporary society or in the contemporary times; it looked very straight forward, it looked very simple; because we try to understand society through our senses. So, anything that we are able to observe, anything that we are able to measure, anything that we are able to see through our senses; must inform the basis of our understanding of that particular object.

But when did this particular argument emerged? It came up against very powerful theoretical traditions based on theology and metaphysics and a host of other kind of similar arguments where you create ideas about the world and yourself. You create ideas about almost everything without any way of ascertaining them through empirical observations. For example, how do you go by the theological arguments? How do you prove whether a particular theological argument is right or wrong? How do you experience or how do you observe a theological argument?

You know that a theology has answers for every questions and any theology is a comprehensive set of explanations for everything. It answers every human question, and but the moment you try to ask the question, how do you come to this kind of conclusions it has different set of explanations, it has a different set of arguments; and these arguments are not based on observation; or based on empiricism.

In the coming lectures we will talk about the emergence of science; we will talk about the emergence of science and technology, industrial revolution, and about enlightenment. So, science emerges as an important paradigm during this particular time. Science emerges as a very powerful paradigm, which can offer you more convincing explanations about the world around you; by displacing the religious explanation, by almost nullifying the religious explanation. This is the context in which sociology emerged and one of the most important foundations of sociology was the argument that sociology is a positive science especially by the so-called father of sociology Auguste Comte. He argued that sociology is a science. But positivism is the view that social phenomena, such as human social behavior and how societies are structured ought to be studied using only the methods of the natural sciences. Thus, it is a view about the appropriate methodology of social science, emphasizing empirical observation.

So, the argument is that if natural sciences are able to understand the nature better in a convincing manner, if physics and chemistry and biology and other disciplines are able to unravel the mystery of the universe and nature. What prevents us from using the similar scientific methods to understand our society? Sociology was fashioned or sociology was imagined as a science of society, which uses a scientific method to understand the society. Sociology as a result does not depend upon philosophical or religious texts, rather you depend upon scientific methods to understand how the society is structured, how the society is brought together? How the society function? These provide you with a more clearer, more convincing and unbiased objective picture, about the society in which we live. So, these two terms positivism and empiricism becomes important as they laid foundation for the methodological orientation of the discipline, which was later criticized. There were divergent stand points of methodology which emerged later; there was a development of an anti positive simulator with the Max weber. We will discuss all these points later; so let us conclude this session.

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Specific factors that influenced the emergence of sociology



- Scientific discoveries
- The Enlightenment
- The French Revolution and the rise of nation-states
- Decline of a feudal agrarian economy and the rise of capitalist industrial society, open market
- Urbanization
- Colonialism



And in the coming sessions we will take up many of these specific points or specific factors that laid to the emergence of sociology. So, I have listed out several factors and we will take up each one of them specifically in the coming classes. Thank you.

Keywords: Triple revolution, Social order, Social change, Epistemology, Positivism.