

Sociology cannot be regarded as a Science: A Review

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Abstract – Auguste Comte, to whom the credit of inventing the term ‘Sociology’ is given, was primarily concerned with developing an empirical science of society, and trying to apply scientific method of social phenomena and along with a theory of scientific and social process. Emile Durkheim was one of the founders of structural functionalism and he analysed society from its structural-functional view point.

It is none of the tasks of Sociology to point out the goodness or badness of social values and determine which values are ultimately good. Polygamy is good or bad, love- marriage is desirable or undesirable, joint family system is useful or non-useful, caste system is harmful or advantageous, Sociology is not concerned. Its purpose is to make an empirical analysis of social institutions and not to lay down the norms regarding them.

Key Words: Sociology, Science, Social Science.

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(i) Lack of experimentation:

If science is used in the same sense in which it is used for physical sciences, then sociology cannot claim to be a science. The term science as used for physical sciences includes the twin processes of experiment and prediction. Sociology in this sense is not a science because its subject-matter, the human relationships, we can neither catch nor see; neither weigh nor Analyse in the test-tube of the laboratory.

It does not possess the instruments like the microscope and the thermometer to measure the human behaviour. Spratt has remarked, "If you cannot experiment, if you cannot measure, if you cannot establish broad unifying hypotheses and if you cannot be confident in your social engineering, you cannot be said to be engaged in scientific study at all".

There is no denying the fact that sociology cannot experiment and predict in the same way in which physical sciences do, because the materials with which society deals i.e., human behaviour and relationships are so peculiar and uncertain. There are sentiments not to be questioned. They are not even to be studied dispassionately; for instance, subjects like sex life and religion evoke great controversies.

Furthermore, Society is so complex and variable that it is not possible to separate and analyse its different elements as can be done in physical sciences. We can analyse the composition of water as two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen and illustrate by means of experiment in any laboratory of the world.

But such experimentations in the laboratory sense in sociology is often difficult and impossible.

(ii) Lack of objectivity:

The second difficulty of sociology in employing the scientific method is that he cannot maintain complete objectivity with the objects of his experiment as does a physicist. Man has his own prejudice and bias. It is, therefore, not possible for him to observe his subject with complete detachment.

It is really difficult to dissociate ourselves from the assumptions which we have absorbed from childhood with regard to any objects. Our valuations are consequently bound to be prejudicial. Moreover, if a person tries to maintain objectivity in the study of human behaviour, he is quickly branded as an agnostic, traitor or worse.

Instead of public support for his work, he may be faced with public hostility. To protect himself then he accepts certain social values and eliminate from his study the phenomenon that form a sociological point of view and are the most fundamental basis of social existence.

Social relationships cannot be studied through physical senses. What we see in social relationships is only an outward expression of our inner life. A sociologist has, therefore, to concern himself also with the working of the inner mind of his subject in order to understand his external actions properly. A

physicist is not confronted with such a complex phenomenon.

(iii) Lack of exactivity:

Another characteristic of science is that it should be able to frame certain laws on the basis of observation and hypothesis and such laws should also enable us to predict accurately. From this point of view also Sociology cannot be called a real science because firstly its laws and conclusions cannot be expressed in precise terms and secondly its prediction might not come true.

Its findings are often limited in time and space. Owing to the fact that social phenomenon is too vast, human motivations are complex; it is difficult to make predictions about human behaviour.

In view of the above obstacles confronting social science it is said that there is no such thing, at best there are merely 'social studies'. Others believe that dispassionate study of social phenomena is not possible, the investigator cannot be neutral, he must take sides. Without neutral analysis science is impossible.

(iv) Terminological Inefficiency:

It has also been argued that Sociology suffers from inexact and clear terminology. Same words convey different meaning to different persons, for example, the terms 'caste' and 'class' have not yet acquired exact meaning. The recent judgment of the Supreme Court in the Mandal case has held that the concept of class cannot be separated from caste.

Is caste a class? The confusion has not yet been removed. Words are essential tools of thought, scientific or otherwise. Sociology has not yet developed an adequate set of scientific terms.

Many of our terms like religion, caste, class, and group are words found in everyday use. Until we cease to employ terms with vague meanings, our terminological inefficiency will remain an obstacle in the way of sociology developing into a science.

CONCLUSION:

Sociology is thus as much a science as social psychology, clinical psychology and other sciences concerning man. Though it has not reached perfection, the sociologist is searching for the instruments which will add to the minuteness of the study and exactness of its principles. Come described it as Social Physics.

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