

Notes



331en03

3

SOCIOLOGY: ITS RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER SOCIAL SCIENCES

In the first two lessons, you have learnt about the meaning and scope of sociology and its history. In this lesson, you will study the relationship between sociology and other social sciences. Sociology and other social sciences i.e. history, political science, economics, social work, psychology, and anthropology are all autonomous because of scope and subject matter. At the same time, they are also inter-dependent since they all deal with human society.

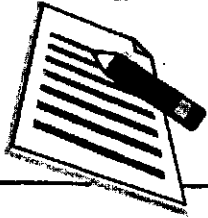
OBJECTIVES

After reading this lesson, you will be able to:

- understand the distinct nature of sociology as a discipline and
- also comprehend the relationship between sociology and other social sciences.

3.1 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY AND HISTORY

The relationship between sociology and history is also connected with another question, whether sociology is a science of society like one of the natural and biological sciences, or a kind of history writing (historiography). Sociologists of the nineteenth and early twentieth century thought that sociology was a 'natural science of society'. But later, the weaknesses of this view started surfacing, and sociologists felt that there was no doubt that their subject was a social science.



Notes

Some of them believed that it was a kind of historiography.

History is a study of the past, which people have already lived. Data for historians come in the form of records from archives, museums, libraries, and personal collections of people.

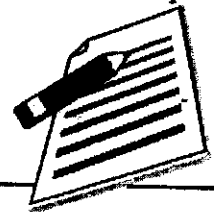
Historians of ancient times also study inscriptions. Historical data may not be complete. Some might have been destroyed, lost, stolen or inaccessible. Therefore, historians have to build up their interpretations of the past on the limitations of the material.

Historians are concerned with specific societies. They tell about the system that prevailed in a society at a particular time. Whatever comparisons historians make are of limited scale. They may compare societies inhabiting the same area, but vast comparisons of societies different in scale and time are beyond the scope of history. Therefore, historians rarely attempt to generalize about human society as a whole. They provide a detailed account of a specific social situation.

By comparison, **Sociology is principally concerned with the study of contemporary societies.** Sociologists collect data methods. They do not base themselves on the data collected by others; they generate their own data, for which the term 'primary data' is used. While collecting data, a sociologist keeps in his mind all the aspects. If answers to certain questions have not been found, he can always go back to his field area to fill in the missing information. As a result, collected data by sociologist are more comprehensive than the historian who has to content himself with whatever is available.

Although sociologists study the contemporary society, they always refer to the historical material available on it for understanding social and cultural change. They may also conduct a sociological study of past societies. In a nutshell, a sociologist may study historical societies using the methodology of his subject and look at the inter-relationship between different institutions. When this perspective is extended for the study of historical societies, the branch of sociology that deals with it is known as historical sociology. The essential difference between history and sociology is that the former is concerned with the past, the latter is mainly concerned with present day societies. While history does not concern itself with contemporary societies, sociology certainly extends its frontiers to include past societies in its scope.

The other significant difference is that **while history confines itself with specific societies, sociology attempts to generalize about human societies.** In simple words, sociology studies at the micro-level, but aims at the macro-level. The sociologist also studies a specific society, in all its details, but he compares the



Notes

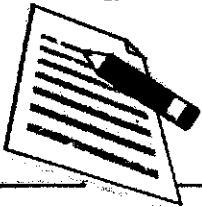
society he has studied with the others with an aim to generalize. Sociologists say that the most important method in their science is the comparative method because it helps them move from particular to general. **Sociology is an observational, comparative, and generalizing science. History bases itself on an analysis of documents.** It tries to illuminate specific situations. Its conclusions are bound by considerations of time and space.

3.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

Political science is also known as the 'science of government' or the 'science of polity or politics'. It is defined as the systematic study of the state and other organs of power. It studies the nature of the distribution of power in a society, the rules according to which competition for power is carried out, and the nature of the government and its functions (such as legislative, executive, and judicial).

Political science generally studies the complex, advanced, and modern societies; in other words, those societies that have the machinery of state and written law. It is concerned with larger systems, i.e. whole societies and their political states, rather than with micro-level units, for which sociologists are famous. Political scientists do not carry out pieces of intensive fieldwork with societies. Their data come from published documents, census and official reports, proceedings of the parliament and other political organs, surveys of opinions and election results, etc. This implies that political scientists do not go to the field to collect data. The data they interpret are those that have been collected and compiled by others. Moreover, political science, as its name implies, is primarily concerned with political institutions, i.e. those that deal with the distribution of power in a society and the maintenance of law and order. An important area in political science is of political philosophy, pertaining to the emergence of state and the need for order.

Sociology studies all types of societies, irrespective of whether they happen to be classified as 'tribal', 'peasant', or 'urban-industrial'. It is comparative in nature. It gives information about the distribution of power in those societies (tribal and peasant) that political scientists do not study. In the 1940s, anthropologists also studied those societies that were without the institution of state. They were called the stateless societies. One of the outstanding examples of which was the Nuer of the Sudan. Anthropologists described how in stateless societies order was maintained. The absence of state does not imply the absence of deviance and conflict. Each society has its own procedures to handle the cases of the breakdown of rules and customs. Sociology supplements the understanding of political scientists



Notes

by providing information about the mechanisms of social control in simple societies.

We said earlier that political science is mainly concerned with political institutions. Sociology does not give primacy to any institution. For it, all institutions are equally important because each contributes in its own significant way to the functioning of society. Thus, for sociology, political institution is one of the institutions of society and should be analysed in relationship with other institutions. The specialized study of political institution that sociologists undertake is known as political sociology. It shares many characteristics in common with political science, but it emphasizes more than political science the social bases of the distribution of power, control mechanisms, and the system of laws. Questions dealing with the relationship between social stratification and the distribution of power, or the role of taboos and other prohibitions in the maintenance of social order, or the place of kinship in political system are sociological questions.

Sociologists carry out fieldwork with micro-level units, whether they are urban neighbourhoods or political parties. They illuminate the processes at work at local levels. By comparing several local situations, they reach towards generalizations about the political system as a whole. Both political science and sociology aim to reach general propositions about political systems but the way in which they accomplish this task is different. Political scientists begin with macro-units and generalize about them. Sociologists study micro-units, systematically compare them, and then reach common propositions.

INTEXT QUESTIONS 3.1

Find out if the following statements are true or false. Write T after the true statement and F after the false statement.

1. History studies the past societies. ()
2. Sociology is an observational science. ()
3. Political science conducts a study of all institutions of human society. ()
4. A study of mid-term elections will be conducted by historians. ()
5. Sociologists collect their data from archives. ()

3.3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY AND ECONOMICS

Today, economics is regarded as the most developed of all social sciences. It has been able to develop both the traditions of qualitative and quantitative research. One of the branches of economics is called econometrics, which is concerned with a quantitative assessment of economic phenomena. Compared to the other social sciences, including psychology, modern economics is highly mathematical.

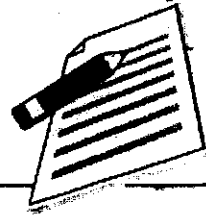
Economics studies the aspects of production, distribution and exchange, and consumption in society. It begins with the observation that resources are scarce and limited whereas human needs are unlimited. Hence, there is a need to strike a balance between limited resources and unlimited needs and wants. The strategy human beings adopt is to make the best use of the resources available with them, and at the same time, put a check on one's needs. The process of striking a balance between the two, resources and needs, is called economization, and the science of economic studies.

Economics concentrates upon the study of economic systems in modern, complex, and urban-industrial societies. A similarity exists between economics and political science. Both focus upon a specific institution (economic or political) of modern society. Economics looks at modern economic institutions (finance, banking, market) in a comparative perspective, aiming to arrive at general propositions. Although it recognizes the role of social factors (such as kinship, religion, values) in influencing economics, it considers them as essentially 'irrational', which tend to slow, or even retard the growth of economy. For developing economy, one has to take rational decisions because they will lead to gains and profits. Each economic system is based on the principle of the maximization of gains and returns. Combining these aspects, we may say that economics is concerned with:

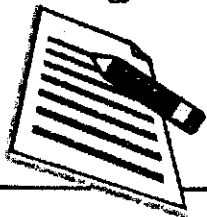
- the relationship between demands and supply in a society;
- the rational use of resources for fulfilling one's needs; and
- the issues of economic development.

For sociologists, economic institution is one of the several institutions of human society. Therefore, it does not give any priority to its study over other institutions. It examines the functioning of the economic institution in relationship with other institutions.

The contribution that social factors make to economics is examined in detail in sociology. Sociologists submit that social factors exercise a tremendous impact on the decisions people make with respect to resources, their use and distribution.



Notes



Notes

The factors that seem irrational to economists are in fact, quite meaningful from the perspective of people. From their studies in tribal and peasant societies, sociologists have confirmed this point. In many societies, people indulge in what is called 'wasteful expenditure' but this is done knowingly to enhance one's prestige and honour. In other words, wealth is expended for social purposes. Sociologists look at the social aspects of economy. In this term, their work is different from that of the economist, who is mainly concerned with the economic consequences of people's actions.

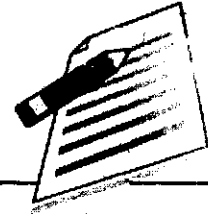
There are some other aspects in which these two subjects differ. Economists collect their data from government publications, census reports, proceedings of the banking institutions, economic survey reports and balance sheets, etc. These data pertain to macro-level situations. It is from a study of these institutions that economists attempt to make generalizations. Rarely do they study the society at a micro-level, for instance at the level of a village or urban neighbourhood? Sociologists, by comparison, carry out their studies at the micro-level using the methodology of intensive fieldwork. The economist's approach is deductive, i.e., he arrives at general propositions from which specific statements can be made. The sociological approach is inductive. From particular studies, one tries to generalize about the whole, and these propositions are subjected to further testing. Finally, sociology is not as quantitative as is economics.

3.4 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK

The relation between sociology and social work is like the relation between a 'pure science' and an 'applied science'. Social work is concerned with the 'technology of application' of ideas for improving human lot.

Social work is essentially an American interest. It grew out of a concern for human welfare. In the early twentieth century, it was realized that social scientists were mainly concerned with acquiring knowledge about the working of society and leading a philosophical dialogue on it. The question of the ideal society also figured, but which technology should be adopted for building it up was not given a serious thought.

As changes were taking place in the society of the twentieth century, the gap between the poor and the rich was fast increasing. Groups of people who were leading the life of a destitute were also emerging. Against this background, the central question was how to improve upon the condition of people. Knowledge was of no significance unless it was put to use. Social work was a product of this



Notes

background. It charted out the suitable technology for human upliftment.

But, for any type of action, it is essential to have a complete knowledge of the social situation, and sociology provided such knowledge. Therefore, social work is dependent upon sociological insights. Sociology generates holistic knowledge about society. It also discusses the possibility of applying this knowledge. The branch of sociology that takes up the areas of application is called applied sociology.

Between sociology and social work lies applied sociology. Let us now understand the difference between social work and applied sociology. The latter is an attempt to explore the areas where sociological knowledge may be put to use, but sociologists themselves do not carry out the action. What should be the nature of action and how it should be carried out are the areas that interest sociologists. Social workers, on the other hand, not only plan action but they also carry it out. Therefore, social work, truly speaking, is an applied area; it is the 'technology of action'.

INTENT QUESTIONS 3.2

Answer the following questions in one sentence only.

1. What is meant by social work?

2. What is the meaning of economics?

3. Which types of societies do economists study?

4. Which methods do sociologists use for their study?

5. What is applied sociology?



Notes

3.5 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY AND PSYCHOLOGY

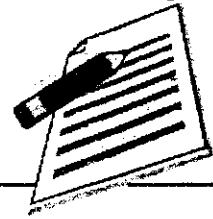
The individual and society are the two main concepts in social sciences. Society is defined as an enduring set of relations between persons. It is an aggregation of individuals, which is different from a crowd. Each individual of a society has its own identity, autonomy, and mental makeup. This would explain why there is a variation between the behaviour of two individuals belonging to the same society. The knowledge about how one should behave comes from society. The individual internalises this knowledge and behaves accordingly. However, while putting this knowledge into action, the individual introduces the element of variation. Even when it is the same kind of situation, each individual will behave differently.

The discipline that focuses upon the individual is known as psychology. It studies the mental structure of the individual, his memory, intelligence, deep-rooted complexes and psychological problems, etc. In other words, psychology tries to understand why an individual behaves in the manner he does. It studies psychic (or mental) facts. In addition to a qualitative assessment, psychology makes a lot of use of quantitative techniques, for it measures phenomena in precise terms. For understanding certain psychological phenomena, knowledge of the human biological system is also required. Thus, psychology pays a lot of attention to the understanding of human body, especially the nervous system.

The branch of psychology that studies the behaviour of people in a situation of crowd or mob is called social psychology. Crowd behaviour is often called collective behaviour, which is the subject matter of psychology, and is distinguished from behaviour that takes place in enduring groups and institutions (such as neighbourhoods, families). The latter is called social behaviour, the study of which is the subject matter of sociology. Social psychology lies in between sociology and psychology.

If psychology is the study of psychic facts, the facts that pertain to the mental structure of the individual, sociology is the study of social facts, which are of a continuing entity called society. They are the ones according to which people behave in relation to others. Language is an example of the social fact. Individuals imbibe it during the process of socialization. But the specific way in which they use it depends upon their personality, psychological facts, likes and dislikes, and other personal factors. They do not, however, change the structure of the language, its grammar, vocabulary, and the rules of speaking, the areas with which sociologists are concerned.

An example will clarify the distinction between sociology and psychology. Suppose,



Notes

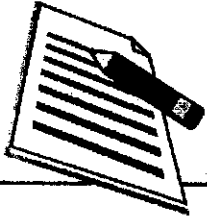
a law court is in session, and the accused, lawyers, and judges are discussing the case. The rules according to which they would decide the case are of interest to sociologists. The rights and duties of each of the members involved in the judicial process are also of sociological interest. In short, sociologists are interested in the totality of the judicial process. But, of interest to psychologists is what goes in the minds of people engaged in the court proceedings. That is the reason why sociologists make a distinction between social and psychic facts, the former are studied by sociologists and the latter, by psychologists.

Here, we should note that the concepts of status and role, about which you will read later, link the disciplines of psychology and sociology. Status refers to the social position which an individual occupies, and the behaviour he carries out by virtue of that is called role. Status is a bundle of rights and duties, which society gives and defines. Society allocates statuses. The individuals occupy them and are trained to carry out their respective pieces of behaviour. The individual performs the role, but the way in which he is expected to behave comes from society. Thus, the concepts of status and role link society with individual, and in turn, they establish a link between psychology and sociology.

3.6 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY

At the outset, you should know that anthropology is a study of the biological and socio-cultural aspects of human beings. It is a scientific study of man in all its dimensions, both biological and socio-cultural. The branch of anthropology that studies the biological aspects of humankind is called physical or biological anthropology, while the study of social and cultural aspects is known as social anthropology. In the United States of America, this branch is, however, known as cultural anthropology. The third branch of anthropology is a study of languages in a comparative perspective. It is known as linguistic anthropology or anthropological linguistics. The branch of anthropology that studies the pre-historic past of mankind, before writing began, is called archaeological anthropology or pre-historic archaeology. Of the four branches of anthropology, sociology is most closely related to social anthropology.

You know from your earlier lessons that sociology as a subject that came into existence during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Social anthropology had its beginnings as a discipline during the second half of the nineteenth century but it came to occupy a respectable place in the first half of the twentieth century. The division of labour that traditionally developed was that sociology concentrated on the study of complex, modern, and urban-industrial societies, whereas social



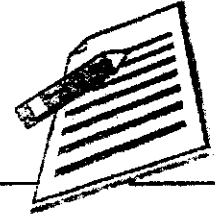
Notes

anthropology studied tribal, peasant, and pre-literate societies of the world, those societies that were largely untouched by the forces of civilization. In the beginning, sociologists studied the societies which were their own, while anthropologists studied societies that were different from theirs. This was the reason why sociology came to be regarded as the study of one's own society, while anthropology earned the reputation of being the study of 'other cultures'. Besides this distinction, the similarities between them were important. Both studied human society in a holistic manner, and attempted to generalize. Both were comparative in nature. In fact, a French sociologist known as Emile Durkheim called anthropology as 'comparative sociology'. Social anthropology was considered a branch of sociology, or better, as a 'sociology of primitive societies':

The distinction between sociology and social anthropology could be applied without much problem where the difference between the 'our' and 'their' societies, i.e. between 'civilized' and 'primitive' societies, was huge and perceptible. It was the case in America, Australia, New Zealand, or Africa, where the native population was totally different from its white colonizers. But this distinction between sociology and social anthropology was not found to be of much use in India, because of the continuity between different populations. In many cases, it was not possible to distinguish between tribal and non-tribal people or rural and urban populations. In such cases, the distinction between sociology and social anthropology was completely blurred.

With the passage of time, social anthropologists have included within their orbit of study to societies, such as urban and industrial, that were supposed to be studied by sociologists. It all happened because tribal societies were on their way to transformation because of urban-industrialization. At the same time, sociology has increased its scope to include tribal and peasant societies. The outcome of all this is that in so far as the subject matters of sociology and social anthropology are concerned, there is hardly any distinction.

Because at one time, sociology and social anthropology specialized in the study of different types of societies, they contributed to the development of different theoretical interests. Sociologists have made significant contribution to survey methods of data collection, whereas anthropologists' contribution has been to fieldwork methodology. Anthropologists have contributed immensely to the understanding of kinship and religion, because these two have been institutions of crucial importance in simple societies. To the understanding of social stratification, education, and urban-industrial society, the contribution of sociologists is unparalleled, because these institutions are of primary importance in modern societies. These specializations apart, there are more similarities between sociology and social anthropology than are between either of them and other social sciences.



Notes

INTENT QUESTIONS 3.3

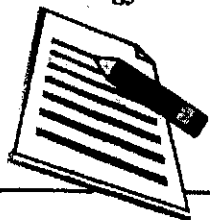
Fill in the blanks with an appropriate word or words:

- 1 Psychology is the study of _____ facts.
- 2 Status refers to the _____ that an individual occupies.
- 3 The subject that studies both biological and socio-cultural aspects of human beings is known as _____.
- 4 In the beginning, social anthropology studied _____ societies.
- 5 _____ has made a significant contribution to survey methodology.



WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT

- When we discuss the relationship between sociology and other social science subjects, we should remember that each of these subjects has its autonomy, and at the same time, it enters into a meaningful relationship with other disciplines.
- Sociology is principally concerned with the study of contemporary societies. The sociologist's data come from field study and survey methods.
- Historians have to build up their interpretations of the past on the limitations of the material.
- The data the sociologist collects are far more complete than is the case with the historian.
- The essential difference between history and sociology is that the former is concerned with the past, the latter is mainly concerned with present day societies
- Sociology studies at the micro-level, but aims at the macro-level.
- Sociologists always refer to the historical material available for understanding social and cultural change.
- Sociology is an observational, comparative, and generalising science. History bases itself on an analysis of documents.
- Political science generally studies the complex, advanced, and modern societies; in other words, those societies that have the machinery of state and written



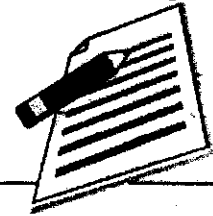
Notes

- law. It is concerned with larger systems, i.e. whole societies and their political states, rather than with micro-level units, for which sociologists are famous.
- Sociology studies all types of societies, irrespective of whether they happen to be classified as 'tribal', 'peasant', or 'urban-industrial'.
 - Political science is mainly concerned with political institutions. Sociology does not give primacy to any institution. For it, all institutions are equally important.
 - Economics studies the aspects of production, distribution and exchange, and consumption in society.
 - Sociologists look at the social aspects of economy. Their work is different from that of the economist, who is mainly concerned with the economic consequences of people's actions.
 - The economist's approach is deductive, i.e. he arrives at general propositions from which specific statements can be made. The sociological approach is inductive. Sociology is not as quantitative as is economics.
 - The relation between sociology and social work is like the relation between a 'pure science' and an 'applied science'.
 - Applied sociology lies between sociology and social work.
 - Social work charted out the suitable technology for human upliftment.
 - Social work is an applied area; it is the 'technology of action'.
 - Psychology pays a lot of attention to the understanding of human body, especially the nervous system.
 - Psychology is the study of psychic facts, the facts that pertain to the mental structure of the individual, while sociology is the study of social facts, which are of a continuing entity called society.
 - Anthropology is a study of the biological and socio-cultural aspects of human beings.
 - The study of social and cultural aspects of human being is known as social anthropology.
 - Sociology came to be regarded as the study of one's own society, while anthropology earned the reputation of being the study of 'other cultures'.
 - Of all the social sciences, sociology is closest to social anthropology. In interdisciplinary works, researchers borrow methods, techniques, and perspectives from other subjects.



TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. How is sociology different from history and what is the similarity between the two subjects? Write in your own words.
2. Describe how political science is different from sociology and state the similarity.
3. How is the sociological work different from the work of an economist? Discuss.
4. What do you mean by 'pure science' and 'applied science'? Explain it.
5. What is the distinction between sociology and anthropology?



Notes



ANSWER TO INTEXT QUESTIONS

3.1

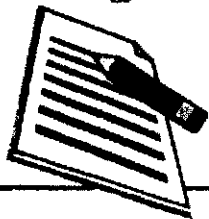
- a) - T
- b) - T
- c) - F
- d) - F
- e) - F

3.2

- a) Social work is concerned with the '**technology of application**' of ideas for improving human lot.
- b) Economics studies the aspects of production, distribution and exchange, and consumption in society
- c) Economics concentrates upon the study of economic systems in modern, complex, and urban-industrial societies.
- d) The sociological approach is inductive.
- e) The branch of sociology that takes up the areas of application is called applied sociology.

3.3

- i) psychic

**Notes**

- ii) social position
- iii) anthropology
- iv) tribal
- v) Sociologists

**SUGGESTED READINGS**

- T.B. Bottmore : Sociology (1922)
Anthony Giddens : Sociology (1993)
Glabert : Sociology