
UNIT 4 RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIOLOGY WITH HISTORY*

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to understand:

- Definition of history as social science discipline;
- Interrelationship between Sociology and History;
- Difference between Sociology and History; and
- Understanding Historical Sociology as an outcome of intersection between Sociology and History.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This unit explains relationship of sociology with history. Both disciplines are very much interrelated. Sociology is often defined as study of society. Notably, no study of any society can be accomplished without looking into its history or past. It is immensely important to see how the society has evolved in the past? What kinds of circumstances and instances have been through which the society has moved on or evolved further? What has been the factors contributed to the changes in its structure and functions? Thus, to understand any society, group or institutions, one needs to appreciate its past to comprehend its present status. It may be noted that the emergence of sociology itself has been shaped up in the historical developments such as French and industrial revolutions, growth of cities and social institutions and growth of individual rights and liberties. Various earlier scholars or founding fathers of sociology such as Ibn Khaldun, Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Karl Marx, etc. gave importance to history or historical perspective in their analysis of social structure, changes and dynamics. Sociology and past (history) are deeply interconnected with each other. Furthermore, history also takes help of sociology in order to elaborate and analyse historical phenomenon. It essentially looks into social aspects of past human lives. It is primarily in this context that the both disciplines supplement each other in understanding social developments. Hence, the sub-

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field such as historical sociology, social history, and cultural history emerged as an outcome of intersection between sociology and history.

Sociologists often talk of the, 'context', while studying or explaining society in terms of its structure, functions and changes. Here, time and space are two important factors which inherit and explain the contextual aspects of social reality. Time is crucial factors in explaining the evolution of social reality as social realities get shaped over period of time. Since, history take care of factors such as time or periodical evolution of societies, it essentially helps sociologist to study society in much more systematic fashion. It helps sociologists in providing rationale to articulate present status and developmental trajectory of a society. Various sociologists such as Comte in his law of three stages, Spencer in his analysis of evolution of societies, Weber in his elaboration of ideal types and growth of city, and Marx in his analysis of class conflict and social changes, have used historical dimension in their sociological analysis. Hence, history and sociology are closely related to each other. However, we may also note that both the disciplines differ in their nature and approaches, nevertheless intersect or criss-cross each other on many points. Resultantly, historical sociology, as mentioned earlier, emerged as an off- shoot such intersection between the two disciplines. This unit focuses on elaborating such intersection and interrelationship between sociology and history.

4.2 RELATIONSHIP OF SOCIOLOGY WITH HISTORY

4.2.1 Defining History

History is often defined as study of past. Historians, who study history, do study cause and effects of past events and circumstances leading to social change and development. To Mallari (2013), the term, 'history', is embedded into numerous interrelated aspects; firstly, history as the past or things happened in the past, secondly, history as narrative that tells events happened in the past. Various thinkers describe history as the study of human's past based on archaeological evidences. It is important to understand that this so called past has its own social, cultural, political and economic aspects. Historians look types of societies, their structure, culture, civilisation and politics human societies had, and developed over the period of time. History studies all this social domain with respect to their time and space attributes.

Notably, history is important in many respects. First, history plays important role in the society similar to as memory does to an individual. Secondly, history like memory provides identity and recognition to any individual or groups or a community in the society. It indicates towards one's roots, historicity or trajectory of developments as it might have happened in the past. It is primarily because of such crucially important tasks that the role of history becomes critically important and crucial to unpack the social reality. It also then becomes a site where various contestations take place.

4.2.2 Relationship of Sociology with History

Sociology and history are interrelated to each other. Sociology study society and focuses on current issues by looking their historical background. Both present

and past come closer in such analysis. Sociologists often refer to history to explain social changes, developments and changing face of society over period of time. Similarly history also needs social aspects (sociological concepts) to explain past. The boundaries between the two disciplines get blurred and entangled which do entails a context to explain complex webs of social reality. These blurring of boundaries between the two disciplines are seen by many scholars as opportunity for productive research endeavours. E. H. Carr (1967), who wrote a book titled 'What is History', argued that the more sociological history becomes, and the more historical sociology becomes, the better for both. Let the frontier between them be kept open for two way traffic. Many sociologists have also advocated this proposition of transaction between the two disciplines so as to enrich the inter-disciplinarily and knowledge generation.

Social change is a reality. It has to happen. History shows mirror or truer way to analyse it with respect to time and space. History, in fact, said to be the constant reminder of the fact that change, even though permanent, is irregular and unpredictable. History thus provides a frame of reference and contextual tool to examine and analyse change carefully. Both sociology and history thus depends on each other to take complete stoke of reality. Sociology depends on history to understand past events, movements and social institutions. Needless to say that sociology is also concerned with the study of historical developments of society. Sociologist studies ancients or old traditions, culture, growth of civilisations, groups and institutions through historical analysis and interpretations. Notably, John Seely rightly said that history without sociology has no fruits and sociology without history has no roots. Both past and presets are equally important to understand any social issue in totality and in-depth.

Sociology as a discipline may provide help in terms of offering a particular frame of mind to study history and its phenomenal developments. For instance, the tool of sociological imagination may help one to go beyond the general facts, to look beyond the obvious and to examine aspects of any historical phenomena critically. In the words of C. Wright Mills (1959), who gave concept of social imagination, said that the tool of social imagination involves seeing the world in terms of biography and history. In his schemes of things, personal biographies, which sociology studies, are linked with social and historical context. Such linkages discreetly situated in the womb of historical phenomenon need to be explored. In fact, Mills emphasised on three aspects of human world; structure, biography and history. He developed his patterns of analysis at the intersection of above mentioned three dimensions of human world. He focuses on social structure in terms of formation and shaping of social world as a systemic reality. He further linked up human behaviour as shaped by particular patterns of social relationships. In his scheme of things, history added to the perception that the shape and formation of social structures are always specific to given time and space which vary from one period to another period, as they themselves are subject to change. Lastly, biography relates all such social structure and change with individual experiences delineating various aspects of social living by larger social and historical process and how their agency as member of society get shaped and re-shaped. To this effect, history may help to understand the context of any social issue to locate the problem and in understanding the issue thoroughly. To understand an issue, it may be noted that just going by one disciplinary approach or frame of reference may not help to obtain an enriched analysis of an

issue rather the real answer of many problems of both sociology and history may be in sociological history and/or historical sociology.

Auguste Comte's conception of sociology includes history in his analyses of growth of sociology and society. He dwells into causes and reasons of developments of humanity through various historical stages. Furthermore, as Tilly (2001) notes, Karl Marx's *Capital*, Max Weber's *Economy and Society* or Ferdinand Tonnies' *Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft* have elaborately used historical dimension to enrich their sociological analysis. Such analysis demonstrate that sociology takes help of history (for instance Weber's elaboration of ideal type is an example of how sociologists have drawn to develop their sociological interpretations) to locate an issue and examine its significance. Furthermore, history has many things to offer to sociology. For instance, historical sources that are available provide a large body of data to sociologists for analysis on society, its growth and dynamics. For instance, social upheavals in Europe during late 1700s and 1800s motivated scholars to study society and understand the patterns of social developments. To this effect, there are ample examples which demonstrate linkages of sociology with history. For instance, many sociologists like Comte, Spencer, Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Simmel, Pareto, Parsons and even the contemporary sociologists such as Habermas, Manheim, Wallerstein, Castells, etc. used historical dimension in their sociological analysis. They placed ample emphasis on the origin of modernity, models of development and problems of urban communities. Sociology in its earlier period and in the beginning of 20th century was interested in both present and past. It essentially got historical phenomena as its integral part to define concepts and situate the same into the context. Sociological concepts also help in causal explanation of historically and culturally significant phenomenon.

The development of sociological theories is traced in 19th and 20th century historical developments at the level of philosophy, epistemology and progressive thinking. Specifically, sociological theories have been product of intellectual, social, cultural and political climate within which they were developed. For instance, enlightenment was a period of remarkable intellectual development. Some of the important ideas and social thoughts emerged in this period. These ideas and thoughts newly developed replaced the old ones. The period gave birth to the society which can be understood by means of reason, rationality, scientific methods or empirical research. Similarly, in 1789 French revolution created a space when universal rights of man accepted as essential ingredients of social fabric. New ideas such as liberty, equality, nationalism etc. took shape. This influenced structure of society and created new set of ideologies and socio-political contestations. Many earlier sociologists were product of such epochal periods and carried forward a tradition of progressive thoughts. Saint Simon was directly influenced by French Revolution, whereas Comte lived in the aftermath of the French Revolution. These earlier sociologists gave thoughts to understand and examine ongoing socio-cultural upheavals and human affairs. For instance, Comte (ref) brings together moral and social philosophy, philosophy of history and epistemology and methods of particular of sciences. Karl Marx and Max Weber, who are also counted as founding fathers of sociology, have used history in their sociological analysis. Marx's analysis of social change and historical materialism are the examples. Similarly, Weber has found elaborations of his concepts such as rationalisation, modernity, capitalism, secular society, city and ideal types in the womb of history and its analysis. As indicated earlier too,

Weber in his work, 'Economy and Society', bring out historical explanations to elaborate his propositions of secular theories about the origin and consequences of particular historical phenomenon, from protestant ethic to the modern state.

Many in intellectual in the field of sociology have worked towards developing social history. More specifically, at the turn of 19th and 20th century few historians in German speaking countries and other nations, who dared to deviate the traditional pathways of the discipline, gradually began to appear to contribute to the development of social history. For instance, J. H. Turner explained America's position in terms of boundaries between civilisation and wilderness. C. A. Beard interpreted and analysed American civil War as a conflict between industrialised north and agrarian south. Similarly, Belgian Henri Pirenne developed a socio-economic history of Europe. Dutch Scholar John Huizinge dedicated his work to the late middle ages and made a significant contribution to cultural history. Further, after short-while sort of stagnation, in the in the 1920s there was a significant shift towards history. This shift was actually associated with Annals School which was initiated by two renowned professors of university of Strasbourg, Lucien Febvre (1878-1956) and Marc Bloch (1856-1944) who were influenced by Durkheim's sociology. They advocated for a broad based study of history. Furthermore, as time advanced, sociology too grew in its approach and methodological traditions. Although sociology and history during 20th century diverged a bit, but a complete separation could never occurred. It was primarily for this reason that a new and interesting research orientation namely historical sociology took shape and gradually got a prominent place in the sociological studies. History eventually helped in substantiating sociological analysis of past and its relevant to the present. If one look for its roots in sociological theories, Parsons' structural-functionalism may be said to be one of the critical motivating factor which bring sociology and history at one place. Further, Robert Neelly Bellah in 1957 published a book titled, 'Takigawa Religion', which revealed Japanese equivalence of the protestant ethic. Neil J. Smelser in 1959 in his book, 'Social change in Industrial Revolution', attempted to explain nature of social change by examining development of cotton industry during the English industrial revolution. Similarly, Talcott Parsons in 1960s developed his theory of social evolution based on concept of increasing adaptive capacity of the system through functional differentiation in works such as Societies: Evolutionary and Comparative Perspective (1971a) and, 'The System of Modern Societies' (1971b). Furthermore, in mid 1970s, Norbert Elias worked on theory of civilisation wherein he elaborately covers historical changes in personality, behaviour and the theory of state formation.

It is said that the golden age of sociology was probably was in the years from 1946 to 1960s, it was when it's scientific focus seemed candid, its future appeared prospective and its intellectual leaders sure of themselves on what to do and how to do. However, with the change of time, societal needs and overall social discourse since the 1960s globalisation, the emergence of interconnected world, network society, information revolution and cultural studies have transformed the context of sociology. Modernity became subject of past. Sociologist in last couple of decades become much concerned with 'post' such as post-industrialisation, post-colonialism, post-positivism, post-modernity or post-structuralism. Various sociologist such as Habermas (Communicate action and public sphere), Foucault (modernity and prison system), Anthony Giddens (Modernity) and others have worked and used historical perspective to elaborate their sociological analysis.

4.2.3 Difference between Sociology and History

Even though both sociology and history are two different intellectual disciplines in the domain of social sciences, both the disciplines differ in their methods, approaches and purposes. John H. Goldthorpe (1991), who studied history in mid-twentieth century at university college, London, compares the research approaches of both sociology and history. He claims that both sociology and history differ in their orientation towards present and past respectively. Historians emphasise their findings as time–space localised whereas sociologists believe their understanding transcends space-time dimension. Thus, the major difference between sociology and history is with regard to the nature of data or evidences put for analysis. Sociologist much concerns with the past and primary data whereas historians are concerns with the past and look for secondary data in achieves or past events. For a richer sociological analysis, it is often argued that the sociologists should be historically aware- they should be aware of historical setting and limits which should inform their analysis of social issues. Goldthorpe (1991) argues that history and sociology are two significantly different intellectual enterprises. He concludes that it is wrong to conclude to consider sociology and history as one. History in no sense is a natural science like sociology. It does not seek colourless units. It is said that history interprets whereas natural science explains. Historians collect the concrete and interpret it as unique phenomenon whereas sociologists work on hypotheses, classify and arrange data in relevant and different categories to explore and formulate the typical propositions.

It is a fact that sociology and history do not speak same language. The two professions diverge on many counts. notably, one need not to see only just two different professions but structures with distinct languages, style of thinking and values shaped by differences in education and training. It is said that sociologists have crave for numbers, historian for dates and words; sociologists recognise rules and ignore variations whereas historians stress on the individuals and specific. Furthermore, sociology differ from history in the sense that the sociologists seek generalised uniformities and processes to form typology of concepts which differ

Sociology and History: Differences

Sociology and history are two different disciplines in the domain of social sciences differ in their methods, approaches and purposes. Sociologists have crave for numbers, historian for dates and words. Sociologists recognise rules and ignore variations whereas historians stress on the individuals and specific. Sociologists seek generalised uniformities and processes to form typology of concepts which differ from the exact data sets proposed in a particular case by the historians. History is seen as concrete and descriptive science of society. History attempts to construct a picture of social past. On the other side, sociology said to be abstract and theoretical science of society. Scope of sociology in this respect considered broader than the history.

from the exact data sets proposed in a particular case by the historians. Many scholars called history as concrete and descriptive science of society. History attempts to construct a picture of social past. On the other side, sociology said to be abstract and theoretical science of society. Scope of sociology in this respect considered broader than the history. Sociology is not only concerned with the social present, but with the social past too. Sociology thus covers a wider range of issues; often go with broad purpose and transcend time and space limits to produce generalisation grounded in theoretical propositions.

Check Your Progress 1

1) Discuss interrelationship between sociology and history.

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2) Discuss differences between sociology and history.

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3) Which of the following sociologist used history in their sociological analysis?

- a) Auguste Comte
- b) Emile Durkheim
- c) Karl Marx
- d) All given above

4.3 HISTORICAL SOCIOLOGY AS SUB-DISCIPLINE

Historical sociology is a branch or sub-discipline of sociology. It emerged as a result of intersection between sociology and history. Both the disciplines have come closer in terms of concepts and theoretical underpinnings to delineate on common themes which touch boundaries of the two. This boundary-crossing phenomenon has led to the development of sub-field named historical sociology. Historical sociology uses history in its analysis. Furthermore, it may be noted that the issues of change and growth in family, kinship issues, migration, dowry system, etc. all have past which have influences on their present status. This past holds important clues to understand the present status of the problem or issue under consideration. Historical sociology has been interested in how people, communities and societies have been changing over period of time, how they have transformed themselves to the contemporary modern societies? How have the great transformation such as imperialism, renaissance, French revolution and industrial revolution have shaped the modern world? Many earlier sociologists such Khaldun, Comte, Spencer, Weber, Durkheim Simon, etc. as discussed earlier, have enormously contributed to the field. For example, Max Weber, in his study,

'The City', published way back in 1921, used historical paradigm and examine the role of city as a carrier of modern capitalistic economy and as a precursor to modern nation-state. Besides critical contributions of earlier sociologist in drawing their theoretical proposition on line of history, it is said that George Balandier in France and Robert Nisbet in America were pioneers to draw attention towards relevance of historical perspective. S.N. Eisenstadt, B. Moore, T. Skocpol, C. Tilly, J. Habermas, M. Castells, A. G. Frank and I. Wallerstein all gave prominent place to history in their sociological analysis and theoretical reflection on development paradigms in the modern world.

Historical Sociology

Historical sociology is a branch or sub-discipline of sociology. It emerged, during the twentieth century, primarily as a result of intersection between sociology and history. Historical sociology as a sub-field of sociology is likely to make two major contributions to the discipline. First, it can fruitfully historicise sociological analysis helping to situate any sociological analysis historically. Secondly, it will help to draw on important social issues which critically required historical analysis but somehow avoided or remain neglected in sociological analysis.

The idea of distinct sub-field called historical sociology said to be formed during the twentieth century. It primarily developed due to the distinction sociologist started to make between evidences come from direct observation of the present and from indirect observation of the past. Historical sociologist actually started to make sense of present in relation to past. Situating causal connection or locating the issue in the context become important not only to understand but to examine the contemporary developments thoroughly. For instance, Jurgen Habermas has interpreted developments related to modern history in his work called, 'Theory of Communicative Action'. He critically analysed work of earlier sociologist such as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Parsons and others on developments related to modernisation, communication, rationality and human liberation. Similarly, Manuel Castells in his well known work, 'The Information Age' has examined changing information systems and identities in the modern world at large in order to understand needs, choices and challenges that humanity is facing today. Furthermore, many scholars like Samir Amin (1989), James M. Blaut (1993), Jack Goody (1996), Andre Gunder Frank (1998) worked in the field of historical or political sociology. They explored the history of emergence of modern world to contest the privileged place of Europe as it got in the human social thought and affairs. They essentially challenged the idea that the modernity evolved in Europe and then spread to rest of the world. Within the domain of historical sociology, they contested the time and space binaries, disputed the very idea of euro-centric notion of development to bring out the critical role played by indigenous peoples beyond Europe and America.

Historical sociology which essentially goes to history to understand a problem is critically important to the growth of the interdisciplinary scholarship to widen the spectrum of knowledge creation. Historical sociology as a sub-field of sociology is likely to make two major contributions to the discipline. First, it can fruitfully historicise sociological analysis helping to situate any sociological analysis historically. This will not only add value to the analysis, but will ground the sociological analysis contextually by specifying their time and space limits and thus attaching the same with other empirical generalisations. Secondly, a greatly broadened historical sociology will help to draw on important social issues

which critically required historical analysis but somehow avoided or remain neglected in sociological analysis. Many sociologist advocates that history should inform sociological analysis or sensibilities of the sociologist not only while studying social evolution, change in culture and civilisation or developmental tradition, but even when we are studying stability or everyday life reality.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Discuss historical sociology as an outcome of intersection between sociology and history.

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- 2) Who are the prominent sociologists that have worked in the domain historical sociology? Discuss.

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- 3) Who among following inspired the growth of historical sociology in America?
 - a) George Balandier
 - b) Robert Nisbet
 - c) Max Weber
 - d) Karl Marx

4.4 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we have examined the meaning and definition of history and its interrelationship with sociology. We have seen how sociology and history are closely interrelated and actually are dependent on each other? History of culture and institutions is helpful in understanding past society, its activities and

development. Similarly, sociology offers its tools such as social imagination, ideal types and so on which help in understanding and conceptualise past social events. We have also examined, how sociology is concerned with present but interested to situate its context in past. It was noted that the both disciplines need each other to make a complete assessment of an issue. Sociology need to see past to understand the context and add value to its analysis. Similarly history also takes into account socio-cultural aspects while studying historical phenomena. Historian also needs social background and at times sociological concepts as well to write and explain historical phenomenon elaborately.

In this unit, we have also made an assessment of differences between sociology and history. It is described that sociology is much concerned with present whereas history with past. Their approaches and purposes too differ accordingly. Furthermore, it may also be noted that the relationship between the two disciplines is marked by a number of myths and misconceptions too. For instance, sociologists are often considered by historians as professionals whose abstract jargons lacks sensitivity to particular time and places. On the other side, historians are often seen mere collectors of information who are unable to analyse their knowledge with required sophistication and methodical precision. History said to be more concrete and descriptive whereas sociology is considered more abstract and theoretical science. Though closely related to each other, the two disciplines are said to be two different intellectual enterprises in terms of their purposes, world views, approaches and methods.

we have also described how historical sociology as an outcome of intersection of the both the disciplines have emerged. It is also described that the historical sociology as branch of sociology has critically contributed to the growth of an interdisciplinary scholarship. Many sociologists, from the beginning of sociology as major discipline, such as Marx, Weber, Durkheim, later on Castells, Amin, Frank, Blaut as discussed, have elaborately contributed in this field. In nutshell, both sociology and history, though being two different disciplines in the domain of social sciences, are very much closely interrelated and supplements each other's field of studies.

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