

# **HC.1.1 CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGICAL TRADITION**

## **BLOCK-1**

### ***EMERGENCE OF SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT***

## BLOCK-1

### EMERGENCE OF SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT

---

#### UNIT – 1: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIOLOGY-AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

---

##### *Structure*

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Learning Outcomes
- 1.2 Introduction
- 1.3 Enlightenment: the Philosophical Foundations of Sociology
- 1.4 Revolutions and Sociological Tradition
  - 1.4.1 French Revolution
  - 1.4.2 Homology in the ideas of Rousseau and Karl Marx
- 1.5 Conclusion
- 1.6 Key Words
- 1.7 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 1.8 Unit end Exercises
- 1.9 Further Readings
- 1.10 References

---

## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

---

This unit is constructed with the following objectives

- To trace the philosophical foundations of sociology
- To examine the role of European enlightenment in ushering in the sociological tradition
- To explicate the impact of revolutions on the development of sociological tradition

---

## 1.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

---

Dear Learner, after going through this unit, you will be able to: ·

Dear Learner, after going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Examine and critique the influence of philosophers' ideas from enlightenment age in the development of sociological tradition
- Explain the philosophical underpinnings of sociological traditions  
Explicate the relations between revolutions and sociological tradition particularly French Revolution

---

## 1.2 INTRODUCTION

---

Knowledge of any form cannot be independent from the influences of socio-cultural system in which it emerges. Historically significant events leave an indelible imprints and tremendous influence on social structure, polity, economy and culture. Knowledge is no exception to this. No knowledge is absolutely theoretical and objective; instead their genesis and formation is moulded by historical and contemporary factors. Similarly, the roots of sociological tradition are deeply embedded in philosophical perspectives. In this unit, we will try to locate and understand the philosophical foundations of the discipline sociology. It is rather an attempt to fathom the foundations of sociology through the lens of philosophy; that is, ascertaining the role of philosophical thoughts in moulding the perspective of the discipline, its taxonomy, nature, essence, uniqueness and difference from other bodies of discipline. Philosophical foundations of any discipline are to be assessed and critiqued in so far how they inform the ontological and epistemological aspects of the discipline. Ontology is concerned with the nature and essence of reality; whereas, epistemology refers to theories and methods of generating knowledge. This unit as such is concerned with philosophical basis of sociological knowledge.

In this unit, we will discuss the legacy of enlightenment in the emergence of sociology; how far the emergence of sociology embodies the philosophical essence, continuity and its drifting away.

---

### 1.3 ENLIGHTENMENT: THE PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF SOCIOLOGY

---

We shall note that sociologists generally trace the history of sociology from the period of Renaissance in European societies. Though the emergence of sociology was a part of reflexive thinking ability of human beings, it did not emerge as a linear and inevitable extension of this ability. Rather it emerged as a response to crises of events and to the challenges formed by major changes in the social order (Nisbet, Robert, 2004:9). With the collapse of Roman Empire, the aftermath period was referred to as dark ages and they were only dark in comparison to achievements of Greeks and Romans. The so called dark ages can be said to have lasted till 15th century.

But from fifth century to thirteenth century new inventions and ideas were slowly accumulated albeit amidst oppressive conditions of the masses. 'Commerce', 'polity', 'religion', 'art', 'intellectual thought' underwent gradual changes in terms of new ideas and experiments. Exploration of new trade routes and new nations, that is, geographical discoveries best explain the metamorphosis that European societies were then undergoing. According to John Scott, until Arab expansion into former Roman world, classical texts were not rediscovered and Muslim scholars started re-examining the texts. Ibn Khaldun used Aristotelian ideas to understand the conditions under which strong states could resolve social conflicts. You shall note that his rediscovery and re-examination of classical texts transformed intellectual life in Western Europe.

Scholars of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries started considering themselves as participants in a 'renaissance or rebirth of classical thought. Ideas and standards of judgments engrained in classical texts lent intellectuals a humanist outlook. Political philosophies of Nicolo Machiavelli (1505) and (1576) and in the field of art new approaches by Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) and Michelangelo (1475-1564) took a rational view about political power and religion. This enabled them to question the theological world view of Church and to consider human's subjective experience as central to all forms of knowledge. (Scott, John, op.cit, 9-10). This culminated in Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626) work *Novum organum*. He was

the first to articulate clearly the new mode of inquiry. He argued that conceptualization of nature of universe should be viewed with skepticism and tested against observable facts. This brought legitimacy and stimulated great achievements finally culminating in Sir Isaac Newton's law of Gravity.

You should also note that enlightenment was not only fuelled by political, social and economic changes, but also by scientific revolution. According to scholars Newtonian physics represented a peak in scientific revolution which ended the dualism between reason and senses and both of them constituted a single unity. Empirical world could be understood by application of concepts, speculation and logic and the accumulation of facts could discipline and insulate the reason from fanciful speculation (Turner, J.H, et.al, op.cit: 2). Physics became the vision of scientific inquiry and theory. This had a significant impact on other fields also. As a consequence of which, the domain of individual and society was increasingly drawn into the orbit of new scientific vision. This represented a leap in thinking about society and individual.

Enlightenment thinking has *negative* and *positive* dimensions. The word negative here implies a vision of looking at the existing setup from critical point of view. Not all the philosophical doctrines, axioms and propositions are originally formulated. In the words of Ernst Cassirer 'Far more than the men of the epoch were aware their teachings were dependent on the preceding centuries. They ordered, sifted, developed, and clarified this heritage rather than contributed and gave currency to new and original ideas (Cassirer 1951 as cited in Zeitlin 1968. P. 04). However, as **Irving Zeitlin** observed enlightenment produced original form of philosophic thought; whereas regarding the contents it was dependent upon eighteenth century.

Thinkers from Enlightenment period questioned the existing institutions and oppressive conditions and proposed reconstruction of society. Hence, enlightenment is not merely reflexive in nature; instead it is negative and critical. Philosophy acquired a central and critical role. It became the activity by which all fundamental forms of phenomena can be enquired and discovered. 'Truth became the central goal of the intellectuals of this age but not truth founded on revelation, tradition, or authority; rather, it was reason and observation that were to be the twin pillars of truth (Zeitlin 1968 p. 03).'

Individual and society as subject of scientific thinking got a momentum by group of scholars known as philosophes in France who spearheaded the enlightenment, which you may have heard of and it was called the age of reason.

Prominent among philosophes were 'Immanuel Kant', 'Charles-Louis de Secondat', 'John Locke', 'Thomas Hobbes', 'Voltaire', 'Jean Jacques Rousseau', 'Condorcet' and 'Denis Diderot'.

The basic thesis or arguments common to all of their thoughts was an idea that humans were deprived from their certain natural rights, which were oppressed by institutional arrangements. They mounted devastating attack on traditional society (Nisbet, Robert, op.cit. p, 9). Hence, it was an imperative to dismantle the existing oppressive structure and to be replaced by new emancipatory system which would be in harmony with the essence and basic needs of people. They were in support of new capitalist class in free trade, free commerce, free labour and free opinion (Ibid: 3).

As we have mentioned in the introduction of the unit that knowing the philosophical foundations of the discipline sociology is an exercise of ascertaining the role of philosophical perspectives in informing the ontology and epistemological positions of the discipline. We will chiefly examine here the influence of few important philosophers of enlightenment era on the emergence and subject matter of sociology

### 1.3.1 Charles Montesquieu

Influence of Montesquieu on sociological tradition is distinct, and prominent.



His work *Spirit of Laws* is considered as one of the first sociological works for its both *style* and *tone*. He left profound impact on both August Comte and Emile Durkheim. In fact, founding of sociology can be pushed back by 75 years if we consider *Spirit of Laws* as first distinct sociological work. Montesquieu argued that society has to be considered as *thing*. A thing is amenable for observation and hence, its properties can be discovered and analysed. Montesquieu stressed that morals, manners, and customs and social structure can be subjected to same way of

investigation as they are done in physical and natural sciences. Society can best be understood by 'discovering the "laws" of human organization (Turner et al. 2007. p. 12). He viewed scientific laws as hierarchical. Sciences which are low in hierarchy formulates determinate laws-Newtonian Law of Gravity, for instance and sciences high in hierarchy are characterized by less determinate laws and are hence, more probabilistic in nature. This view accommodates 'human freedom' and 'initiative implying the plurality of truth. This line of argument seemed to have left impact on Comte who was of the view that complexity of social reality makes discovery of determinate laws in social realm difficult. Hence, 'sociological laws would capture the *basic tendencies* and *directions* of social phenomena (ibid, italics are added)'.

Emile Durkheim's concepts and arguments cannot be fully appreciated unless we understand the influence of Montesquieu's ideas on him. Durkheim credited Montesquieu for considering society 'as a thing or fact in the same sense physical matter constitutes thing or fact (ibid, p. 13). Durkheim believed that Montesquieu was the first to consider that '*morals, manners, customs* and *spirit of nation* are subject to scientific investigation and he credited him for his view that any discipline may be called as science provided it has a definite field, that is, subject matter. Influence of Montesquieu on Durkheim was so profound that his Latin doctoral thesis was on *The Spirit of Laws* which was published a year before his doctoral thesis on *Division of Labour* was published.

### **1.3.2 Jean Jacques Rousseau**

Rousseau was an eminent philosopher of enlightenment era. His ideas of *social contract, general will, state of nature* and *social order* left deep impact on classical sociology, particularly on the works of Emile Durkheim. Rousseau's concepts of will, general will, sovereignty were transformed in the works of Marx and became corner stone in Marxist philosophy, which this unit discusses in detail in the coming pages. Freedom remained a fundamental ideal for Rousseau. How to attain it? Certainly not by shattering the society or civilization and by returning to natural state as popularly perceived. Irving Zeitlin observed that for Rousseau 'the perfectibility of man, his freedom and his happiness, and the increasing mastery of his own fate, all depended on a clear understanding of the laws of nature (Zeitlin op.cit p. 23).



Nature and society function according to their laws and he concurred with Montesquieu that laws of society differ from the requirements of law of nature. It is because of men who due to limited knowledge and insufficient perspectives they act contrary to their nature and create social order which violates their basic nature. Hence, establishing right social order whose laws would be in harmony with the laws of nature was Rousseau's chief objective. But the existing order contrary to man's nature has impeded him from perfectibility and deformed his nature. Hence dual realm of social and natural order existed; contradictions, conflict and chasm between them has to be reconciled. How to reconcile it and establishing the ideal social order which will be in greater harmony with the laws of nature where general will embodied in the form of state regulate order that no individual will exploit another? How one can know social order is at variance with natural order? To understand that one must know the state of nature. In order to understand that Rousseau constructed heuristic device called 'state of nature'. Irving Zeitlin observed

This was a *hypothetical construct*, a *heuristic device*, by which man would be theoretically divested of his social and cultural aspects. This would yield a concept of natural man which could serve as a kind of yardstick by which to measure the degree of repression imposed by a specific society. Or, what amounts to the same thing, it could serve as a *relatively objective, non-ideological means* by which to measure the degree of perfection and freedom offered by a specific "civil state (ibid, p. 24, italics are added)."

We will summarize the major lines of influence on Rousseau's ideas on Emile Durkheim and as well as the homology between Rousseau and Marx's ideas. Following are the particular areas of influence on Durkheim:



**a. Society as an Emergent Reality**

Durkheim endorsed and credited the Montesquieu for his insight that society constituted a moral reality, *sui generis* which can be distinguished from individual morality. Society as a moral entity is different from the individuals who compose it. Society is hence, an emergent and moral entity. Society is not possible without moral aspects which guide the exchanges between the individuals.

**b. Social Pathology**

According to Durkheim, Rousseau's heuristic methodological device *State of Nature* or *Natural State* as a heuristic methodological device can be used to fathom the pathologies of the society and 'to provide the guidelines for the remaking of society (Turner, et. al p. 266)'. Durkheim was influenced by Rousseau in conceptualizing the pathological aspects of society as *egoism*, *anomie* and *forced division of labour*

**c. The Problem of Order**

Dilemmas of modern society as observed by Rousseau were accepted by Durkheim. Dilemma revolves around 'how is it possible to maintain individual freedom and liberty without releasing people's desire and encouraging self-interest, while creating a strong and cohesive social order that does not aggravate inequality and oppression? (ibid)'.

**1.3.3 Homology between Rousseau and Marx's Ideas**

Rousseau's conception of equality exerted tremendous influence on the course of revolution. But John Locke's conception of *liberty* and *property* were at confrontation with Rousseau's concept of *democracy* and *equality*. In Rousseau's view, liberty to accumulate wealth needs to be restricted in the interest of equality. Economic inequality should not become a state where one had to sell himself off or being bought by someone. Hence, views and propositions of Rousseau were a critical reflection and check on capitalist development of industry, which was aided by scientific revolution.

Enlightenment in Europe was rested on scientific revolution and believed in the inevitability of human progress. Rousseau made break with the individualism of Enlightenment through his much celebrated idea of *General Will* which laid the foundation and acted as fountain spirit for French conservative thought and also for

*communist-socialist* political thought. Hence, the collective orientation of Emile Durkheim firmly owes to French revolution and its celebrated philosopher Rousseau. Besides, we also find homology between Rousseau and Marx's ideas. Rousseau's idea of Sovereignty is observed to have become cornerstone in Karl Marx's philosophy. For Rousseau, sovereign is a public person formed by the union of all other persons is called *state* by its members when passive and sovereign when active. Essence of his conception of social contract is individual becoming subject of himself; that is, he is both *law giver* and as well as *citizen* bound to the law. Individual is, therefore, both the *creator* and *adherent* of the state. 'Thus freedom and obedience are complementary notions (Rotenstreich 1949 p. 717, italic are added)'. The same duality is best captured in Marx's writings in which 'man is both the *producer* of the conditions of the reality and the *subject* of them; he is both the *author* of his drama and *actor* in it (ibid, italics are added). Marx perceives two aspects of human existence: *activity* and *circumstance*. Human's activities are bound to circumstances; but circumstances are also the products of activities. Hence there will be interplay between them. But Rousseau finds this duality of activity and passivity in the sphere of state; whereas, Marx locates it in the sphere of social structure and economy. If the will represents the activity of man for Rousseau and is responsible for contract which directs individuals to abide by law. Whereas for Marx, *praxis* is the activity; a sensitive activity which gives identity to man distinguishing him from others and it is capable of bringing transformation in things and situation. Praxis embodies itself in concrete situation in production serving as 'stimulus and as bridge to the coming state of society (ibid, p. 718). If the *Will* in Rousseau's theory creates the *State*, *Praxis* in Marx's philosophy creates history and directs its flow. Activism gains different forms, meanings and features based on its location in different spheres, whether state or production and *will* or *praxis* respectively as resultant forms.

#### 1.3.4 Jacques Turgot

**Jacques was considered as one of the influential thinkers of the eighteenth century enlightenment.** He served as finance minister of France and left considerable influence even outside the intellectual circles. Two discourses given by him left deep impact and stimulated sociological thinking, particularly the mind of August Comte which established him as a major social thinker. He delivered his first discourse on July 1750 titled as *The Advantages which the Establishment of Christianity has Procured for the Human Race*' and the second discourse was presented on December 11, 1750 titled as *Philosophical Review of the Successive Advances of the Human Mind*.

The first discourse draws the attention to the positive and preservative role of religion in Europe which is not attached with more importance in sociological circles. Whereas, his second discourse becomes significant as Turgot drew attention to the similarities of humans in perceptions and responses to situation and hence all evolve along the same evolutionary path. 'Humanity is like an individual in that it grows and develops in a similar way'. Hence, slow pace of advancement characterizes Human progress from less developed state to advanced stage. In the end all humanity reaches the stage of perfection (Turner et al. op.cit p. 13-14). Turgot presents holism when he sees parts as connected in system. Change occurs in one part of system or structure, say in economic forces, brings in other parts and change hence permeates the society as a whole. Turgot's view that agriculture produces surplus bringing forth the expansion of division of labour which involves new commercial activities with forward linkage leading to shipbuilding and 'extensive use of ships' causes advances in navigation, astronomy and geography. The expansion of trade creates towns and cities which preserves the *arts and sciences*, thereby encouraging the advance of technologies (ibid).' Turgot recognized the role of economic forces bringing changes in other parts of the society which heralded the arrival of Marx's perspective of placing primacy on economic factors in society.

Turgot's later works *On Universal History* and *On Political Geography* exerted definite impact on Comte in formulating his Law of Three Stages. Turgot in *On Political Geography* conceptualized human progress in three stages. He argued that all societies of the world are at one of the three stages, *hunters, shepherds, or husbandmen* (ibid, p. 15, italics in original)

### 1.3.5 Saint Simon

Saint Simon is considered to be bridge between eighteenth century and early nineteenth century. How he influenced the development of sociological tradition is debatable as August Comte joined him as his disciple and secretary and served him till their violent quarrel and separation in 1824. Similarities of ideas and thought can be seen in the works of Simon and Comte. Who influenced who becomes a contested matter? But sociologists are of the opinion that since joined Saint Simon as his secretary in 1817, ideas, hence developed by Saint Simon in the period falling between 1800 and 1817 are considered to be not influenced by Comte. 'Study of humankind and society must be a positive science based on empirical observation'. Society is like any organic body governed by natural laws of development and should be explored by scientific observation. For which social organization of society

should be studied focusing on *growth, order, stability and abnormal pathologies* (ibid, p. 18). This should be achieved through three paths:

- a. “ a series of observations” on the course of civilization shall be a starting point for the new science
- b. Observations leads to the discovery of laws of social organization
- c. Using these laws, best form of social organization could be constructed

His law of history projected the movement of idea from polytheism to Christian theism and then switching over to positivistic stage. Ideas maintained social order in each stage and with each transition came a period of crisis. Transition to positivism led to the dismantling of feudalism and its religious configuration. Alongside the movement of ideas and transition of stages in society, scientific observations first entered the realm of astronomy followed by physics, chemistry and finally physiology which includes both biological and social organs. He advocated terrestrial morality based on ‘the ideas of positivism, that is the use of observations to formulate, test and implement the laws of social organization (ibid, p. 19)’. These lines of thought has clearly influenced in August Comte’s law of three stages and hierarchy of science with more clarity and more articulate. Saint Simon gave more importance to the scientists and industrialists in reconstructing society. Science became a functional equivalent for religion and his terrestrial morality consists of both spiritual and temporal aspects. If spiritual leaders give a sense of direction and religious sense to social activity; temporal leaders, whereas ensure that new organization is built destroying the hereditary privileges and allowing people full chances to realize their potential. Positivism become the basis for spirituality

### **Check Your Progress-1**

1. Who among the following is not considered as philosophes
  - a. Immanuel Kant
  - b. John Locke’,
  - c. ‘Thomas Hobbes’
  - d. Ibn Kaldhun
2. Write a note on the role of enlightenment in developing scientific and critical thinking
3. State True or False’

‘The basic thesis or arguments common to thoughts of all enlightenment philosophers was an idea that humans were deprived from their certain natural rights, which were oppressed by institutional arrangements’

True

False

4. Who authored the work *Novum Organum*?
5. Examine the impact of Rousseau’s ideas on sociology

---

## 1.5 Revolutions and Sociological Tradition

---

Revolutions represent the total changes of system and its course of action and events are *intense, dramatic* and consequences are *far reaching*. Revolutions are always aimed at capturing the power; destroying its existing form and changing it to a new form. Intimate to revolution is its conviction and connection with power. Hence, question of political is central to revolution. Exercise of power becomes a tool towards reasoning and in establishing a new order which is claimed to be free from exploitation, oppression and egalitarian.

Two revolutions are considered to have brought tremendous and all-encompassing changes which included from family to state in Europe and also for causing reverberations across the both sides of Atlantic inaugurating far reaching changes in coming decades. Revolutions are considered to be ‘relatively rare but historically important events in which an entire social and political order is overturned, usually by violent means and reconstructed on new principles with new leaders’ (Marshall 2006:553).

According to Robert Nisbet, ‘the fundamental ideas of European Sociology are best understood as responses to the problem of order caused at the beginning of the nineteenth century by the collapse of the old regime under the blows of industrialism and revolutionary democracy (Nisbet 1966:21). Here we are making attempts to understand how sociological theory emerged and blossomed as a response to consequences blown out by two revolutions in Europe: Democratic revolution in France and Industrial revolution in Britain. Repercussions and reverberations of these two revolutions were felt across the Europe. They are responsible for the breakup of social order which was based on *kinship, land, social class, religion, local community* and set free the elements *power, wealth* and *status*. No field of thought and aspect of life were untouched by the impact of the two revolutions to such an extent that it has gripped the imagination of thinkers and

their thought. If politics in nineteenth century revolved around '*practical* efforts of men to re consolidate these elements; whereas the history of social thought represented the efforts to consolidate on theoretical plane, that is, 'put them in perspectives having philosophic and scientific relevance to the new age (ibid). To elucidate further nature of community, the location of power, stratification of wealth and privilege, the role of individual in emerging mass society, the reconciliation of sacred values with political and economic realities, the direction of western society became rich themes in sociological theories (ibid). Today the two revolutions may be subject to analysis and may appear as chapters or stages which can be subsumed under general process of change dispassionately. But the two revolutions displayed the reality which largely defied the conceptualization of them as merely a general process of change as they pounced as *millennial abruptness*.

Robert Nisbet draws our attention to the relation between *events* and *ideas* which is never direct; it is always mediated by conceptions of events (ibid, p. 22). It is through the concepts that events are perceived, understood and evaluated. Hence, ideology played an important role in perception and evaluation of situation, events and the impact of two revolutions. According to Eric J. Hobsbawn, words are witnesses which often speak louder than documents (Hobsbawn, 1996. p.01)

The period falling in between eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth century has been considered to be richest from the point of formation of new words in History; of them following words merit our attention as a testimony to the profoundness of impact of revolutions on thought formation and social life: '*industry, industrialist, democracy, class, middle class, ideology, intellectual, rationalism, humanitarian, atomistic, masses, commercialism, proletariat, collectivism, equalitarian, liberal, conservative, scientist, utilitarian, bureaucracy, capitalism, crisis* (ibid and also as cited in Nisbet op.cit, p. 23, italics are in original). Without the aid of these words, once cannot comprehend and assess the impact of revolutions on all aspects of collective life which broke out between 1798 and 1848 as they are considered as greatest transformation in human history. Hobsbawn includes the subsequent revolutions and coupe that took place till 1848 after the first revolution of 1798. While noting the profundity of the French Revolution that broke between 1798 and 1848 he remarked:

The great revolution of 1789-1848 was the triumph not of 'industry' as such, but of *capitalist* industry; not of liberty and equality in general but of *middle class* or '*bourgeois*' liberal society; not of 'the modern economy' or 'the modern state', but of the economies and states in a particular geographical region of the world (part of

Europe and a few patches of North America), whose centre was the neighbouring and rival states of Great Britain and France (Hobsbawn op.cit. p. 1, italics are in original )

The above observations amply make clear the forces which acted as catalysts in the making of revolution. But twin revolutions-French Revolution and Industrial Revolution viewed from historian lens from non-European region at 3000 AD may inform that they were bound to happen in France and England than in any part of the world and also could not take any other form 'than the *triumph of a bourgeois-liberal capitalism*. Two revolutions cannot be understood unless we connect them to *ancient regime* which they swept away. Analysing the impact of revolution, its magnitude and profoundness on society, economy and polity are of more significance than causes for the emergence of revolution. It is the triumph of the revolution and its conquest of fortress which should be understood and the expansion of the world it brought in the form of conquering bourgeoisie. The impact of two revolutions spread outside the 'double crater' of France and England in the form of European expansion of the world. Hobsbawn observed:

Indeed its most striking consequence for world history was to establish a domination of the globe by a few western regimes (and especially by the British) which has no parallel in history. Before the merchants, the steam-engines, the ships and the guns of the west – and before its ideas – the age-old civilizations and empires of the world capitulated and collapsed (Ibid. p. 03)

But dialectics of the same revolution is such that it not only led to expansion and triumph of bourgeoisie but also to the contraction expressed in forms of independence movements and communist movements against the colonial regimes.

### **1.5.1 French Revolution**

If economic organization of the Europe in nineteenth century was formed by British industrial revolution, new political ideology and structures were shaped by the French. Though the offshoots of industrial revolution, factory system of production and railways penetrated beyond Europe and explored the bounty of colonies, French revolution led to the birth of revolutionary ideas; it raised fundamental questions about the nature of relations between individual and state, individual and authority and individual, family and community. In the words of **Eric Hobsbawn**, France provided the vocabulary of '*liberal and radical democratic politics*' and '*nationalism*' for the word and its impact was so deep that flag of tri colour

became emblem of the nations. It also 'provided the codes of law, the model of scientific and technical organization, the metric system of measurement for most countries (ibid p. 53, italics are added). Ancient civilizations which escaped so far the influence of Europe were penetrated through French revolution. According to **Robert Nisbet**, French revolution had what industrial revolution lacked and 'by its very nature the French revolution was possessed of a suddenness and dramatic intensity that nothing in Industrial revolution could match. Declaration of rights of men, revolutionary laws that were enacted in the period between 1789 and 1795 left deep impact that pervaded and penetrated all aspects of social life of French so much so that apart from reign of terror rendered was sufficient to render French revolution a **millennial character** that became for a next century most gripping and 'preoccupying event in French political and intellectual history (Nisbet op.cit, p. 31)'.

Impact of French revolution reverberated in the works of classical sociologists; from August Comte to Emile Durkheim, French revolution was given a decisive role in their writings as it was considered to be responsible for bringing the changed social conditions which they studied. But the tone and slant of their positions varied on the qualitative aspects of the impact of revolution. For Comte, revolution brought social disorder and dogmas of the revolution such as *equalitarianism, popular sovereignty, individualism*, etc. were responsible for the spread of moral disorganization across the Europe. For Durkheim, the revolution replaced *corporate egoism* with *individual egoism*. Max Weber's fascination with the concept of authority and its categories, Gaetano Mosco's theory of power and Robert Michels' theory of oligarchy drew their inspiration from French revolution (ibid, p. 32, italics are added).

What was happening in the field of sociology was also felt in all other areas of social thought such as historiography, jurisprudence, political science, etc. They were under the grip of the consequences of revolution and were dealing in one or other way with the issues raised by the revolution such as *tradition versus reason, religion versus state, the nature of property, social classes, nationalism and equalitarianism* which was the source for all and at pinnacle (ibid, p. 33, italics are added). Democracy was the central aspect which emanated from the revolution best represents the essence of revolution and its impact. According to E. Weekley, 'until the French Revolution that *democracy* ceased to be a mere literary word, and became part of the political vocabulary (Williams 1964 as cited in Nisbet, ibid), which enormously signifies the role and impact of the French revolution. What distinguished French



revolution from other revolutions? Why is it so unique? Why did it keep the minds of people under firm grip regarding their identification of themselves and their relations with polity and morality? Answers to these questions lie in the fact that French Revolution was thoroughly *ideological* revolution which redefined the fundamental aspects of humans' existence and their relations to authority, community and liberty. Revolution became a tool of reconstruction which involved *church, family, property* and other institutions and hence became decisive aspect occupying the sociological imagination both for its character and intensity and also for the profound impact it brought. According to **Edmund Burke**, the French Revolution consisted of compound forces of political *power, secular rationalism* and *moralistic ideology* which were unique (ibid, p.34, italics are added).

According to **Ted Benton**, empiricism, science and religious unorthodoxy were partisan forces in both the revolutions. He further notes the impact of empiricist epistemology and physical theory of John Lock and Newton on French enlightenment. Empiricist epistemology was blended with atheism and materialism. Influential philosophers in France who popularized Locke were known as *encyclopedists*. Liberty of individuals was cornerstone in assessing the social and political setup and were judged in terms of how far they allowed individual the liberty and freedom to dispose his property within the purview of law. Authority of the state rested on the consent of the subjects (Benton 1977 p. 24-25).

Apart from Locke, Rousseau's conception of equality exerted tremendous influence on the course of revolution. But Locke's conception of *liberty* and *property* were at confrontation with Rousseau's concept of *democracy* and *equality*. In Rousseau's view, liberty to accumulate wealth need to be restricted in the interest of equality. Economic inequality should not become a state where one had to sell himself off or being bought by someone. Hence, views and propositions of Rousseau were a critical reflection and check on capitalist development of industry, which was aided by scientific revolution. Enlightenment in Europe was rested on scientific revolution and believed in the inevitability of human progress. Rousseau made break with the individualism of Enlightenment through his much celebrated idea of *General Will* which laid the foundation and acted as fountain spirit for French conservative thought and also for *communist-socialist* political thought. Hence, the collective orientation of Emile Durkheim firmly owes to French revolution and its celebrated philosopher Rousseau. Besides, we also find homology between Rousseau and Marx's ideas. Rousseau's idea of Sovereignty is observed to have become cornerstone in Karl

Marx's philosophy. For Rousseau, sovereign is a public person formed by the union of all other persons is called *state* by its members when passive and sovereign when active. Essence of his conception of social contract is individual becoming subject of himself; that is, he is both *law giver* and as well as *citizen* bound to the law. Individual is, therefore, both the *creator* and *adherent* of the state. 'Thus freedom and obedience are complementary notions (Rotenstreich 1949 p. 717, italic are added)'. The same duality is best captured in Marx's writings in which 'man is both the *producer* of the conditions of the reality and the *subject* of them; he is both the *author* of his drama and *actor* in it (ibid, italics are added). Marx perceives two aspects of human existence: *activity* and *circumstance*. Human's activities are bound to circumstances; but circumstances are also the products of activities. Hence there will be interplay between them. But Rousseau finds this duality of activity and passivity in the sphere of state; whereas, Marx locates it in the sphere of social structure and economy. If the will represents the activity of man for Rousseau and is responsible for contract which directs individuals to abide by law. Whereas for Marx, *praxis* is the activity; a sensitive activity which gives identity to man distinguishing him from others and it is capable of bringing transformation in things and situation. Praxis embodies itself in concrete situation in production serving as 'stimulus and as bridge to the coming state of society (ibid, p. 718). If the *Will* in Rousseau's theory creates the *State*, *Praxis* in Marx's philosophy creates history and directs its flow. Activism gains different forms, meanings and features based on its location in different spheres, whether state or production and *will* or *praxis* respectively as resultant forms.

### Check Your Progress-2

1. State True or False
  - Revolutions represent the total changes of system and its course of action and events are *intense, dramatic* and consequences are *far reaching*

True	False
------	-------
2. Bring out the relations between revolutions and the sociological tradition
3. Discuss the impact of French revolution in the emergence of sociology

---

## 1.6 CONCLUSION

---

We have discussed in this unit the philosophical foundations of sociology. As part of which, we have explored the complex interfaces between the factors which led to the emergence of sociology; amongst them we have discussed in detail the

role of enlightenment in the development of sociological tradition. Philosophers from the enlightenment era, widely known as *philosophes* and *encyclopaedists* raised the issues and conceptualized them which apart from laying the path for the emergence of sociology also informed the ontological and epistemological aspects of the discipline. Montesquieu, Rousseau, Turgot, Saint Simon, GWF Hegel exerted influence in a tremendous way so much so that ideas they formulated, their advocacy for the application of methods of natural sciences to the study of society paved the way for the emergence of new science of society and its subject matter.

Besides, we have also explored the role of revolutions in moulding the sociological tradition. French Revolution and Industrial Revolution brought wider changes and repercussions which acted as precipitating factors in the birth of sociology. Unprecedented changes brought by French Revolution in the areas of polity, economy and family through its declaration of rights and legislations with radical intent and economic reorganization brought by industrial revolution have also necessitated the emergence of sociology as a need to subject the new unprecedented conditions of life to scientific scrutiny and to reconstruct the social organization in a better way.

---

## 1.7 KEY WORDS

---

- Enlightenment:** identified as period of European thought which places emphasis on *reason, experience, scepticism* over religious and traditional authority. Ideals of *secular, liberal* and *democracy* were embedded in this period. Period of Enlightenment is often traced from the date of publication of Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica* in 1686 and John Locke's works. Some trace it to the works of Francis Bacon and Thomas Hobbes in England and in France with Rene Descarte's work.
- Revolutions :** Revolutions represent the total changes of system and its course of action and events are *intense, dramatic* and consequences are *far reaching*. Revolutions are always aimed at capturing the power; destroying its existing form and changing it to a new form.
- General Will :** General will is central to Rousseau's philosophy. It refers to interest collectively held by people aiming at common good interest of people aimed at collective common interest

---

## 1.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

---

### Check Your Progress-1

1. D
2. Refer section 1.3
3. True
4. Francis Bacon
5. Refer Section 1.3.2

### Check Your Progress-2

1. True
2. Refer section 1.4
3. Refer section section 1.4.1

---

## 1.9 UNIT END EXERCISES

---

1. Is Enlightenment scientific and critical in its approach?
2. Bring out the interconnections between revolutions and sociological tradition
3. Discuss the relevance of the ideas of Charles Montesquieu and Jean Jacques Rousseau in providing the philosophical foundations to the discipline of sociology

---

## 1.10 FURTHER READINGS

---

- Nisbet, Robert 1968. *Sociological Tradition*. Jaipur & New Delhi: Rawat Publications
- Turner, J H et.al 2015. *The Emergence of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat
- Zeitlin, Irving. 1968. *Ideology and Development of Sociological Tradition*. New York:

---

## 1.11 REFERENCES

---

- Hobsbawn, E.J 1996. *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848*. New York: Vintage Books
- Marshall, Gordon (Ed). 2006. *Dictionary of Sociology*: New Delhi, Oxford University Press
- Nisbet, Robert 1968. *Sociological Tradition*. Jaipur & New Delhi: Rawat Publications
- Turner, J H et.al 2015. *The Emergence of Sociological Theory*. Jaipur: Rawat
- Zeitlin, Irving. 1968. *Ideology and Development of Sociological Tradition*. New York: Prentice Hall Publications -

---

## **UNIT – 2: DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGICAL TRADITION**

---

### *Structure*

- 2.0 Objectives
- 2.1 Learning Outcomes
- 2.2 Introduction
- 2.3 Ideology and Sociological Tradition
- 2.4 Unit Ideas of Sociology
- 2.5 Liberalism
- 2.6 Radicalism
- 2.7 Conservatism
- 2.8 Conclusion
- 2.9 Key Words
- 2.10 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 2.11 Unit End Exercises
- 2.12 Further Readings
- 2.13 References

---

## 2.0 OBJECTIVES

---

This unit is constructed with the following objectives as frame of reference

- To explicate how ideas influence the perception of reality
- To explore the underpinnings between ideology and the development of sociological tradition
- To examine three principal ideologies of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and their influence on sociological theory

---

## 2.1 LEARNING OUTCOMES

---

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- Explain how ideologies have shaped the development of sociological knowledge
- Appreciate the role of ideas in grasping the reality and recognize the relations between ideas and reality
- Explicate how sociological tradition is shaped by three major ideologies *Liberalism, Radicalism* and *Conservatism*
- Recognize how essential concepts and perspectives of sociology place it in proximity to philosophical conservatism

---

## 2.2 INTRODUCTION

---

In the previous unit, you have understood the philosophical foundations of sociology and we discussed how far the radical ideas of philosophers of enlightenment age and during the age of revolutions have influenced the emergence, subject matter and epistemology of sociology. In this unit we will discuss the role of ideology and empiricism in the development of sociological tradition. This unit will explore the interconnections between the ideology and sociology and traces how empiricism shaped the science of society.

---

## 2.3 IDEOLOGY AND SOCIOLOGICAL TRADITION

---

The term ideology has different shades of meaning and polemical connotations; its mould is so vast that no discourse can escape it. Ever since, the term ideology was coined by French enlightenment aristocrat and French philosopher **Antoine Destutt de Tracy** (1754-1836), meaning of which has transformed so much and

acquired different dimensions. Ideology refers to bunch or system of ideas capable of affecting the social circumstances and informing the actions of individuals. Ideology for Marx and Engels is used as tool to advance the interests of groups/ classes and for it will bring social cohesion and remove social strains

Ideology as a sociological concept originated in the works of Karl Marx. It was undoubtedly Karl Marx who bestowed much coveted focus to the concept by his critical views placing it on the intellectual space of global recognition. Beneath Marx's analysis of ideology is his rejection of idealism which places primacy over ideas as the prime movers of the history. For Marx 'the realm of ideas is distinguishable from and determined by that of economy. What makes the ideas of ruling classes ideological is the fact that facts are hidden by ruling classes to the benefit of working class. Hence, ideology becomes a tool for ruling class to justify and continue their dominance. Marx uses the metaphor *camera obscura* to indicate that function of ideology is to invert the reality and inversion is not an autonomous.

Apart from Marxist implications, we shall also note the other ways in which meaning of ideology is perceived; ideology is understood as a bunch of ideas. Concepts which are used to refer social phenomena are basically ideas and hence, concepts belong to the realm of ideas; they are connected to realm of politics, economic aspects, etc., which are empirical reality. Therefore, how empirical reality is perceived, grasped and interpreted are dependent on ideas. Hence, how ideas shaped sociological theories occupies central importance.

We shall remember that central aspect of this unit is to explore the interconnections between ideology and the development of sociological tradition. To be more particular, this unit explores how ideas shaped the classical sociological theories. This cannot be achieved simply by assigning respective ideologies to sociologists as August Comte may appear *radical* when his *utopianism* of *Positive Polity* is taken into consideration which advocates the total reordering of western society. For many others, notably John Stuart Mills he appeared as *liberal* because of his emphasis on science, industry and positivism. But Comte had a place in French conservatism.

Time line in which all the classical sociologists lived was characterized by radical events and times such as revolutions- French Revolution of 1789, revolution of 1848, Industrial revolution which started in England. They ushered in modern democratic states and factory system of production and hence, there were both

ideological and social structural changes. Communities which were small in size, simple in nature and agrarian were on the path of transition towards big, complex and industrial societies. Hence, the conceptual apparatus used by classical sociologists to capture the metamorphosis were thematically rich and abstract in nature.

---

## 2.4 UNIT IDEAS OF SOCIOLOGY

---

According to Robert Nisbet, five are the essential ideas which gave distinctiveness to sociology and also made it distinct from other social sciences. They are *community, authority, status, the sacred* and *alienation*. Community here is not a local instead it is an abstract idea which encapsulates religion, work, family, social bond and culture. Every association has inner order which is vested with legitimacy to make decisions called as authority. Status refers to positions of individuals in the hierarchy in terms of prestige and influence that pervades all communities and associations. The realm of sacred consists of mores, beliefs, values, religious, ritualistic and non-rational way of behaviour and actions which are valued beyond their utility. Alienation refers to an idea and state of mind on which humans are estranged, anomic and rootless. Alienation may also spring from moral-ascetic ideas and outlook of religions where individual progressively becomes detached from material and social attachments of life. These ideas characterized the works of all classical sociologists. Each idea is linked to its conceptual opposite; community is linked to a kind of antithesis such as *society*; the idea of society has to be understood in Ferdinand Tonnies' sense of *Gessellschaft* which implies *large scale, impersonal* and *contractual ties* which were enveloping and enshrouding in modern times at the expense of community. Authority is linked to its opposite *power*. Power is associated with growing military and political powers and faces the problem of legitimacy compared to authority as the latter emanated from 'social functions and associations (Nisbet 1966: 06, italics in original). Sacred is linked to its opposite *secular*; beliefs and practices progressively get detached from sacred and things become more *profane* in outlook and utilitarian in consideration. Alienation is linked to its conceptual opposite *progress*. Alienation is considered as inversion of progress; estrangement of individual from values, and himself came to be considered as impediments to progress.

Three ideologies have left deep impact in the formation of classical sociological theories: *Liberalism, Radicalism* and *Conservatism*. Soul of Liberalism as an ideology is



importance to individual; his autonomy and rights: social, political and economic. In the words of Robert Nisbet 'what tradition is to the conservative and use of power is to the radical, individual autonomy is to the liberal (Nisbet 2017:10)'.

### Check Your Progress I

1. Who employed the metaphor *camera obscura* to indicate the inverse function of ideology?
2. Write a note on unit ideas of sociology

---

## 2.5 LIBERALISM

---

Liberalism is a dominant ideology of the Western democracies with its roots in enlightenment. It is opposed to any political absolutism and authoritarian demands. Different strands and arguments can be observed within the broader frame of liberalism as ideology. Classical liberalism is associated with philosophers such as John Lock, David Hume, Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill and all of their ideas revolve around *social contract theory*. Humans are guided by enlightened self-interest, rationality, free choice and there should be minimum intervention of state in the lives of people (Marshall 2006). In political sphere it is inextricably linked up with language of freedom and rights which are inalienable such as right to life, right to free speech, property, association and religion. In economic sphere, it is intimately connected with the doctrines of *laissez-faire* as embodied in the writings of Adam Smith.

Liberalism has different meanings for people from different regions. For some, liberalism means liberation of economic activities and forces from the fetters of laws and customs; for some others, it is liberation from oppressive political structures and establishment of rights. Autonomy of individuals forms the heart of liberalism. For people from Paris, liberation of thought from clericalism becomes important. Despite of the differences, liberalism has common grounds: i). acceptance of the structure of state and economy and ii) belief that progress is possible when mind and spirit of individuals are liberated from the clutches of 'religious and traditional bonds of older (Ibid)'. Liberalism believed in the faith of enlightenment: self-sustaining nature of individuality once it's released from *corrupting* and *fettering institutions* (Ibid, italics are added). Individual freedom is more important than authority; discrete self-motivating and self-stabilizing individual is more important than institution and tradition as reflected in the works of Thomas Macaulay, Thomas Buckley, and Herbert Spencer.

---

## 2.6 RADICALISM

---

Radicalism as an ideology has left deep impact in the formation of classical sociological tradition. Radicalism believes in redemptive possibilities of *power* and *reason*. Power is an instrument in liberating the individuals from oppressive structures and in emancipation. Faith on reason is limitless in moulding the new order. Radical views which are critical of the existing structures and system, conflict and its manifest form as revolt is present since ancient times. What informs the radical position and drove the conflict in ancient times may differ from modern times. Radical views and actions in ancient and medieval period were conditioned by religious factors and consciousness; whereas, modern radicalism since nineteenth century is explicitly *secular*. The torch of revolt passed on to the new actors in nineteenth century saw the hope not in religious views but in political force and power. Power is here not for the sake of power but in rational sense to liberate the individuals from the clutches of *tyrannies* and *inequalities*.

According to Jonathan Israeli, notions of *progress*, *improvement of society* and *amelioration of state of mankind* were central to enlightenment. Four of six founding Philosophers of enlightenment Descartes, Hobbes, Spinoza and Bayle argued that 'most people's ideas about most fundamental questions are wildly wrong and that were most people's ideas about most fundamental questions are wildly

wrong and that were it possible to improve men's ideas about the world and about the structure of reality, this, itself, would significantly human existence (Israeli 2010, p. 01)'. From Thomas Hobbes point of view, this would make society *safe* and *stable*, for Bayle society will be *tolerant*, for Descartes, it will be more *rational* in its approach to *disasters* and *health* problems and *freer* and *more* acceptance of the *dissenting* individuals (*ibid*, italics are added)'.

We shall remember that radicalism is an enlightenment philosophy which included philosophes Spinoza, Diderot, Condorcet, Paine and Bayle. They argued that everything can be transformed by reason. Because of the primacy they placed on reason, radicals were able to apply the questions of reason and justice beyond one's own society and culture and hence, they were able to condemn the colonialism, racism, gender and other forms of inequality prevailed and practised by European colonizers in far Asian and African colonies. Both Liberalism and Radicalism were part of the age of reason. But radicalism regarded rationality as *secular*, *universal* and guiding force (Menashe 2018). For Radicals, reason is not a god gift which

differentiates humans from other beings. Instead humans are merely an animal among others with no specially privileged status in the universe while 'la raison,' as one radical text expressed it in 1774, far from being something beyond and above matter, is nothing but 'nature modifiée par l'expérience' [nature modified by experience]( Israel, Jonathan as cited in *ibid.*, p. 01)

Radicalism rejected the *Dualism*. Dualism is a belief that mind and body are separate entities, whereas, Monism rejects anything which exists outside of the material world. Renowned philosopher **Descartes** propounded *dualism*; whose famous utterance *Cogito ergo sum* (meaning 'I think, therefore, I am') implies that he had mind, but doubted whether he had a real body in space (*ibid*). Approving the existence of kind, whereas doubting the existence of body led to the development of dualism between subject and object, matter and spirit, reason and emotion, culture and nature. It rejects the dualism between body and mind, god and nature. Material Monism does not accept these dichotomies and proposes the higher unity that manifests in matter.

Karl Marx is considered as the very personification of radicalism (Nisbet, *op.cit*). According to Irving Zeitlin, much of the classical sociology emerged 'within the context of debate; first with eighteenth century thought, the enlightenment and later with its true heir in the nineteenth century, Karl Marx (Zeitlin, 1968, p. vi).'

---

## 2.7 CONSERVATISM

---

Conservatism is the child of two revolutions: French revolution and Industrial revolution. It stood in direct contrast to the chief tenets of two revolutions. Conservatism defended what the two revolutions attacked. It attacked what was advocated by two revolutions-*popular democracy, technology, secularism, etc.* 'If the central ethos of liberalism is individual emancipation, and that of radicalism the expansion of political power in the service of social and moral zeal, the ethos of conservatism is *tradition*, essentially medieval tradition (Nisbet *op.cit*, p. 11, italics are added)'

Conservatism gives more emphasis on the values of community, kinship, hierarchy, authority and religion and fears about social chaos caused due to wrenching of individuals from these values by the forces of liberalism and radicalism. Conservatism as an ideology rejects the core ideas of enlightenment and philosophes. It gave more importance to institutional order and society.

In the words of Robert Nisbet, who perhaps best summarizes the climate in Europe in 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century observed '*Community-Society, authority-power, status class, sacred-secular, and alienation-progress*: these are rich themes in nineteenth century thought. Considered as linked antithesis, they form the *very warp of the sociological tradition*' (ibid., p. 7, italics are added). These ideas represented the essence of conflict between tradition and modern and between the old order which was turned as on the verge of waning due to revolutions and new order whose form was still nebulous and remained as the cause of *anxiety* as much as of hope (ibid). These tensions, anxiety and also hope, elate can be observed to have embodied in the works of all classical sociologists and three principle ideologies of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe-*Liberalism, Radicalism and Conservatism*.

None of the classical sociologists considered themselves as representatives of *conservatism*. Whether it was Durkheim, Weber, or Tonnies they all believed in the ideals of liberalism and science and empiricism. Even their political sympathies were liberal. They also distanced from political and economic conservatives. But are they radicals? No, certainly not. To leave the matter just because their personal ideological affiliation is not towards conservatism will be 'deceptive' as the concepts and tone of their writings embody deep currents of conservatism running against their overt political affiliations in the writings of all the three classical sociologists when observed from present times (ibid). This dilemma is best expressed in the writings of Max Weber; tension between his beliefs in liberalism and modernism and realization of the effects of Modernism- rationalization of culture and thought and dehumanization. 'The inner conflict goes far to explain the melancholy that spread itself over parts of Weber's thought and that actually immobilized him as a scholar for short periods (ibid., p.17). Though such type of melancholy cannot be seen in the writings of Durkheim and Simmel, their works exhibit the same kind of tension between the values of political liberalism they cherished and 'the values of a humanistic or cultural conservatism' embodied in their writings (ibid.)

Though the emergence of sociology falls in the *mainstream of modernism* in terms of its objectives and in the *political and scientific values of pioneers*, its concepts and perspectives place its orientation in proximity to philosophical conservatism (ibid). Ideas of community, authority, tradition, the sacred and sentiments of alienation were passed on from philosophers of one age to another. If one may look at them in terms of their impact on economists, political scientists, psychologists and ethnologists from that age. 'But in sociology they are- transfigured, of course, by

rationalist or scientific *objectives* of the sociologists-at the very core of the discipline (ibid., p. 18, italics are in original).

#### Check Your Progress-2

1. Who among the following does not belong to the school of liberalism?
  - a. Adam Smith
  - b. John Stuart Mills
  - c. Irving Zeitlin
  - d. David Hume
2. Write a note on the importance given to reason in radicalism
3. What is conservatism?

---

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

---

In this unit, we have understood the role of ideology in the development of sociological tradition. Ideology as a sociological concept is linked to Marxism. Marxian perspective sees ideology as tool of the ruling class to justify and perpetuate its domination. Karl Marx sees ideology as ideas of the ruling class as the facts are distorted and aspects connected to the development of working classes are hidden. Hence, Marx uses the metaphor *camera obscura* to indicate that function of ideology is to invert the reality and inversion is not an autonomous.

But ideology is also understood in Non-Marxian terms as coherent body of ideas informing the knowledge production and actions of people. It is about intricate relationship between how ideas informed the classical sociologists in making sense of reality. Sociological tradition in Europe was profoundly influenced by three dominant ideologies: Liberalism, Radicalism and Conservatism. Three ideologies together have formed the essence of sociological tradition. As we have discussed in this unit ideas and sentiments of *Community-Society, authority-power, status class, sacred-secular, and alienation-progress* formed the rich tradition of classical sociological theory. We shall note that though the emergence of sociology falls in the *mainstream of modernism* in terms of its objectives and in the *political and scientific values of pioneers*, its concepts and perspectives place its orientation in proximity to philosophical conservatism

---

## 2.8 KEY WORDS

---

- **Liberalism-** Liberalism is a dominant ideology of the Western democracies with its roots in enlightenment. It is opposed to any political absolutism and authoritarian demands.
- **Radicalism-**Radicalism is an important ideology which believes in redemptive possibilities of *power* and *reason*. Power is an instrument in liberating the individuals from oppressive structures and in emancipation.
- **Conservatism-**as an ideology, it is the child of two revolutions: French revolution and Industrial revolution. It stood in direct contrast to the chief tenets of two revolutions. Conservatism defended what the two revolutions attacked
- **Dualism-**a philosophical perspective which identifies irreducible distinction between two classes of facts. Rene Descartes view that mind and matter exist as independent entities is a classic example and it extends to such other areas *nature-culture, religious-secular* being, etc.
- **Ideology-** refers to bunch or system of ideas capable of affecting the social circumstances and informing the actions of individuals. Ideology for Marx and Engels is used as tool to advance the interests of groups/classes and for it will bring social cohesion and remove social strains

---

## 2.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

---

### Check Your Progress -1

1. Karl Marx
2. See 2.4

### Check Your Progress -2

1. C-Irving Zeitlin
2. See section 2.6
3. See section 2.7

---

## 2.10 UNIT END EXERCISES

---

1. Discuss how ideologies have shaped the sociological tradition
2. What are the unit-ideas of sociology?
3. Examine conservatism as an ideology is implicit in the works of classical sociologists

---

## 2.11 FURTHER READINGS

---

- Nisbet, Robert 1968. *Sociological Tradition*. Jaipur & New Delhi: Rawat Publications
- Zeitlin, Irving. 1968. *Ideology and Development of Sociological Tradition*. New York: Prentice Hall Publications

---

## 2.12 REFERENCES

---

- Israeli, Jonathan. 2010. *A Revolution of the Mind: Radical Enlightenment and the Intellectual Origins of Modern Democracy* New Jersey: Princeton University Press
- Marshall, Gordon (Ed). 2006. *Dictionary of Sociology*: New Delhi, Oxford University Press
- Menashe, Alexa. 2018. 'The Theoretical Framework of the Enlightenment and Its Application to the Problem of the 'Other' in *Athene Noctua*: Undergraduate Philosophy Journal. Issue No. 05
- Nisbet, Robert 1968. *Sociological Tradition*. Jaipur & New Delhi: Rawat Publications
- Zeitlin, Irving. 1968. *Ideology and Development of Sociological Tradition*. New York: Prentice Hall Publications

Dr Jayapal H R  
Assistant Professor  
Department of Sociology  
KSOU, Mysuru

---

## UNIT – 3: PROJECT OF POSITIVISM OF AUGUSTE COMTE

---

### *Structure*

- 3.0 Objectives
- 3.1 Learning outcome
- 3.2 Introduction
- 3.3 What is Positivism?
  - 3.3.1 The basic tenets of positivism are as follows:
- 3.4 Influence of Saint Simon on Comte
- 3.5 Empiricism and Positivism
- 3.6 Sociological Positivism of Comte
- 3.7 Manifestations of Positivism in the contributions of Auguste Comte
  - 3.7.1 How knowledge reaches the Positive Stage
  - 3.7.2 Law of three stages of Human Mind
- 3.8 Criticism
- 3.9 Conclusion
- 3.10 Key Words
- 3.11 Answers to Check Your Progress
- 3.12 Further Reading
- 3.13 References



---

### 3.0 OBJECTIVES

---

This unit is constructed with the following objectives as frame of reference

- Comprehend what is positivism?
- Identify the background of positivism
- Examine positivism and its basic tenets
- Relationship between empiricism and positivism,
- Sociological positivism related to other discipline
- How positivism was manifested in the contributions of Auguste Comte

---

### 3.1 LEARNING OUTCOME

---

After going through this unit, learner can

- Explain positivism with clarity
- Grasp the base of positivism and basics of positivism in a sociological manner
- Analyse positivism as a methodological tool
- Able to use positivism in the research study in a more logical and scientific manner.

---

### 3.2 INTRODUCTION

---

In the earlier units you have familiar with philosophical foundations of Sociology and emergence of sociology and its founder Auguste Comte. Before the advent of 19<sup>th</sup> century there was no Sociology. The term Sociology was coined by Auguste Comte in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, the study of society as an historical object had begun much earlier in 18<sup>th</sup> century France. During this time prevailing discourse was mainly focused on critics of society and questioned and the traditional aspects of society. However, there was no pure Sociology it was of mixture of political history, political economy, philosophy, political philosophy and Sociology.

The works of Montesquieu, Ferguson and Millar contributed a lot for making of Sociology. They discussed broad sociological themes within a non-sociological discourse; their contributions were genuine precursors for the development of sociology. They explained the analysis of social institutions, social processes by giving body of concepts and method of enquiry. Montesquieu's *Spirit of Law* was the first major attempts to theorizing society both as an organic whole and related varying

cultures, values and institutions to the specific stages of historical development. According to Montesquieu, all social phenomena are interconnected. Every particular law is connected with another law. His concept of society is more holistic in nature. Societies are self contained integrated whole, thus the concept of society as a system in which various element acquired meaning only in terms of the whole. Philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle defined society in holistic terms as an organism in which the constituent parts were necessarily related to the whole or unified system. Aristotle's *Politics* is full of sociological insights thus writings of Aristotle, Plato, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau contained substantive sociological themes like inequality, social conflict, social cohesion, division of labour, private property, which further boosted the development of Sociology. The idea of positivism was also discussed in the contributions of Bacon, Verkeley, Locke and Hume. These thought patterns gave impetus to Auguste Comte for his positivism discourse.

### **Check your progress I**

1. Who were the scholars discussed sociological themes within a non-sociological discourse?

---

### **3.3 WHAT IS POSITIVISM?**

---

Comte had laid the foundations of a sociological positivism which was to remain the dominant paradigm during the course of the nineteenth century. It's a philosophy which describes any system that confines to be data of experience and critical to the metaphysical speculations. It is anti-theological. It was first developed by Auguste Comte.

Positivism is a term which has been used to denote a philosophical tendency oriented around natural science. Natural sciences attained their highest unquestioned position in the modern world, through their applications of the scientific methods and the accurate results. When we think in terms of methodology the term 'positivism' is conceived as opposition to the metaphysical abstractions of traditional, conventional philosophy. Positivism is more a philosophy, method rather than a theory. Positivism explains that human experience is the basic base for interpretation of the world and social realities. It emphasises on the application of scientific method of natural sciences to the study of social world. In order to understand human behaviour both natural scientists and sociologists apply scientific methods under positivism.

Positivism brought a revolutionary change in the field of social science. It has a strong commitment and belief in the progress of humanity. It is based on the belief that the scientific analysis of any aspects/issues/problems of society can be cured by applying positivism. Comte's positivism concerned with the questions about how things are in reality. Comte's positivism has been discussed by different scholars in a different manner. However, the basic principles of positivism have not changed much. Now we will be understanding the basic tenets of positivism.

### **3.3.1 The basic tenets of positivism are as follows:**

- All knowledge regarding matters is based on positive data of experience there is strict adherence to observation and experience.
- The greatest happiness for the greatest number of people is the ethical maxim.
- Roots of positivism lie in French enlightenment which emphasized the reason.
- Science is the only valid knowledge.
- Knowledge is based on facts.
- The task of philosophy is to find general principles common to all sciences and by using these principles human conduct and social organizations are built.
- It is scientific. This scientific science should not confuse with empiricism or mere collection of facts.
- Comte believed that whole universe is governed by natural laws and these laws are scientific and logical. It could be learned through method of science.
- Positivism considers only real phenomena.
- It is not concerned with supernatural phenomena.
- All scientific knowledge is based on experience.
- Direct observation is the most appropriate way to acquire scientific knowledge.
- There is no value judgement in scientific enquiry. It is always precise.
- Positivist view of science should be used as a tool for social engineering.
- Positive knowledge is always relative and always unfinished because there is no absolute knowledge in science.
- Positivism gives prediction which is the base for action.

Thus, Positivism is the name for the scientific study of the social world. Its goal is to formulate abstract and universal laws on the operative dynamics of the social universe. A law is a statement about relationships among forces in the universe. In positivism, laws are to be tested against collected data systematically.

### **Check your progress II**

2. What is Positivism?
3. Who has developed positivism for the first time?

---

### **3.4 INFLUENCE OF SAINT SIMON ON COMTE**

---

So far you have understood the meaning of positivism and its basic principles. When we have seen the history of positivism there were many scholars who have thought of some principles of positivism that indicates that before Comte discourses on positivism prevailed. Before Comte his guru Saint Simon also advocated positivism. He proposed scientific reorganization of society and promotion of science. The idea of positivism was in a rudimentary form in the discussions and contributions of Saint Simon, later Comte has given a definite shape, reorganized and expanded the idea.

Saint Simon introduced the term 'Industrial Society', he particularly bothered about transition from feudal societies structured around consumption whereas industrial societies centered around productions. Comte was influenced by Saint Simon. He coined the terms 'social physiology' and 'social physics' to describe his positive method of analysis around science and the growth of systematic social knowledge especially related to the social laws which regulated the social whole. Saint Simon's model of society was thus holistic: he defined a 'healthy' society as one in which the various parts subsisted in a state of functional harmony with the whole. Social health was closely identified with production and the role of the productive social classes. Saint Simon described industrial society in terms of collaboration and consensus: under the old system force constituted the means of social cohesion, but industrial society creates partners not subjects and associated modes of co-operation involving labourers and the wealthiest property owners.

---

### **3.5 EMPIRICISM AND POSITIVISM**

---

There three broad streams of thoughts contributing to 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century of Sociology and it has helped the emergence of Sociology.

1. Vico's Humanism, where he rejected simple application of natural science methods to social analysis.
2. Materialistic social theory of Montesquieu, Millar and Ferguson concerned with objective facts and relevance of natural science of study of society.
3. Enlightenment philosophers and their critical rationalism which helps to understand social world in a scientific manner.

Hence positivism formed an integral part of enlightenment tradition. Metaphysics and speculations were replaced by science and facts, faith was not consider acceptable source of knowledge. As a philosophical and sociological movement positivism embraced a number of different meanings which included a belief in science as the foundation of all knowledge.

### **Check your progress III**

4. What is healthy society and industrial society according to Saint Simon?
5. Describe the influence of Saint Simon on Auguste Comte.
6. Write a short note on empiricism and positivism.

---

### **3.6 SOCIOLOGICAL POSITIVISM OF COMTE**

---

Sociological Positivism dates from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century in the work of Auguste Comte (1798-1857). However, positivism embraced number of different meanings for example; a belief in science as the foundation of all knowledge was called scienticism. It also included causal explanations of social phenomena and fundamental laws of historical change of human nature.

Before going to understand positivism of Auguste Comte we will have glance of his contributions he was one of the founding fathers of Sociology laid the foundation of new science and coined the term 'Sociology'. He was of the opinion that this new science should be treated on par with natural sciences, initially he coined the term 'social physics' later on he used the term Sociology. Comte coined the term Sociology in 1838 he has combined two words 'Socious' and 'Logos' from Latin and Greek languages respectively. According to Comte, "Sociology is the study of the fundamental laws of the social phenomena in accordance with the methods of the positive sciences". He stressed the methods of positive sciences he was of the opinion that by using methods of science we can understand, control and predict human behaviour. He wanted to integrate political, economic and social phenomena

to understand society. It is reflected in his work jointly with Saint Simon entitled '*A Prospects of the Scientific Works required for the Reorganization of the Society*' in 1822. His other works *Positive Philosophy* and *Positive Polity*. He has narrated the development of future science of society.

According Raymond Aron, *Auguste Comte is a sociologist among philosophers and a philosopher among sociologist*. This indissoluble link between Sociology and philosophy has its source in Comte's principles of positivism. Auguste Comte was strongly influenced by the works of Saint Simon especially his belief in science and technology. Comte's work was produced a technical period of

French history and French revolution in which old traditional disintegrated regime was questioned and new industrial regime was in the process of formation. Comte's sociological positivism shaped within a French culture. Like Saint Simon, Comte's work was produced at a critical period of French history, the period following the Revolution in which the old regime had disintegrated and a new industrial regime was in the process of formation. Comte's sociological positivism was forged at the same time.

Comte's *Course de Philosophie Positive* (1830-42) is essentially an attack on the 'negative' philosophy developed by eighteenth-century individualistic philosophy. He agreed with Saint Simon that the eighteenth century had destroyed rather than provided the foundations for a 'new edifice'. This new structure was to be directed exclusively in the interests of social order and social consensus. The 'essential aim of practical politics', he wrote, was to 'to avoid the violent revolutions which spring from obstacles opposed to the progress of civilisation'.

It seemed obvious to Comte that 'true science' was nothing less than 'the establishment of intellectual order, which is the basis of every other order'. Comte's positivism, a science of stability and social reconstruction can thus be seen on one level as a response to the negative and critical traditions of Enlightenment philosophy by seeking to unite the notions of order and progress. The task of social physics would be wholly positive:

Sociology was defined in its relations with other sciences and Comte's stated aim was the synthesis of all available knowledge, a task facilitated by the law of three stages and hierarchical classification of the sciences.

### Check your progress IV

7. Explain Sociological positivism of Auguste Comte
8. Mention two books of Auguste Comte.
9. In which of the two contributions Auguste Comte's positivism is reflected?

---

### 3.7 MANIFESTATIONS OF POSITIVISM IN THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF AUGUSTE COMTE

---

Till now you are familiar with the concept of positivism and its history. Now we shall examine where and how concept of positivism applied by Auguste Comte. Comte's positivism is manifested in the evolution of sciences or hierarchy of sciences, law of three stages of intellectual development and in his religion of humanity. Comte used positivism as weapon against the negative philosophy prevalent before French revolution. Now the question arises what is the negative philosophy? Negative philosophy was more emotional than practical. It was based on speculation; it was neither constructive nor practical. According to Chambliss, "Comtian positivism is not fatalistic or optimistic or materialistic. It is concerned with the real rather than fanciful, useful rather than all knowledge".

Comte's positivism is associated with law of three stages of intellectual development. Comte's saw evolution of thought patterns in the entire history of mankind. On the other hand he has explained history of an individual's development from infancy to adulthood. He has explained three stages of intellectual development. In all three stages Comte criticized the existing propositions regarding human development by using positivist perspective. Comte pointed out that in order to reach this stage of maturity one has to abandon these pseudo explanations of the theological and metaphysical stages. In this stage there will be a abundant adherence to scientific method.

After explaining the three stages of human development he has given an account of the historical order of development of various sciences on the basis of their logical analysis and scientific precision. On the basis of these parameters he has arranged six basic and pure sciences one upon the other in a periomedical manner. Comte prepared the way for logical positivism to 'reduce' each level to the one below. He placed Mathematics at the top and fundamental level. He placed the each science in such a way that each science depends upon and make use of the

sciences below. Thus, after Mathematics he placed Arithmetic, Geometry, Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, Biology and finally Sociology. Each higher level science adds to the knowledge and contents on the levels which are below, so that it enriching its content.

Both law of three stages and hierarchical classification of the sciences had been discussed by previous writers notably Turgot, Condorcet and Saint Simon. According Saint Simon, all the sciences are conjectural but end by being positive, developing from the simple to the complex. Comte systematised these arguments, tracing the evolution of the sciences in great detail. Here we can observe the influence of Saint Simon and August Comte. All human thought, he argued, has passed through three separate stages, the theological, the metaphysical and the positive.

1. **Theological Stage:** In this stage natural phenomena are explained in terms of accomplishment of supernatural or divine powers. Here miraculous are believed to produce most of the events occurring in society. This stage was criticized by Comte as anthropomorphic.

In the theological state the human mind seeks for origins and final causes, analysing all phenomena as the result of supernatural forces; feeling and imagination predominate and Comte divided the theological state in to three separate periods of fetishism (nature defined in terms of man's feelings), polytheism (a multitude of gods and spirits) and, finally, monotheism (the existence of one God and the gradual awakening of human reason with its constraint on the imagination). For Comte, each stage and substage of evaluation necessarily develops out of the preceding one; the final substage of monotheism prepares the way for the metaphysical stage.

2. **Metaphysical Stage:** Here the observable processes of nature resumed to arise from impersonal powers. In metaphysical stage human thought is dominated by abstract concepts, by essence and ideal forms.
3. **Positivism Stage:** This also called scientific stage. The task of the science is to study the facts regularities as laws; explanations are more logical and scientific. In the final stage of evolution thought abandons essences and seeks law which link different facts together through the methods of observation and experiment;



absolute notions of causes are abandoned and the emphasis shifts to the study of facts and their invariable relations of succession and resemblance.

### 3.7.1 How knowledge reaches the Positive Stage

Each science develops in exactly the same passing through these separate stages, but they do so at different rates: knowledge reaches the positive stage in proportion to the generality, simplicity and independence of other disciplines. As the most general and simple of the natural sciences, Astronomy develops first, followed by physics, Chemistry, Biology and Sociology. Each science develops only on the basis of its predecessors within an hierarchical framework dominated by the law of increasing complexity and decreasing generality.

Sociology is particularly dependent on its immediate predecessor in the hierarchy, Biology. The science of Biology is basically holistic in character beginning not from isolated elements, as in Chemistry and Physics, but from organic wholes. The distinctive subject matter of Sociology is society as a whole, society defined as a social system. Sociology is thus the investigation of the action and reaction of the various parts of the social system. Individual elements must be analysed in their relation to the whole, in their mutual relation and combination. As with biological organisms, society forms a complex unity irreducible to its component parts: society cannot be decomposed into individuals any more than 'a geometric surface can be decomposed into lines or a line into point'. Knowledge of the parts can flow only from knowledge of the whole, not vice versa.

Society was defined, therefore, as a collective organism characterised by a harmony between its individual parts and whole. The analogy between Biology and Sociology is constantly reiterated: in biology, we may decompose structure anatomically into *elements, tissues and organs*. We have the same things in the social organism... forms of social power correspond to the *tissue*... the *element*... is supplied by the family, which is more completely the germ of society than the cell or fibre of the body... *organs* can only be cities the root of the world being the nucleus of the term civilization. (Comte, 1877, vol. 2, pp. 223-6)

Although Comte warns against pushing the analogy too far – cities are organic wholes themselves or aspire to be so – his theory of social order derives almost entirely from Biology, especially his concepts of harmony, equilibrium and social pathology. Pathological situations develop within the social organism, for example, when the natural laws governing the principles of harmony or succession are

disturbed by elements analogous to diseases in the bodily organism. Social evolution proceeds in accordance with biological laws and the general intent of Comte's positivism is to subordinate the study of society to biological concepts. The absence of a spontaneous harmony between the parts and the whole of the social system indicates the existence of social pathology. Harmony is consensus; conflict is equated with pathology. Comte assimilated biological terms and models to his Sociology arguing that the distinction between anatomy and physiology enabled Sociology to differentiate structure from function, dynamics from statics, social order from progress. All living beings exist under dynamic and static relations; statics investigates the laws of action and reaction of the different parts of the social system which 'normally' produce equilibrium between parts and whole, a functional interrelationship of social institutions. This extension of analogy has been further taken up by Herbert Spencer in his *Organic Analogy* which you will study in the next minute.

Comte's notion of statics is concerned with clarifying the interconnection between social facts functional for a social system such as the division of labour, the family, religion and government and is clearly synchronic in nature. Dynamics is the empirical study of this interconnection as they change in different types of society and Comte describes this aspect of Sociology as the historical method.

Comte's awareness that facts and theory are mutually connected makes him the first theoretical sociologist who was thoroughly sceptical that observed facts will, as it were, speak for themselves. But the theory which Comte developed was essentially a speculative theory of historical change, a philosophy of history.

Like the social scientists of his day, Comte accepted the structural significance of the industrial working class but differed from their analysis by his stress on the inevitable laws of social evolution which point to their integration into an unequal society. There was no question of class organisation and practice: the individual might 'modify' the course of social development and assert a freedom of action over 'blind fatality', but ultimately the natural laws of society are higher in their practical efficacy than human action. Social evolution, which for Comte was the progressive development of the human mind as it finds its expression in the three stages.

### **3.7.2 Law of three stages of Human Mind**

The law of three stages consists in the assertion that the human mind passes through three phases. In the first, the mind explains phenomena by ascribing them

to beings or forces comparable to man himself. In the second phase, that of metaphysics, the mind explains phenomena by invoking abstract entities like 'nature'. Finally, the third phase, man is content to observe phenomena and to establish the regular links existing, among them, whether at a given moment or in the course of time. He abandons the search for the final principle behind the facts and confines himself to establishing the laws that govern them.

But, the transition from the theological age to the metaphysical age and then to the positive age does not occur simultaneously for the various intellectual disciplines. In Comte's thinking, the law of three stages has no precise meaning unless it is combined with the classification of the sciences. For it is the order in which the various sciences are ranked that reveals the order in which the intelligence becomes 'positive'. The positive method was adopted sooner in mathematics, in physics, and in chemistry than in biology. There are reasons why positivism is slower to appear in disciplines relating to the most complex matters. The simpler the object of study, the easier it is to think positively. There are even certain phenomena in which observation follows automatically, and in these cases the intelligence has been positivist from the beginning.

The combination of law of three stages and the classification of the sciences eventually leads to Auguste Comte's basic formula: the method which has triumphed in Mathematics, Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry, and Biology must eventually prevail in politics and culminate in the founding of a positive science of society, which is called Sociology.

Comte believed that with the help of science reformation can be brought to the society. We had a scientific bent of mind. This is reflected in his Religion of Humanity. This religion of humanity is the scientific interpretation of religion. In this scientific interpretation of religion, God is replaced by humanity and humanity will be worshipped. Comte emphasized past (those who are dead), present (those who are living) and future (those who would be born). Here Comte has used positivistic tenets to his new Religion of Humanity.

As a methodological tool positivism can be used in understanding various issues of society and questioned existing metaphysical and normative affiliations. By using positivistic methodology one can arrive scientific, logical, rational and appropriate results which exhibits the true reality of society.

### Check your progress V

10. How Comte used positivism for classification of sciences and law of three stages of intellectual development and understanding religion?
11. How to use positivism as a methodological tool in research?

---

### 3.8 CRITICISM

---

Auguste Comte had given lot of importance to scientific method. He has been criticized by many for his approach of too much objectivity and scientific attitude. Though positivism has received considerable attention by various scholars, it has received same amount of criticism. Scholars argued that, positivism utterly failed because it doesn't exist in the objective world where human behaviour is more volatile in nature. Positivism claims clarity, preciseness and certainty however it is not seen in the real world. Giddens writes that, positivism today become more of a term of abuse than a technical term in philosophy.

Another criticism of positivism is the excessive confidence in its claim as a more objective and empiricism but in reality it doesn't stand up to that mark of objectivity in both natural sciences and social sciences.

As per positivist approach any phenomena can be observed with objective and unprejudiced manner in the search of true knowledge of a subject with an empirical rather than normative aspect. So that causal relationship between social phenomena can be established it urges researcher to seek universal laws regardless of time and location. However, time and context are the determinants of human behaviour which alter the social phenomena. Popper criticised positivism and he known as post-positivist he pointed out that, every scientific statement must remain tentative forever. He further pointed out that, universal laws could be established through repeatedly experience in an event was an illogical one. It will not continue to be forever.

There is a lot of discrepancy between theory and practice in positivism. For example, sensory experience and observation must be explained in terms of concepts. An individual analyse, describing, interpreting the experiences through concepts. When researcher interprets the data there will be bias towards a particular conclusion. In social science research is it is very difficult to detach from their subjective notions. Positivist failed to distinguish between natural sciences and social sciences. After

Auguste Comte positivism has gone through several changes but the core elements of positivism have remained as it is.

Though positivism has received considerable attention by various scholars, it has received same amount of criticism. Scholars argued that, positivism utterly failed because it doesn't exist in the objective world where human behaviour is more volatile in nature. Positivism claims clarity, preciseness and certainty however it is not seen in the real world

### **Check your progress VI**

12. Critically evaluate Comte's project of positivism.

---

## **3.9 CONCLUSION**

---

Auguste Comte who was one of the founding father of Sociology laid the foundation of a new science, initially called it as 'social physics' later used the term Sociology. He was the father of positivist approach in sociology. He stressed the methods of positive sciences, by using these methods we can understand control and predict human behaviour. Sociological theorization has been a continuous process before Comte and scholars like Montesquieu, Ferguson, Miller, Plato, Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau had contributed a lot for understanding society, however it was not pure Sociology.

Positivism is a term which has been used to denote a philosophical tendency oriented around natural science. Natural sciences attained their highest unquestioned position in the modern world, through their applications of the scientific methods and the accurate results. When we think in terms of methodology the term 'positivism' is conceived as opposition to the metaphysical abstractions of traditional, conventional philosophy. Positivism is more a philosophy, method rather than a theory. Positivism explains that human experience is the basic base for interpretation of the world and social realities. It emphasises on the application of scientific method of natural sciences to the study of social world. In order to understand human behaviour both natural scientists and sociologists apply scientific methods under positivism.

Positivism brought a revolutionary change in the field of social science. It has a strong commitment and belief in the progress of humanity. It is based on the belief that the scientific analysis of any aspects/issues/problems of society can be cured

by applying positivism. Comte's positivism concerned with the questions about how things are in reality. Comte's positivism has been discussed by different scholars in a different manner. However, the basic principles of positivism have not changed much. The basic tenets of positivism are as follows.

- Science is the only valid knowledge.
- Knowledge is based on facts.
- Positivism considers only real phenomena.
- It is not concerned with supernatural phenomena.
- All scientific knowledge is based on experience.
- Direct observation is the most appropriate way to acquire scientific knowledge.
- There is no value judgement in scientific enquiry. It is always precise.

The goal of positivism is to formulate abstract and universal laws. Auguste Comte was highly influenced by his teacher Saint Simon. The idea of positivism was in a rudimentary form in the discussions and contributions of Saint Simon, later Comte has given a definite shape, reorganized and expanded the idea.

The indissoluble link between Sociology and philosophy has its source in Comte's principles of positivism. According Raymond Aron, *Auguste Comte is a sociologist among philosophers and a philosopher among sociologist*. Comte used positivism as weapon against the negative philosophy prevalent before French revolution.

Comte's positivism is manifested in the evolution of sciences or hierarchy of sciences, law of three stages of intellectual development and in his religion of humanity. In Comte's thinking, the law of three stages has no precise meaning unless it is combined with the classification of the sciences. For it is the order in which the various sciences are ranked that reveals the order in which the intelligence becomes 'positive'. The positive method was adopted sooner in mathematics, in physics, and in chemistry than in biology. There are reasons why positivism is slower to appear in disciplines relating to the most complex matters. The simpler the object of study, the easier it is to think positively. There are even certain phenomena in which observation follows automatically, and in these cases the intelligence has been positivist from the beginning. Popper criticised positivism and he known as post-positivist he pointed out that, every scientific statement must remain tentative forever. He further pointed out that, universal laws could be established through repeatedly

experience in an event was an illogical one. It will not continue to be forever. Positivism claims clarity, preciseness and certainty however it is not seen in the real world.

---

### **3.10 KEY WORDS**

---

**Positivism**

**Law of three stages**

**Religion of humanity**

---

### **3.11 ANSWER TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

---

1. Montesquieu, Ferguson and Millar
2. Refer 3.3
3. Auguste Comte
4. Refer 3.4
5. Refer 3.4
6. Refer 3.5
7. Refer 3.6
8. *Positive Philosophy* and *Positive Polity*.
9. Law of three stages and hierarchical classification of the sciences.
10. Refer 3.7
11. Refer 3.7
12. Refer 3.8

---

### **3.12 FURTHER READING**

---

1. Swingewood, Alan., (2015), *A Short History of Sociological Thought*, Palgrave Macmillan, United States.
2. Timasheff. N & G. Theodorson: *Sociological Theory*, Random House, New York, 1976.
3. Turner, Jonathan H., (2007), *The Structure of Sociological Theory*, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.

---

### 3.13 REFERENCES

---

- Abraham, Francis & J. H. Morgan: Sociological Thought, Macmillan India Ltd, Delhi 1985.
- Aron, Raymond, Main Currents in Sociological Thought (Two Volumes), Doubleday, Garden City, 1970.
- Aron, Raymond., (1965), Main Currents in Sociological Thoughts 1, Penguin Books, England.
- Aron, Raymond., (1968), Main Currents in Sociological Thoughts 2, Penguin Books, England.
- Barnes, H.E. An Introduction to the History of Sociology, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980.
- Coser, Lewis: Masters of Sociological Thought, Harcourt & Brace, Chicago 1971.
- E.C. Cuff et all, Perspectives in Sociology, Routledge, London, 2009.
- Haralambos and Holborn, Sociology (7<sup>th</sup> Edition), Collins, London, 2007.
- James, Farganis (2013), Readings in Social Theory, The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism, McGraw Hill, New Delhi.
- Ritzer George, Classical Sociological Theory, McGraw Hill, New York, 2000

Prof. Jayashree. S  
Professor and Chairperson,  
Department of Sociology  
Karnatak University, Dharwad  
Mail: jaishiva678@gmail.com



---

## UNIT – 4: EVOLUTION AND SOCIAL DARWINISM: VIEWS OF HERBERT SPENCER

---

### *Structure*

- 4.0 Objectives
- 4.1 Learning Outcome
- 4.2 Introduction
- 4.3 Evolution According to Herbert Spencer
- 4.4 Two Basic Laws of Evolution
- 4.5 Secondary propositions
- 4.6 Charles Darwin and Spencer's Theory of Evolution
- 4.7 Three Types of Evolution
- 4.8 Spencer's Theory of Social Evolution
- 4.9 The Analogy between a Society and an Organism
- 4.10 Society and Organism Resemblance
- 4.11 Dissimilarity between society and organism
- 4.12 Survival of the Fittest
- 4.13 Criticism
- 4.14 Conclusion
- 4.15 Key Words
- 4.16 Answer to Check your Progress
- 4.17 Further Reading
- 4.18 Reference

---

## 4.0 OBJECTIVES

---

This unit is constructed with following objectives in frame

- Comprehend what is social Evolution?
- Identify meaning of the concepts of Social Evolution and Social Darwinism
- Identify the background of Social Evolution
- Examine organic analogy and its basic principles
- Analyse Herbert Spencer's Organic Analogy.

---

## 4.1 LEARNING OUTCOME

---

After going through this unit, learner can/will be able to

- To acquire the knowledge regarding social evolution
- Application of evolution in human society
- Inculcating the practical aspects of evolution
- Critically evaluate the theory of social Darwinism and evolution
- Recognize the pitfalls of Spencer

---

## 4.2 INTRODUCTION

---

In the last unit you have read about Comte's positivism and its manifestation in the law of human progress and hierarchy of sciences. Now you will be introduced to Herbert Spencer, a British sociologist who made outstanding contributions to the development of sociology. As Comte sought to unify all knowledge in his hierarchy of the sciences, so Spencer aimed to unify all knowledge in his concept of evolution. In his book, *The study of Sociology* (1873) he defined the new science as the science of societies.

The evolution of humanity was Spencer's theme in which society constituted a special instance of a universal law. According to Spencer, there can be no complete acceptance of sociology as a science, so long as the belief in a social order not conforming to natural law, survives' (Spencer, 1965,Ch. XVI).

In contrast to Mill's positivistic nominalism the positivist organism of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), combined, within a broad evolutionary model of social development, a notion of society as both system an aggregate of individuals. Spencer's main focus lay on the evolutionary growth of social structures and

institutions not mental states. Comte, he wrote, accounts for 'the progress of human conception. Spencer's model of society was organism. Societies were like living bodies which evolve out of state of undifferentiated unity to highly complex, differentiated structures in which the individual parts, while becoming more autonomous and specialised, nevertheless they are increasingly dependent on each other. This interdependence of parts implies integration; for 'unlike parts' are 'so related as to make one another possible' and come to form an aggregate 'constituted on the same general principle as is an individual organism'. In simple societies the lack of differentiation means that the same individuals are both hunter and warriors. Society thus develops through progressive changes in the structure and functions of its basic institutions; social evolution does not depend on individual intentions and motives. Thus, from a state of homogeneity, a process which Spencer was a characteristic of the inorganic world of matter, where evolution begins, the organic world of nature, and finally the living organisms in society, the last stage of evolution.

---

### **4.3 EVOLUTION ACCORDING TO HERBERT SPENCER**

---

Every age, every nation, every element exhibits and modifies, from one stage to another stage at all times. Amongst human beings there will be a greater or lesser amount of change is going on. Evolution again is endless. The processes of modification and adaptation cannot reach a final, static resolution.

According to Herbert Spencer "Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion, during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation". Thus, Evolution is the change in inheritable traits in a population over generations. Change in traits is caused by changes in the genes (in DNA) that code for that traits. Natural selection tends to increase favourable traits in a population and decrease unfavourable traits. Nature consists of variety of forms of subsistence and energy behind it. All these forms in fact sequences and processes of creation growth, development, death and dissolution. It is a continuous process and vicious circle. It applies to all most all phenomena.

Thus, all aspects of universe are same. All forms in this nature whether economic, geology, mathematics, political, social all of them are subject to a process of creation, growth, development and ultimately it reaches the origin matter which it is made up off. It is vary from one to other aspects. But the transformation is universal in all objects.

This world is manifested by many forms of transformation and therefore the basic process of transformation was common to them. These varieties of facts ultimately the material substance is same. That is creation, growth, development, death, dissolution and ultimately decays. The basic processes of transformation are same. It is in an evolutionary manner why evolution occurs? He looks an answer in physics.

When we consider all the varieties of objects in nature of which we do have perceptual experience planetary systems, oceans, storms, civilization of men in history we realise, as a fact of the most fundamental nature that all these phenomena are forms and transformations of the same basic material substance. Nature consists of a vast variety of continuing forms into which its basic substance and energy is compounded. Furthermore all these forms differently according to their nature- are sequences and processes of creation growth, development, decay and death in time. The forms of the world emerge out of the basic substance of existence have their pattern of growth and change are then dissolved into their original basic elements.

### **Check your Progress I**

1. How Herbert Spencer is different from Auguste Comte?
2. Define Evolution.

---

## **4.4 TWO BASIC LAWS OF EVOLUTION**

---

You are now able to define evolution according to Spencer. To understand better we know what are the processes of transformation are? What are the components sequences and grounds of their occurrences how and according to what principles do they occur? You can find answer in Spencer's three fundamental ideas.

1. Firstly that since all forms of nature were transformations of material substance and evidenced then, in the basic postulates of physics.
2. Secondly though the world manifested many forms of transformation, the basic process of transformation itself was common to all and central characteristics of the entire nature of things. His idea of evolution was taken by examining the basic formulation of physics.

### **Spencer identified Three Laws of Evolution**

#### **4.4.1 Law of persistence of force**

According to Herbert Spencer, there is a force or energy behind any evolution. All aspects of phenomena in society have this energy or force. It is always there it is constant and always persists. Everything in this universe has its own energy. The persistence of some sustaining energy in which all phenomena rest but which its quantity and quality is beyond our knowledge. The law of 'the persistence of force' or the conservation of energy, from which is derived the law of the indestructibility of matter and the law of the continuity of motion. The notion of the persistence of force forms the basis of Spencer's deductive system. The universe is characterised by a continual redistribution of matter and motion in terms of the process of evolution and dissolution.

#### **4.4.2 Law of Continuity of motion:**

According to Spencer the direction of change and movement and direction of motion of the elements of phenomena are a resultant of the fact that all forces and elements move along the line of least resistance or greater attraction. There is always a continuous motion in the world. This motion cannot be halted, stopped or decay or destroyed. Sometimes motion changes its form but its core qualities and basic qualities persist.

#### **4.4.3 Law of Indestructibility:**

Like force and energy the matter does not vanish. It neither be created nor destroyed. Externally outwardly it may change but it cannot be destructed.

---

### **4.5 SECONDARY PROPOSITIONS**

---

Spencer noted four secondary propositions to these three laws: Laws of Uniformity and Regularity, The law of least resistance and great, Rhythm of motion and law of transformation and equivalence of force. All these laws and propositions are governed by the law of universal evolution which states that with the integration of matter, motion is dissipated and as matter becomes differentiated motion is absorbed. Spencer notes four secondary propositions to these three laws;

- 1. Uniformity and Regularity:** There is a continuous relationship among the forces in the world. There is always regularity and uniformity in the manifestations of events, the forces, the elements of matter.
- 2. The law of least resistances and great attraction:** There is a tendency in all forces and elements to move along the line of least resistance and greatest attraction.

3. **Rhythm of motion:** All phenomena in the world have its own rhythm of change, duration and development. Force matter and motion have its own rate of change and pattern of change.
4. **Law of Transformation and equivalence of force:** The force, motion and the elements of matter are never completely lost in the process of change. They just change their form features, size. They transformed into some other form of manifestations.

He used the pure scientist theories in his evolutionary theory. Newton's law, physicists law have been extensively used. So in his time "Big Bang" theory was in vogue. So he applied it to his evolution.

According to Spencer all the changing sociological, psychological processes of human experiences and behaviour followed this definite pattern of change. In this, they move from a condition of simplicity to a condition of organised complexity, from a condition of indefiniteness to a condition of definiteness, from a condition of which their parts are relatively undifferentiated to a condition of increasing specialisation in which their parts are characterised by a complex differentiation of structure and function from an unstable condition consisting of a large multiplicity of very similar units, relatively fewer phenomena now so intricately organised and articulated that their behaviour is regular coherent and predictable.

Thus, evolution is a gradual process. He gives few more support to the evolution. Following five factors he emphasis explanation of evolution.

1. Instability of homogeneity: That is nothing can live with homogeneity ever.
2. The multiplication of effects.
3. Segregation: As transformation is form homogeneity to heterogeneity. In this process of transformation similar units are aggregated and dissimilar units are segregated.
4. Equilibrium: The ultimate limit is all the process evolution is equilibrium.
5. Dissolution: This is a reverse of evolution further it created evolution. Dissolution occurs in all kinds of phenomena whether it is mind, motion, material, ideas and values. These in the process of dissolution to which ultimately every phenomenon must submit.

### Check your Progress II

3. Explain Spencer's three basic law of evolution.
4. Mention 4 secondary propositions of Spencer's basic law of evolution.

---

#### 4.6 Charles Darwin and Spencer's Theory of Evolution

---

Spencer constructed theory of evolution on the basis of three major principles. There is lot of literature provide information of evolution, and it is associated with Darwin. Darwin spent over 20 years collecting evidence and reading research by others before he wrote *On the Origin of Species*. He found many feature of organisms that suggested they were related by ancestry. It had three main components: that variation occurred randomly among members of a species; that an individual's traits could be inherited by its progeny; and that the struggle for existence would allow only those with favourable traits to survive. It was Herbert Spencer, not Darwin, who coined the phrase '**Survival of the Fittest**' due to the fact that he believed human behaviour was designed in a way that strives for self preservation. Darwin later used the term 'survival of the fittest' in his edition of *Origins of the Species*. Spencer came into contact with Darwin and influenced by him. Spencer was often criticised as "Darwinian Sociology".

The theory of Social Darwinism is associated with the idea of the 'survival of the fittest' as that the strongest and the fittest should survive and flourish in society, and the weak should be allowed to die out. This allowed Spencer to believed that the rich and powerful became they were better-suited to the social and economic climate of the time. He believed it was natural or normal that the strong survived at the cost of the weak.

### Check your Progress III

5. Describe the Darwin and Spencer's theory of evolution.
6. Write note on survival of the fittest.

---

#### 4.7 THREE TYPES OF EVOLUTION

---

1. Inorganic Evolution: Evolution as it occurs in inorganic phenomena. Second Part of his principle deals with physics. Evolution occurred in physical, materials, planets etc.

2. Organic Evolution: Evolution occurs in those phenomena, which have life in nature. How evolution occurs in several of human beings. For example: Amiba to Elephant, Monkey/ape to man.
3. Social Evolution or Supra Organic Evolution: He called supra because it is superior to than the previous two levels. Society is results of interactions of organisms and therefore society is super organic. The task of sociology is to examine the various interactions of social organisms.

At first, Spencer compared society and organism was one and the same pointed out that, society is an organism. But later the realised and changed his idea and give another refined and systemised notion that society is like an organism. It is now considered as organismic theory society.

Society is a whole consisting of parts which are interdependence. These parts as own function to maintain the whole. Eg: Function of Division of Labour permitting specialization in society.

For certain purposes there were identity between society and organism. As human beings grows from child to man, so in society groups grow to families to tribes, villages, towns and then to states. As in organic life, there was mutual interdependence of structurally differentiated parts and co-ordination of their functions. So in the society its component parts that are domestic, economic, political, religious groups and institutions are interdependent. That, societies like organism may be studied as a whole. Societies like develop along a path as evolving organism. So there is social evolution like organic evolution. As there is evolution in different organisations with the complex Division of Labour. There is evolution in other aspects of society from simple to differentiated one. One that is development of language, painting, sculpture, poetry, music, drama.

#### **Check your Progress: IV**

7. Mention three types of Evolution.
8. Why Spencer called social Evolution as Supra Organic Evolution?

---

#### **4.8 SPENCER'S THEORY OF SOCIAL EVOLUTION**

---

In the very beginning members are in societies who have same kind of values, ideas, behaviour, and attitude. There was greater homogeneity. They all have same spiritual, political, economic idea. Each one of them is warriors, administrators, hut builders and tool makers. In this process of indefinite coherent to different in coherent



occurs in the parts of the society differentiation occurs in a society also differentiation occurs in the parts of society that is in institutions. Thus, each institution has its functions to perform while results in Division of Labour, this leads to specialisation and so functions becomes exclusive. In the beginning Division of Labour is very rudiment. i.e., only ruler and people as a result of Division of Labour interdependence become very necessary part of life. Therefore a separate and various bodies are necessary for regulating the activities. This regulation leads to government.

At that time there is certain amount of equilibrium in society. Homogeneity is the feature of society. When society advances where its fittest members are allowed to assert their fitness with the least hindrance, and where the least fitted are not artificially prevented from dying out. This struggle for existence is constant in the human history. In this in junction is observed each generation will contain a higher proportion of the fittest and a smaller of the unfit a process of racial purification which continues until unfitness is bred out altogether and the superior inherit the earth.

Some who are not survival, they have fear of the brave and also fear of the dead. Fear of the brave leads to political power that is state, which exists both for the defence and offensive purposes and to regulate both internal and external affairs. External affairs includes protection of the boundary, expansion of the territory and trade, internal affairs including means of communication, internal peace and prosperity, it also includes religion which was the outcome of fear of dead.

Thus, we find that growth leads to complexity, complexity leads to differentiation it leads to Division of Labour, Division of Labour leads to interdependence, and next complex Division of Labour, complex Division of Labour leads to proper co-ordination-regulation in society both external and internal, internal regulation leads to decentralisation in administration appear. We take the example of leader- unstable leadership, occasional leadership, stable leadership Spencer has summarised the process of evolution as follows:

Like a low animal, the embryo of a high one has few distinguishable parts, but, while it is acquiring greater mass, its parts multiple and differentiates. It is same in a society. At first the unlikeness among its groups of units are inconspicuous in number and degree but as population arguments, divisions and subdivisions become more numerous and more decided. As we progress from small groups to

larger, from simple groups to compound groups from compound groups to doubly compound groups the unlikeness of parts increase. The social aggregate, homogeneous when minute, habitually gains in heterogeneity along with each increment of growth and to reach great size must acquire great complexity.

According to Spencer, the knowable universe consists of material aggregates which are in a condition of incessant change. There is a universal tendency for elements to move from a condition of unstable equilibrium to a condition of stable equilibrium and must become heterogeneous, correspondingly the simple must become compound and doubly compound and so on. Thus, change involves transition from homogeneity to heterogeneity and uniform to multiform. Spencer noted social organisation is at first vague, advance brings settled arrangements which grow slowly more precise, customs pass into laws which while gaining fixity also become more specific in their applications to verities of actions, and all institute of first confusedly intermingled, slowly separated at the same time that each within itself marks off more distinctly its component and structures. Thus, in all respects is fulfilled the formula of evolution there is progress towards greater size, coherence, multiformity and definiteness.

### **Check your Progress V**

9. Explain Spencer's theory of social evolution

---

## **4.9 THE ANALOGY BETWEEN A SOCIETY AND AN ORGANISM**

---

You have already read that, Spencer compared society and organism. Spencer used this analogy to make it perfectly clear what he meant by analysing a society in terms of structure and function and the functional interdependence of parts in the social system as a whole. It may true that Spencer used this analogy in much greater detail than most other thinkers.

He never believed that the relationship between the two was homologous rather than analogous. When he discussed the evolution of human societies, he called super organic evolution. Human society though having some featured similar to those possessed by organisms. Hence, his term super-organic evolution a kind of evolutionary change which occurred in addition to and over and above, the changes peculiar to biological organisms.

The concept of the social organism is crucial to Spencer's theoretical system. The phase "Social evolution" is only meaningful if biological human and social

development are run to constitute stages in one broad evolutionary continuum subject to the same immutable laws and impelled by the same natural forces. Spencer's idea of social evolution places society firmly in nature, as the medium through which human perfection is attained. Yet whatever social manifestations violated his view of progress were "unnatural" strikes.

Spencer is best known for his treatment of the organic analogy. He set up the hypothesis that society is like a biological organism and then proceeded to defend his thesis against all objections with great logical force. Thus, in *The Principles of Sociology* (1969b [1873]) he writes that it is the character of both living and social bodies 'that while they increase in size they increase in structure', that as they acquire greater mass their parts multiply and differentiate. And in his article, 'The Social Organism' (1969a[1860]), he defined society as a 'thing' which grows, evolving from small 'aggregations' so simple 'in structure as to be considered structure less' in which there is 'scarcely any mutual dependence of parts', to complex, differentiated structures in which the separate parts acquire mutual and functional dependence: society as a structure characterised by co-operation between parts and whole: Should anything 'disturb' this consensus, Spencer adds, the equilibrium of the whole system is endangered (that is, if government artificially interferes with the workings of economic and social life). Although noting the differences between the biological organism and society- the parts are more dispersed and independent from the centre of society, individual members may die but the whole persists, in the biological organism the elements exist for the good of the whole while in the social organism the whole exists for the good of its members-Spencer tended to equate the two (Swingewood, Alan., 2015:24-25).

---

#### **4..10 SOCIETY AND ORGANISM RESEMBLANCE**

---

Spencer found four main ways in which society resembles an organism.

1. In both society and organism growth is attended by augmentation of mass and visible growth in its size. In organism Amiba to Elephant. In society from least to maximum or increase 8-12-16-18 etc. But nature and method of growth is different in both. In organism growth is within itself and it also a full fledged growth. Complete decay is found in organism. But in society, growth may be in division of fusion and in society decay is not found men may come and go. But society is go on forever.

2. In both society and organism along with increase in size, there is also increase in complexity in structure (relations between parts) in other words there is lot of overlapping relations and complexity as its own.
3. In the organism and in society there is an interdependence of parts. Along with increasing complexity of structure and increasing differentiation of parts and specialization of function. Thus, in a society there is separate institution called Religion, Family, Government, Education, Recreation. In organism there is separate organ called Brain, Lungs etc.
4. In both society and organism occurs a process of evolution. This occurs in such a way that differences in the parts possible. So that they are interdependent that is movement toward the least resistances and most attraction apt to man in organism. Society wants a regulated system of economy for that reason we want separate institution for the fulfilling of our needs and requirements. It is evident that there is some rhythm in this process.
5. The analogy between society and organism, even more evident that society as a two societies. Society is the organs of individual and organism contains the organs that is organs makes organism as a whole.
6. In both there may be destroyed and the units of segregates as continued. That is even though their whole unity as such may be destroyed. The individual parts in both may continue to live for some time afterwards. The parts of both process a certain independence and continuity. Eg: When an organism dies certain parts continue to grow even though they no longer perform their appropriate function in the life of the organism as a whole.

Similarly if a human society is destroyed as a total independent entity by Conquest, earth quake. Economic absorption into a larger power or some other disaster in this context of overall disorganisation, certain parts and components of the society may continue to function.

### **Check your Progress VI**

10. How society and organism are similar according to Spencer?

---

## 4.11 DISSIMILARITY BETWEEN SOCIETY AND ORGANISM

---

You have already learnt that society and organism are similar in certain aspects now you will be exposed to how society and organism not same. In some way the society two organism are unlike. There are analysed by Spencer and determined to be merely superficial differences.

1. In a biological organism, the internal units form together and form a united living whole, a concrete physical entity organism is not within itself. It is a part of the whole.

In a society however, the parts are separated and dispersed. Eg: families are disconnected from each other and widely dispersed throughout a country, similarly, schools and political parties. Though all interrelatedly separate and distinct entities. Whereas in an organism the lungs, brain, the heart are actually in physical interaction with each other.

Thus, the elements of society do not form a continuous whole as in the case of an animal. The living units composing society are free and not in contact being more or less dispersed.

2. In an organism, particular functions are fulfilled by specific organs alone and by no other organs, each of these parts has its own functions and exclusively meant for that particular activity. Eg: The brain may be said to be the “organ of thought and no other organ in the body can fulfil that function.

This is not true to human society. All human beings in a society and as members of all institutions to some extent share all these functions amongst each other. Specialisation occurs among forms of social organisation. There is no social mind for society. Social parts or institutions have various functions that are social control, social change etc.

As a result, organism exists for the good of the whole, whereas in a society the entire ensemble of institutions exists only for the good of parts of its individual members. In total society exists for the whole not for the society wants it, but individual wants it.

Spencer employed this analogy on almost every page of his ‘Treatise’ on social institutions. Spencer compared the elementary system of an organism to the productive industries or the sustaining system in the body politic. There is a strong

similarity between the circulatory system of an organism and distributor system in society with its transformation lines.

The idea of comparison of society with organism is not a new idea. Comte used the same analogy extensively. But Spencer's account for great clarity and more clear than that of Comte. But some historians of sociology tend to see Spencer as a continuator of Comte's organicists' and evolutionary approach. But it is not true. Comte gives a coherent account of the progress of human conceptions. Spencer gives a coherent account of the progress of the external world.

It is an axiomatic to Spencer that ultimately all aspects of the universe, whether organic or inorganic, social or non-social are subject to the laws of evolution. Biological analogies occupy a privileged position in all of Spencer's sociological reasoning.

### **Check your Progress VII**

11. Write the difference between society and organism according to Spencer.

---

#### **4.12 SURVIVAL OF THE FITTEST**

---

You have read about survival of the fittest in the same unit. Now you will analyse it better in the backdrop of organic analogy. It had three main components: that variation occurred randomly among members of a species; that an individual's traits could be inherited by its progeny; and that the struggle for existence would allow only those with favourable traits to survive.

---

#### **4.13 CRITICISM**

---

The wide employment of the concept of evolution that Spencer's work has been subjected to much criticism. A chief criticism entirely trivial is that, Spencer falsely extrapolated from the biological theory of evolution but he failed to apply the same evolution for the purpose of sociological explanation. It is commonly felt that Spencer's derived his theory of social evolution from the biological theory of evolution and that this was therefore a false application of the concept of evolution in sociological explanation. This is totally unfounded. Thus, biological evolution to the other fields of study in which it was not applicable and it is worth to note that Spencer's outline of the centrality of evolution in the nature of things was stated before Darwin's origin of Species was published. He was not committed to the strictly

Darwinian account of biological evolution in some fields Spencer going beyond biology. On the contrary Spencer's conception was broader than that of Darwin.

Both of them were in touch and influenced each other to some degree. But it is surely incorrect to call Spencer a "social Darwinist", because his main doctrine was developed before Darwin had published anything on evolution.

Spencer says society is a Super-organic. Modern American sociologists write super organic evolution is a beautiful term, but it has meaning only if it denotes a clear conception of the nature of society-A matter that unfortunately Spencer never clarified. They commented that it is certainly sheer stuff and non sense.

There have been major objections raised against various other aspects of Spencer's theory. E.g; Spencer's work enters upon his attempt to view social institutions and social change as expressions of a single, universal law of evolution to which all manifestations of reality- physical, biological, psychological and cultural are subject. The process of evolution envisaged by Spencer as a development from a homogeneous, incoherent and indefinite state to a heterogeneous, coherent and definite one proved in applicably to the description of this trend. The core of his contribution resulted from his use of sociological analysis; this was not recognised in his times.

Spencer's most formidable critic on his social evolution was Thomas Huxley for whom civilization was the transcendence of natural evolution. Nature according to Huxley is a jungle; society is a garden. This contention was contemptuously dismissed by Spencer as "a virtual going- back to the old theological notions which put man and nature in antithesis. L.T. Hobhouse and G.C. Wheeler rejecting Spencer as anti reformist individualism. There have been major objections raised against various other aspects of Spencer's theory. E.g: against the underlying assumption that, all societies must necessarily follow the same sequence of evolutionary stages.

A final criticism of Spencer is that he was unclear and indeed, ambiguous in what he had to say about the facts evolution and the grounds of his ethical judgements of them.

Spencer's contributions to social thought are not negligible for many reasons. He emphasised law of evolution and natural causation. He described social and universal evolution and made comparison between biological organism and human society. He stressed the significance of individuality. He described the role of social institutions and or structures.

Thus he made very considerable contribution which added much to the work of Comte and Mill. He did indeed produce a new systematic approach to knowledge which provided a new picture of “man’s place in nature” and his influence during the later half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was equal to that of Comte.

George Eliot once remarked of Spencer, that ““The life of this philosopher, like that of great Kant offers little material for the narration”.

---

#### **4.14 CONCLUSION**

---

Herbert Spencer a British Sociologist, pointed out that law of evolution is universal in character. Evolution applies to three aspects of the world i.e., Organic world, inorganic world and super organic world. Hence his theory of evolution is more advanced than that of Darwin. Because Darwin restricted his theory of evolution to the living things. According to Spencer there are three universal laws governing the evolutionary process. 1. Law of persistence. 2. Law of continuity of motion. 3. Law of indestructibility. He also talks about Uniformity and Regularity, The law of least resistance and great, Rhythm of motion and law of transformation and equivalence of force. He used the pure scientist theories in his evolutionary theory. Newton’s law, physicists law have been extensively used. So in his time “Big Bang” theory was in vogue. So he applied it to his evolution.

Spencer applied theory of evolution to society and called it social evolution. In his book “The principles of sociology” he gives elaborative description of social evolution. At first he formulated that society is an organism. Applied (birth develop and death). So there is no difference. Later he changed his definition is like an organism. According to Spencer, society moves from simple to complex. Evolution means modern society. Society has passed four types of societies in terms of stages of their evolutionary development. 1. Simple society. 2. Compound society. 3. Doubly compound society. 4. Trebly compound society. The evolution of society based on Division of Labour in society.

Spencer was a great original thinker of 19<sup>th</sup> century. Spencer was a great consistent and indefatigable scholar, and his system of sociology his contribution to the making of sociology was one of the greatest to be produced during the 19<sup>th</sup> century on indeed at any time. Thus, Spencer was much more than a sociologist. He was a philosopher and a scientist.



He enjoyed on international reputation and influence almost comparable to that of Charles Darwin. In conclusion we can say that Spencer made an impact so widespread and profound that he is remembered as one of the masterminds of sociology.

---

#### **4.15 KEY WORDS**

---

Social evolution  
Social Darwinism  
Organism and Society  
Survival of the fittest  
Analogy

---

#### **4.16 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS**

---

1. Refer 4.2
2. According to Herbert Spencer “Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion, during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation”.
3. Refer 4.4
4. Refer 4.5
5. Refer 4.6
6. Refer 4.6
7. Refer 4.7
8. Refer 4.7
9. Refer 4.8
10. Refer 4.10
11. Refer 4.11

---

#### **4.17 FURTHER READING**

---

1. Spencer, Herbert., *The Principles of Sociology*, D. Appleton and Company, 1898.
2. Spencer, Herbert., *First Principles*, D. Appleton and Company, 1886.
3. Spencer, Herbert., *The Man versus The State*, D. Appleton and Company, 1885.
4. Spencer, Herbert., *The study of Sociology*, D. Appleton and Company, 1885.

---

#### 4.18 REFERENCES

---

1. Abraham, Francis & J. H. Morgan: Sociological Thought, Macmillan India Ltd, Delhi 1985.
2. Aron, Raymond, Main Currents in Sociological Thought (Two Volumes), Doubleday, Garden City, 1970.
3. Aron, Raymond., (1965), Main Currents in Sociological Thoughts 1, Penguin Books, England.
4. Aron, Raymond., (1968), Main Currents in Sociological Thoughts 2, Penguin Books, England.
5. Barnes, H.E. An Introduction to the History of Sociology, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1980.
6. Coser, Lewis: Masters of Sociological Thought, Harcourt & Brace, Chicago 1971.
7. E.C. Cuff et all, Perspectives in Sociology, Routledge, London, 2009.
8. Haralambos and Holborn, Sociology (7<sup>th</sup> Edition), Collins, London, 2007.
9. James, Farganis (2013), Readings in Social Theory, The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism, McGraw Hill, New Delhi.
10. Ritzer George, Classical Sociological Theory, McGraw Hill, New York, 2000.
11. Swingewood, Alan., (2015), A Short History of Sociological Thought, Palgrave Macmillan, United States.
12. Timasheff. N & G. Theodorson: Sociological Theory, Random House, New York, 1976.
13. Turner, Jonathan H., (2007), the Structure of Sociological Theory, Rawat Publications, Jaipur.

Prof. Jayashree S  
Professor and Chairperson,  
Department of Sociology  
Karnatak University, Dharwad.

Mail : jaishiva678@gmail.com

---