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SOCIOLOGY: AN ART OR A SCIENCE?

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INTRODUCTION

Sociology is a discipline that enables a better understanding of the inter-relationship and interdependence between the various societies and their cultures along with their practical usages. It gives us an outlook that can help us determine our respective functions and duties in the society we live in. The word “sociology” was brought into existence by none other than ‘Auguste Comte’, the father of the discipline himself. Sociology must be respected by students of all academic disciplines, technical or otherwise, for the simple reason that it impresses upon us, through demonstrations, the need to broaden the viewpoint through which we look at our own lives. This is so that a rational explanation can be offered for why we behave in a distinct manner, respond to the same stimulus in a way that differs from others, etc.

The paradigm shifts that have come about in this social science over the past century and a half, have been influenced by an amalgamation of diverse political and socio - economic circumstances in which it has been expected to be applied. It is now widely recognized as a multi-perspectival line of study, that is based on an expansive and exhaustive core of theories, along with well-structured methodological techniques and procedures. Notwithstanding this, a lot of sociology’s initial apprehensions have not ceased to exist even in this day and age, but at the same time, the relevance of some of its most fundamental methodological and conceptual milestones is still acknowledged.

The present-day line of distinction separating an art from a science, has its genesis in the 19th century. However, this line now coherently elucidates the cognitive world's principal internal constraints. The traditional point of view, despite having gaping flaws, depicts art on one hand, as a facilitator that allows an individual to express themselves and science on the other, as a discipline of objective erudition. Science has gradually arisen to be the final assessor of principles that are

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based on general reasoning, while on the contrary, art has played the role of the custodian of the particularities and tangibility of experience.

Robert Nisbet, a venerable figure in the fields of sociology and history, who has, during his expansive career, authored numerous insightful works that include the likes of "Social Change and History," has recently penned another volume in which he has made an attempt at resolving this age-old dispute. In his well-founded view, the commonalities in art and science are far greater than the divergences. He has also opined that sociology as a discipline could be greatly enhanced by taking cognizance of and continuing to tend to, the element of imaginative inventiveness that has always been an intrinsic and inalienable part of some of its greatest works. In support of Mr. Nesbit's view, I would like to iterate that some of the principal architects of modern social sciences, like the author of the "Communist Manifesto", Karl Marx, German jurist, sociologist and political economist: Max Weber, French Sociologist, Emile Durkheim and Georg Simmel among others, were all, at the end of the day, scientists. However, the extent to which their work and understanding would have been inhibited, had they not been artists, could not be understated.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

My project is a doctrinal work, which was worked on with the help of a variety of secondary sources. These include but not limited to literary pieces such as publications by scholars, books, articles, and journals. In all honesty, the research required for the project could not be conducted merely with the help of paperback sources. I also consulted a few blogs and websites like "Lexology". Mentioned below, are some of the primary and indispensable sources that immensely helped me when working on this doctrinal project:

1. 'Sociology' by Anthony Giddens:

To work on this doctrinal project eminent English sociologist and writer Anthony Giddens's textbook on sociology was used as a reference. In order to understand and to get a vivid and broader perspective of sociology, its relationship with different disciplines and its application in the society, this textbook has played a crucial role. The author has explained all portions in-depth with several references.

2. **'Sociology as an Art Form' by Robert Nisbet:**

The 'New York Times' had, on 31st Oct. 2021, published an article titled 'Sociology as an Art Form', authored by Mr. Robert Nesbit. I have referred to a digitized copy of the said article for this project. The author of the article has elaborately explained how distinctions have been created by comparing sociology as a science and as an art. In the article, Mr. Nesbit also discusses about the importance of both, art and science in broadening the horizons of the discipline of sociology.

3. **'Fundamentals of Sociology' by Vidya Bhushan and D.R. Sachdeva:**

This textbook gives insights into the different theories, mindsets and hypothesis of various sociologists. It has left no stone unturned in explaining to the readers, the subtleties of sociology. The simplicity and lucidity of the words and writing style used made the book very accessible for rookies in the field like me. I would also like to commend the student-friendly style of presentation used by the authors of the book.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Making a comparison of the discipline of sociology with art or science underestimates its legacy and legitimacy.

HYPOTHESIS

The *locus* of sociology with respect to the two undisputed epicentres of study as per the present-day culture, (science and art) has been univocal. Greater weightage has always been laid upon science. This laudation has often been reciprocated by writers and artists alike, throughout the course of history. They have viewed sociology as, for the most part, a desiccated generalization and a presumption of scientific nature. In contrast to this, sociology is the scientific study of society, the mannerisms exhibited by people as parts of groups, along with being the study of how they structurally and functionally organize themselves. It factors in, a wide range of influences, both minor as well as significant.

OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

Sociology being a multi-paradigmatic field, has resulted in a plethora of arguments and counter-arguments along with myriads of decipherments of its relationship(s) with other social and natural academic disciplines, including of course, art and science. Keeping this in mind, I carefully thought about what the objectives of my project must be. These objectives have been stated below and elaborated upon hereinafter:

1. Understanding how sociology is a science and how it is an art.
2. Critically analysing the nature of its interrelatedness and interconnection with its application.
3. Comprehending and evaluating the perspectives of different prominent thinkers of their respective times, upon sociology as a science and as an art.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. Does sociology bear a greater resemblance to art or to science?
2. What are the points of contention leading to different opinions about sociology being art or science?
3. Should it be considered necessary to relate sociology with other academic disciplines?
4. Would there be any difference in the way we understand the role played by sociology in society and its functioning based on whether we view sociology as an art or as a science?

WHAT IS SOCIOLOGY?

The word sociology comprises two constituent words. The 1st part of the word is derived from ‘societas’ (society in Latin) while the genesis of the 2nd part lies in ‘logos’ (study or science in Greek). In comparison to other disciplines in the realm of social science, such as political science, anthropology or economics, sociology is arguably the youngest. The term sociology has come about to be generally accepted to mean *“The study of society and human behaviour encompassing different level of social interaction and culture.”* Thereby, it has become customary for mankind to interpret or decrypt human behaviours by effectively applying wide ranging and age-old techniques and theories, in addition to taking into consideration various extraneous variables, which have the potential to influence them. The formal status of a discipline or of a field of academics was conferred upon sociology at some point in time during the 1800s. Following this, the main objective of psychology became, the checking and challenging of modernization and attempting to analyse and explain the ever-changing temperament of people and communities world-wide. Sociologists, with the help of this newly formed line of study, made an attempt at understanding what gave rise to the abstract bonds of cohesion that had been holding social groups together since the dawn of human civilization. In addition to this, they tried ideating ways to prevent, reverse or at the very least, decelerate the social disintegration which was ubiquitous in the west, because of rampant modernization. Sociology is also *“the study of the mechanism that maintains and alters interaction and socialization.”* Enquiring into the numerous types of ‘societal dysfunction’ including but not limited to insurrection, crimes, riots, unjust social stratification also comes under the ambit of sociology. Sociology also analyses social movements that translate to societal transformation. The importance of the sphere of influence exerted on a person’s conduct by the community, social groups, and various organizations that a person is associated with, cannot be understated. Due to this very reason, it is absolutely imperative for sociology to comprehend how the various aforementioned entities are formed, how coordination is maintained between them, and finally how they gradually deteriorate and after a certain period of time, cease to exist.

One of the most fundamental objectives of sociology, was to attempt to integrate and jointly study the various disciplines under humanity, including economics, history, and psychology among others. In the view of Comte, the entirety of humanity, ever since it came into existence, had undergone nearly identical, identifiable stages and conditions of evolution, throughout the course of history. Attaining a comprehensive understanding of this unending process called evolution, would beyond a doubt, go a long way in helping us formulate solutions to tackle the various communal evils prevalent in the society. A widespread misconception which has seldom been

dispelled, is that sociology aims to absorb the other sister disciplines that come under humanities, however, this notion is completely unfounded. Right from the outset, sociology never intended to supersede the other social sciences. On the contrary, it had always been desirous of being one of them, while having contents, schools of thought, methods, and practical uses of its own.

Despite the fact that all fields of study in social science in general lay great emphasis on the social phenomena, thereby becoming interconnected and interdependent; Every single one of them studies under a lens, a particular phase of our behaviourism through extensive researching. These social sciences may provide us with a myriad of images of the society, each image, based on one perspective or the other. Though I have always been an ardent supporter of these sciences, I cannot deny that these varying points of view, used to fall short in furnishing the students of social sciences with a complete 360 ° anatomization of the inter-relatedness, inter-connectedness of the many societies. Due to this very shortcoming, the pressing necessity of a science with a broader ambit, that would be capable of panoramically examining the society as whole right from its very foundations was felt. The creation of the line of study of ‘sociology’ as we know it, led to the satiation of this long-standing needs. When other areas of human erudition proved to be incapable of providing adequate insights into the complexities of human behaviour, the need for sociology was felt.

The most vociferous of sceptics have always contended that sociology as a line of study, lacks a clear-cut subject matter or topic of study for itself but rather that it is a haphazard amalgamation of the hypothesis, theories and observations of the different disciplines in humanities. These sceptics argue that all social sciences other than sociology possess a significant degree of specialization and concreteness, which is lacking to quite an extent in humanities. In my opinion however, the two pence worth of these critics is completely devoid of any substance. It would not be wrong to state that in today’s day and age, not only has the field of sociology has come about to be an unmistakably distinct line of study, with its own theoretical core and body of principles among other features, but it has also been conferred the coveted status of a discipline. It has managed to attain such extraordinary heights of recognition and admiration that quite a few social scientists have regarded it as the “mother of all social sciences”.

Thus, we can conclude that sociology can be finally defined as the following:

- i) The study of society,
- ii) The analysis of social relationships

- iii) The study of social life and conduct
- iv) The understanding and decoding of human behaviour in groups
- vi) The interpretation of the various types of social relationship
- vii) The study of social groups and systems, their inter-dependence and inter-relation
- ix) The understanding of communities

THE GENERAL NATURE OF SOCIOLOGY

A significant sphere of influence exerted by other disciplines in social science such as political science, economics or psychology, etc. is evident in sociology. However, we can also observe this influence is reciprocated by sociology itself. It's impact on the aforementioned disciplines cannot be understated. Owing to this, these fields enjoy a significant degree of commonality in their methods and history. Sociobiology is a demi-science that comes under the ambit of sociology. It is responsible for analysing the behaviour of individuals, organizational structures, etc. along with the manner in which they have impacted the course of the metamorphosis of processes that are biological nature. The line of study of sociobiology can be called as an amalgamation of sociology along with the wide range of subsets of science, even including the likes of zoology and botany among others. Organizational behaviour is another important aspect of the daily lives of humans, that comes under the ambit of areas covered by sociology.

Because of its exhaustive scope, sociology has numerous points of conjunction with a myriad of other disciplines including not just social sciences, but also some other subjects like geography, education etc. The most important of all these subjects however, is law. The stand-out trait of the approach of sociology of covering on a broader societal structure to the end of comprehending and rationalizing the social phenomena in a unique way.

The lines of study of sociology and psychology for example enjoy a very special connection. As a consequence of this, we have witnessed the forging of a niche subfield by the name of social psychology. That being said, for the most part, psychologists have always tended to abide by the conventional approach of stressing on the person and their cognitive machinery. On the contrary, sociologists apply quite a varying approach where they lay a greater emphasis on the way external

communities and groups influence people's mannerisms and ways of thinking. Sociology can generally be said to focus on the collective aspect of the behaviour of humans, essentially anything that comprises of a large number of people, such as institutions and organizations. As opposed to this, the objective of psychology, is primarily to bring under a lens, the lines of thought and patterns of behaviour of individuals.

The first and foremost aim of psychology is to assist persons to successfully perform their roles in the various spheres of their personal and social life (Ex: the spheres of family, and work respectively) so that they are able to integrate themselves with the society as a whole.

VIEWING SOCIOLOGY AS AN ART

It is an undeniable fact that sociology as a line of study is a type of an art that has originated and evolved thanks to a plethora of art forms, principally including literature, philosophy among others. In this way, sociology slowly but steadily reached the pinnacle of its glory by the 1800s. The degree to which sociology resembles the arts, after factoring in the wide-ranging modes of expression, impulses of creativity etc. is elaborated upon by Nisbet. From his analysis, it has been made amply apparent to us that it was quite commonplace for the founding fathers of sociology, namely Marx, Simel and Durkheim to prepare portraits. These paintings specifically depicted the working class as opposed to the bourgeois or specific factory landscapes, concepts that are also evident in the artworks of the same era that also explored similar subjects. Furthermore, these portraits show demonstrate a resemblance in the portrayal of active motion. Nisbet's examination of the correlation between sociology and art, specifically in connection to the concept of "fin de siècle," is logically methodical. Upon tight analysis of the works of the initial European sociologists, it becomes evident that there is a fusion of art and culture. There exists a prevalent fallacy that the primary objective of science as an academic field is to reveal the truth, while the role of art is rather perceived as one to convey beauty and to evade reality. It is imperative to fight this fallacy at any expense. The field of sociology of art encompasses the examination of artwork and its interconnectedness with society, therefore illustrating art as a deeply meaningful activity within the social realm. The application of sociological research methodology involves the investigation of the effects of art on its audience, the distribution or circulation of art works in society, the artistic preferences of the public, and the limited influence of public preferences on creative production. Both of the aforementioned approaches should be employed in the study of the sociology of art as an academic field.

An extensive and illustrious history characterizes the sociology of art. The “social criticism of art” put forward by Plato and later improved by philosophers like St. Augustine is a prime instance of this. Many cultural, social and philosophical movements felt that art and politics were closely intertwined.

Scholars in England and France, who investigated Sociology from the standpoint of an art, gave a more explicit portrayal of the subject in the 19th century. The essence of an artwork is inalienably connected to different social components, including the commonly prevailing sentiments in the society and the setting that it finds itself in. However, the emergence of diverse social sorts in tragedy and comedy. Examples of the conformity of the sociology of art may be noticed in its emphasis on social phenomena like the incorporation of culture in the evaluation of art.

VIEWING SOCIOLOGY AS A SCIENCE

There is a lot of dispute and discussion over the precise nature of sociology, whether or not it is a science. Owing to this, a lot of confusion and uncertainty within the fraternity of sociologists from quite a long while. As a result of this discussion, the sociologists ended up to be divided into two distinct categories holding opposite opinions. One category of the sociologists says that sociology counts as a science, since the way it operates is based on scientific procedures, pragmatism and implementation similar to the way sociology adopts and uses the same method. The founding founders of sociology, including August Comte, Emile Durkheim etc. embrace this point of view. In contrast to this the remaining sociologists, belonging to the other category, hold a contrary view and belief that sociology is not a science. German Sociologist, Max Weber belongs to the latter category.

According to Comte, sociology is guided by certain organic laws like other natural disciplines. Therefore, sociology constitutes a science. According to the sociologists that embrace the concept of sociology as a science say that like other disciplines in social science, which include political science, economics, psychology, history etc. Although Sociology also qualifies as a science, it is necessary to know what a scientific is before establishing a new perspective or embracing any particular view; and if sociology is regarded as a scientific discipline, then to what extent does sociology attain the essential qualities of a science?

WHAT IS A SCIENCE?

Science is a body of structured and methodical knowledge. Science is built on reason and empirical evidence. A science is a discipline of knowledge or study that examines a corpus of fact or truth methodically ordered and illustrating the action of general rules. Science stands upon factual knowledge and interconnects them in a linear sequence so as to reach a valid inference. Science embraces scientific technique. Scientific theory, knowledge, and information is obtained by observing, experimenting, generalizing, analysis and study. Science is not a mish-mash. On the contrary, it is an academic field which has impartiality, observation, proper forecasting, testing, accurate measurements, generalization, which is abstraction and cause and effect relationship.

According to Comte and Durkheim, “Sociology is a science because it adopts and applies the scientific method. Sociology does make use of scientific method in the study of its subject matter; hence sociology is a science.” The grounds for defending the arguments are listed below:

1. Sociology embraces scientific techniques:

It may be claimed that the scientific process needs experimental laboratories and sociology is unable to perform experimentations with males in a laboratory. Nevertheless, it is to be mentioned that human behaviour and conduct of people is open to scientific testing and inquiry like natural occurrences. Like science included numerous tools for experiments on sociological issues in its own way involve diverse devices including but not limited to sociometry, scheduled case study interviews and surveys (questionnaires), which gives a quantitative assessment of social occurrences.

2. Sociology provides valid observations:

In the field of sociology regardless of a laboratory, a reliable observation can be made. This is owing to the fact that, for sociology, each person, group of people, community, nation and the globe in its entirety is a lab. This statement can be verified by the fact that ‘Newton never discovered his laws within the confines of a lab.’ A wedding, a burial, birthday party, everything can be a testing ground for sociologists and it allows for correct observations.

3. Sociology explains the cause-and-effect relationship:

As a science entails tracking an issue followed by seeking a remedy in the exact same manner sociology identifies the issues in society as a whole individual, community, their interaction, social action etc. and then identifies the causes underlying their transformation and influences. When analysing demography, growth in population and family, it has tracked and solved a number of the most significant concerns which prevail in the society of our day and age such as family disorganization and dysfunctioning diversified population increase as well as social nervousness and its repercussions. By such research and observation, sociology has established that family dysfunction is a catalyst for divorce and the unrestrained increase in population is the cause of poverty. In this method sociology explains the cause-effect relationship and so confirms the thesis that sociology is a science.

SELF-INTERPRETATION OF VIEWS

Sociology being a newly emerging and exciting area of study, has prompted numerous sociologists as well as various intellectuals' and writers to offer their own opinions concerning its similarities with other lines of study. This has essentially opened the floodgates to a lot of argument and discussion revolving around the question of whether or not sociology can independently exist without bearing any reasonably construable parallels to any of the social science fields or other fields of study. Another important question up for debate, is if sociology is internally void and as a consequence thereof, requires other fields of study for it to defend its portrayal and authority. The heated debate over whether or not sociology is a science, has persisted to an extent that it has resulted in a polarization of viewpoints and a split between a lot of renowned social scientists and philosophers. The late Auguste Comte and Emile Durkheim stood for the view that sociology is a science. where they supported their assertion with various justifications, ideologies and principles. Contrary to the views of the aforementioned sociologists, German thinker, Max Weber along with his contemporary, Robert Nisbet was firmly of the belief that sociology bears a greater semblance to an art than to a science because of the very simple reason that art and culture are incorporated into everyday life of our society in today's day and age, and that sociology is nothing but an exploration of the society.

Therefore, after examining and evaluating the various viewpoints of sociological thinkers and comprehending the various hypotheses and observations, I am of the firm view that sociology represents a science more than an art. The reason behind my belief is that sociology relies extensively on presumptions, forecasting, measurements, trial and error, impartiality, abstraction, cause – effect connections, and practical expertise, which is also the very foundation and root of any of the sciences. The question of whether sociology can exist independently without being comparable to any other social sciences may be addressed easily, as in today's day and age of inter-disciplinary studies, in which each and every field of society and learning is interrelated, there can be no standalone discipline. All lines of study necessarily have to intersect at some point or the other, either directly or tangentially. It is an inevitable occurrence. It is for this very reason that the similarity of sociology with other disciplines in social science or natural science, does not, by any stretch of imagination, decrease the credibility and heritage of sociology.

CONCLUSION

Art and science are among the most contentious and discursive themes. Just like artists, sociologists have also presented an appealing interpretation of the world. They have presented us with the scenery of cultural practices and society as a whole colour of different thoughts etc. However, both the position and perception of sociology with reference to these two opposing winds of contemporary society has been extremely plain and honest. Its attention, goal and likeness have always been directed towards science. Instead of calling literature and art as a more unbiased, precise, indifferent, and accurate technique of social science. Sociologists consider art, mainly as creative, yet also as a somewhat ambiguous and peculiar means of interpreting the self, community and humanity as a whole. Artists and sociologists often exchange this excitement when they regard sociology as matching art is a simply barren and hollow generalization. However, similarities with science produces more credible and trustworthy responses. Both, Sociology as an art and sociology as a science have a significant number of overlapping themes, storyline, mode of functioning and even the tools of observing and comprehension are occasionally the same. While different brains express various hypotheses, a recurring notion which each social scientist, philosopher and writer agrees upon, is that sociology is an open, accessible and interpretive field that may be linked to any subject material.

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