

The Contribution of “Auguste Comte” to Sociology





biography

- Auguste Comte- volatile French philosopher, moralist and sociologist
- traditionally regarded as the father of sociology.
- coined the term sociology
- Tried to create a new science of society, which would not only explain the past of mankind but also predict its future course.
- "Auguste Comte may be considered as first and foremost, sociologist of human and social unity" so writes the French sociologist Raymond Aron.

COMTE

- Isidore Auguste Marie Francois Xavier Comte was born in Montpellier of Southern France in January 1, 1798 and died in 1857.
- He was the first thinker who realized the need for a distinct science of human society.
- He is regarded as the father not because of his significant contributions to the subject but because of creating sociology as a science of society or science of human behaviour.

Social physics

- Comte first gave the name “Social Physics” to the science invented by him
- but later he coined the word “Sociology” a hybrid term:
- compounded of Latin and Greek words to describe the new science.

important works

- Comte has many important works to his credit.
- An important work of Comte “A Programme of Scientific Work required for the Reorganization of Society” was published in 1822 which contains an outline of his thoughts. He also wrote many books.
- 1. Positive Philosophy (1830-42)
- 2. System of Positive Polity (1851 -54)
- 3. Religion of Humanity (1856)

contribution

- His contribution to sociology can be divided into four categories. They are namely:-
 - (1) Classification and ordering of social sciences.
 - (2) The nature, method and scope of sociology.
 - (3) The law of three stages.
 - (4) The plan for social reconstruction.
 - (5) Positivism.

contribution

- Comte gave birth not only to a specific methodology of studying knowledge but also analysed the evolution of human thinking and its various stages. He had developed a unilinear theory of evolution.
- According to Comte individual mind and human society pass through successive stages of historical evolution leading to some final stage of perfection.
- The principle developed by Comte in the study of human thinking presumes gradual evolution and development in human thinking and is known as the law of three stages of thinking.

The Law of Three Stages:

- According to Comte it is the universal law of intellectual development.
- According to him “Each branch of our knowledge passes through three different theoretical conditions; the theological or fictitious; the metaphysical or abstract; and the scientific or positive.”
- This is known as the law of three stages because, according to it, human thinking has undergone three separate stages in its evolution and development.

The Law of Three Stages...

- He opines, “The evolution of the human mind has paralleled the evolution of the individual mind”.
- He focussed mainly on stages in the development and progress of human mind and stressed that these stages co-related with parallel stages in the development of social order, social units, social organisation and material conditions of human life.

The Law of Three Stages...

- Comte's evolutionary theory or the law of three stages represents that there are three intellectual stages through which the world has gone throughout its history.
- According to him, not only does the world go through this process but groups, societies, sciences, individuals and even minds go through the same three stages.
- As there has been an evolution in the human thinking so that each succeeding stage is superior to and more evolved than the preceding stage

The Law of Three Stages...

- According to him human thought as well as social progress pass through three important stages. These three stages are the universal law of human progress.
- These three stages are common in case of the development of human knowledge as well as social evolution.
- Human individual is a staunch believer during childhood, then becomes a critical metaphysician in adolescence and becomes a natural Philosopher during manhood.

- A similar case of development takes place in case of human society. Law of Three Stages not only talks about the progressive transformation of society but also explain the transformation in minds of the people.
- The evolution of human mind goes hand in hand with a typical form of organisation of society

The Law of Three Stages...

- (a) Theological or Fictitious Stage.
- (b) Metaphysical or Abstract Stage.
- (c) Positive or Scientific Stage.

(a) Theological or Fictitious Stage:

- This stage was the first stage of law of three stages. It characterized the world prior to 1300 A.D.
- “All theoretical conceptions whether general or special bear a super natural impress”.
- It was believed that all the activities of men were guided and governed by supernatural power.
- In this stage the social and the physical world was produced by God.
- At this stage man’s thinking was guided by theological dogmas.
- It was marked by lack of logical and orderly thinking.
- Theological thinking is characterized by unscientific outlook.

Theological....

- A natural event was the main subject matter of theological thinking. The usual natural events tend man towards theological interpretation of the events.
- Unable to find the natural causes of different happenings the theological man attributes them to imaginary or divine forces.
- This kind of explanation of natural events in divine or imaginary conditions is known as theological thinking. Excess or absence of rain was believed to be due to godly pleasure or displeasure. Magic and totemism were given emphasis.

Theological...

- This stage was dominated by priests.
- It implied belief in another world wherein reside the divine forces which influenced and controlled all the events in this world.
- In other words at this theological stage all phenomena are attributed to some super natural power.
- The concept of super natural power itself passes through four sub-stages..

Theological...

- Comte had divided the theological stage into the following four stages:
- (i) Fetishism
- (ii) Anthropomorphism
- (iii) Polytheism
- (iv) Monotheism

Theological...

- (i) **Fetishism:**
- It is the first and primary sub-stage in theological thinking stage. In this stage men thought that in every object or thing God resided.
- Fetishism is a kind of belief that there exists some living spirit in the non-living objects.
- This is otherwise known as animism.
- People worshipped inanimate objects like trees, stones, a piece of wood, etc. These objects are considered as Fetish.

Theological...

- (ii) Anthropomorphism:
- It is the second sub-stage of theological stage.
- With the gradual development in human thinking there occurred a change or improvement in the human thinking which resulted in the development of this stage.

Theological...

- **iii) Polytheism:**
- With the passage of time human mind develops and there occurred a change in the form of thinking.
- A more evolved and developed stage than fetishism and anthropomorphism appeared which is known as Polytheism.
- As there were many things or many objects, the number of Gods multiplied. So men were found to be engaged in the worship of a number of Gods.
- He believed that each and every God had some definite function and his area of action or operation was determined. At this stage man had classified God's or natural forces.

- Polytheism means believing in many Gods. Primitive people believed that different Gods control different natural forces.
- Each God had some definite function and his scope and area of action was determined.
- For example, God of water, God of rain and God of fire, God of air, etc.

Theological...

- (iv) Monotheism:
- With the passage of time human mind further develops and there occurred a change and development in the form of thinking. A more evolved and developed stage occurred which was known as Monotheism.
- This is the last sub-stage of theological stage. This stage replaced the earlier belief in many Gods by the belief in one God. 'Mono' means one.
- It implied that one God was supreme who was responsible for the maintenance of system in the world.
- This type of monotheistic thinking marked the victory of human intellect over irrational thinking.

(b) Metaphysical or Abstract Stage:

- *This is the second stage which occurred roughly between 1300 and 1800 A.D. This is an improved form of theological stage.*
- *Under this stage it was believed that an abstract power or force guided and determined all the events of the world.*
- *It was against the belief in concrete God.*
- *There was development of reason in human thinking.*
- *By this man ceased to think that it was the supernatural being that controlled and guided all the activities.*

Metaphysical....

- *Metaphysical stage is an extension of theological stage. During this period, reason and rationality was growing.*
- *Reason replaced imagination. People tried to believe that God is an abstract being.*
- *Soul is the spark of divine power i.e. inform of abstract forces. It is believed that an abstract power or force guides and determines the events in the world.*
- *Metaphysical thinking discards belief in concrete God. The nature of enquiry was legal and rational in nature.*
- *For example; Classical Hindu Indian society where the principle of transmigration of soul, the conception of rebirth, has were largely governed by metaphysical uphill.*

Metaphysical....

- So it was the mere modification of the first one which discarded belief in concrete God.
- According to Comte, “In the metaphysical state, which is only a modification of the first, the mind supposes instead of supernatural beings, abstract forces, veritable entities (that is personified abstraction) inherent in all beings and capable of producing all phenomena.”
- At this stage the position of supernatural power of the first stage is taken over by the abstract principles.

(c) Positive Stage:

- The last and the final stage of human thinking or human mind was the positive stage or the scientific stage which entered into the world in 1800.
- This stage was characterized by belief in Science.
- People now tended to give up the search for absolute causes (God or Nature) and concentrated instead on observation of the social and physical world in the search for the laws governing them.

Positive Stage...

- According to Comte observation and classification of facts were the beginning of the scientific knowledge.
- It was governed by industrial administrators and scientific moral guides.
- So at this stage the priests or the theologians were replaced by scientists.
- The warriors were replaced by” industrialists. Observation predominates over imagination.
- All theoretical concepts become positive or scientific.

- This positive stage is also known a scientific stage. The dawn of 19th century marked the beginning of this stage. It is characterised by scientific knowledge. In this stage, human mind gave up the taken for granted approach.
- At this stage, human mind tried to establish cause and affect relationship. Scientific knowledge is based on facts. Facts are collected by observation and classification of phenomena.
- Positivism is a purely intellectual way of looking at the world. Positivism emphasises on observation and classification of data and facts. One can observe uniformities or laws about natural as well as social phenomena. Positivistic thinking is best suited to the need of industrial society.

CONCLUSION...

- So it may be concluded that in the first stage the mind explains phenomena by ascribing them to supernatural power or God.
- The second, metaphysical stage, is a mere modification of the first; in it the mind suppresses that abstract forces produce all phenomena rather than supernatural beings.
- In the final stage man observes nature and humanity objectively in order to establish laws.
- Corresponding to the three stages of intellectual development there are two major types of society (i) Theological military type of society; (ii) Industrial Society.

