

Political Sociology and its Implications

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1. Background

Political Sociology, although a new emergence in its modern form, has a long history and there are examples of contributions made by the scholars of nineteenth century in the field of Political Sociology. Sociologists like Herbert Spencer and Oppenheimer made special contributions in the field of Political Sociology. The contributions of Hegel and Karl Marx in the development of political sociology can't be belittled too. The works of Wilfred Pareto, Hob House are also considered to be important in the field of political sociology. In spite of the contributions of these scholars, it is Max Weber, the German Sociologist, who is known as the father of Political Sociology because of his special contributions in this field. His analyses of the relations between state and society, the concept of bureaucracy etc helped in augmenting the standard of political sociology as a scientific discipline. As a discipline, political sociology is an admixture of the fundamentals of the philosophics of political science and sociology. Speaking clearly it is the product of cross fertilization between sociology & political science studying the impact of society and politics on each other. It includes the elements of both political science and Sociology. Its purpose is to study the stability of the democratic political system. The hindrances as well the impact of the social factors (Dictionary of Sociology, 1999). According to Lip set, if the stability of society is a central issue for Sociology as a whole, the stability of specific institutional structure or political regime the social conditions of democracy is the prime concern of political sociology.

There are certain factors responsible for the emergence of Political Sociology. Nineteenth century scholars contributed a lot in the development of political sociology. These scholars include political scientists, sociologists and politicians. Political sociology as a discipline was born out of the criticism of contemporary sociological theories (Kumar, 2001). The following factors too contributed in development of political sociology in its modern form. The first factor is the extension of the area of politics, which has penetrated into the social arena. The distinction between the political and the social is rapidly diminishing and their interdependence and interrelationship is increasing day by day. Because of the interdependence of politics and society, political institutions have been studied from the sociological perspective. The second factor favoring the growth of political bureaucracy is the rise of the modern concept of bureaucracy on a large scale as proposed by the father of modern

political sociology, Max Weber. As bureaucracy has deep relationship with the society and culture of the country, political sociologists started conducting large-scale surveys for the standard study of bureaucracy and social variables.

The third factor responsible for the rise of political sociology is the rise in tendency of the distinction between state and society. In Europe, the evolution of modern states encouraged the studies in political sociology because it was realized that the study of society is as important as state and politics. The rise of modern nation states, which were free of orthodox Christian dogma, paved the way for the distinction between state and society as favored by Machiavelli who claimed that the state determines the society, consequently preparing the ground for the rise of political sociology in its modern form. In fact, it was the relationship between state and society, which laid the genuine foundation of political sociology, and it is this relationship, which is the core subject matter of political sociology. The fourth factor that contributed in the rise of political sociology is the tendency of the distinction between political and social relations. The world famous philosopher Montesque claimed that social factors determine the nature of government and administrators; and the nature of state may change the society. Rousseau's comparison between subject and citizen was the contrast of man under nature and man in the civil society. Similarly Ferguson's genetic definition of society comprises of state and family.

The fifth factor responsible for preparing the ground for the rise of political sociology is the issue of interesting contrast between political and social as proposed by Saint Simon, which was in fact the distinction between the government and administration. Tocquville pointed out the relationship between self-governing associations of USA with social and political institutions and highlighted the influence of social institutions of political institutions. Karl Marx, a political and economic philosopher, who claimed that the state changes according to different economic conditions and so also does society, with such a claim, he made a more intricate analysis of the distinction between the state and society. The father of political sociology, Max Weber, said that we may give sociological definitions of the state, but these will not be based upon the activities of the state but on their means just as the use of physical force. He believed that politics is the effort to participate in the power influencing the distribution of authority between different social groups. Emil Durkheim, prominent sociologist from France, professed the view that the state has a necessary universal aspect and political sociology particularly emphasizes this universal aspect of the state.

2. Subject matter of Political Sociology

Scholars throughout the world have expressed the opinion that the formal institutions of the polity do affect the social structure. The social structures in turn determine the nature of political system. For example communism develops in a society, which has a background history of backwardness, and a wider base of unsatisfied and revolting exploited lower class. The proverb "hungry stomach can't defend democracy" becomes pragmatic in the form of Military Coup or drastic political changes in underdeveloped countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. On the other hand,

democracy flourishes in a society where there is equal distribution of power and resources between different social classes. We can cite example of Great Britain, where democracy has been institutionalized as a way of living, and there is no threat to democracy even if there is no written Constitution and the country is governed by conventions. On the basis of these examples, we can easily say that political sociology is a discipline of recent origin in its modern form that studies the inter relations between state and social structures. It is the sociological studies of the political institutions and its relationship to the other social institution and society. Political Sociology is concerned with political movements and ideologies. Such phenomena are studied primarily as constituent parts of the structure of society and of social processes, which differentiate political sociology from traditional political science.

The subject matter of political sociology is "Non-political politics". Non-political politics, as is clear by the term, takes its confinement in society and disowns its associations with the state and its formal institutions. In general expressions, it is social politics, or political behavior (Kumar, 2001). It is this which makes the bridge between political science and sociology. Non-political politics is a social process characterized by conflict and consensus. Explanations here focus on different types of social variables and social processes. There exists no doubt that political phenomena are closely associated with social phenomena. At the same time it is the society where political activity takes place. Thus, in diminutive form we can say that the subject matter of political sociology is the stability, its conditions and causes of democratic society as claimed by Kumar (2001). Not only this, it studies the impact of society and its organizations on the politics and the impact of politics on the society and its various organizations.

The scope of political sociology is very vast in the modern days. In fact, there is no aspect in contemporary society, which is not touched by some form of political association or activity or processes. As political sociology studies the relationship between the society and state, party system and its relation to society, its utility is increasing day by day in the modern society of the twenty first century where politics pervades the entire modern society. The extension of political sociology includes effect of social attitudes on political participation, political effect on social class and attitudes, social and political attitudes, voting behavior and its social and political implications.

As a modern discipline, political sociology stresses on the turbulent and volatile relationship between the society and politics of the modern age with special focus on the characteristics of a multi group society, the social and political implications and the nature of modern bureaucracy and its forms in diverse political and social contexts. The prime interest of political sociology is on captivating society as a living functional system with different parts interdependent and with the impact of social grouping and of the activities of different parts on political activities, the nature of the state, common masses, the effectiveness of propaganda and public opinion as means of informal political education. "Political social aspects" has been the cornerstone of political sociology which occurs out of the need for a single

subject for studying all the factors that contribute to the newly increasing interdependence and close ties between society and polity in the complex modern society based on consumerism.

As political science and Sociology are the most closely related subjects in the modern time, it is not possible to study political and social institutions as separate entities in the modern society. There has been increasing comprehension from all sections that for the smooth functioning of the society as well as the politics of the land, an understanding of the existing socio-political structures and its implications is prerequisite; and it is possible only through the study, comprehension and acceptance of the principles of political sociology. The modern day society has become a quite different place to live. Material culture as well as liberal democratic norms has penetrated into all aspects of human life, which has increased the expectations of the modern man. It is very difficult for the policy makers to draft the policies coping with the expectations of the rapidly changing society. It is also not possible to introduce new laws, reforms or any kind of innovation without understanding the social and cultural structure and processes. There are diverse examples from the countries of the world when government's popular programmed failed because of the lack of social understanding. Consequently, it has been widely realized that without a total comprehension of socio-cultural process it is difficult to rule the people or to be a successful government, thus paving the ground for the emergence of Political Sociology for the better understanding of the relationship, interdependency, influences of both society and politics on each other.

3. Tribulations or the problem fields of Political Sociology

The implications of political sociology are as much important to the democratic society as to the totalitarian or authoritarian state. An understanding of social and political behavior is significant for tracing out the peculiar nature and subject matter of political sociology that decides the areas, fields and the problems with which it deals. As a discipline studying the dependability between politics and society, political sociology studies the phenomenon of power in order to find out how power operates in society. It takes into consideration not only the issues of states but also the many primary and secondary organizations of the society that has direct or indirect effect on the power holders. Political sociology doesn't accept power as the monopoly of the state but believes that power is relative, social and measurable. It is the relationship between power holder and the power addressee. Both these are equally important.

Political sociology also examines the points of interaction between social and political variables with a focus on non-political and social issues. With the idea of non-political politics, political sociology dismantles the boundary between state and society. The discipline of political sociology hold the notion that power can't last unless it is duly transformed into authority which is the legitimate power. Due to its legitimacy, the power addressee recognizes the power of the power holder. Political sociology believes that power is two-way affair and can't be unlimited. Of its many

types such as traditional authority, charismatic authority and the rational legal authority, political sociology clearly favors the last, without denying the existence of the first two. The first two however, are condemned since they weaken the society and the developed modern society accepts rational legal authority.

The modern concept of bureaucracy is also one of the study fields of political sociology. Political sociology deals with bureaucracy not in the political context, but in the larger societal context. As the modern social structure is very complex and diverse, it needs technical experts, officials and coordinative skills for the regulation of day-to day activity and it approaches in the form of Bureaucracy. Political sociology suggests prophylactic measures for bureaucratic reforms. Political culture is another field where political sociology has its input. Political culture prescribes political values and legitimized political power. Political culture contributes to the stability of the whole political system and in turn has deep relationship with culture and tradition of the land.

Socialization, which is a common term in sociology, has been borrowed in political science and a new term political socialization has thus developed which epitomize the process of the transmission of the country's political culture from one generation to next. Political socialization is a process, which is learned, but not consciously. It is picked up unconsciously during the course of social interactions. Political sociology has deep interest in the issues related to political participation that is conditioned by psychological, political and social variables. The levels of political participation are influenced by social and cultural variables. The social and cultural variables effecting political participation differ according to countries. For example, in western countries where the societies are very liberal, flexible and conscious, people's participation in political activities are high compared to rigid and immobile oriental societies like that of Nepal. There are high chances for a British woman going to vote than a woman from an orthodox Islamic country where woman have even no voting right. Hence, it is the structure of society and culture that determines political participation of the people. The voting behavior of people may also vary according to society and culture. There exists high chances that voter from a traditional orthodox country may be easily induced by religious parties and communal politics.

Above and beyond political participation, political sociology also studies social and political changes, as the most important problem of a political sociologist is the explanation of social and political changes along with agitations, revolutions, violences, conflicts and political changes of different sorts. Political sociologist doesn't consider these only as political in nature as they provide a social and cultural explanations of these phenomena with a notion that these phenomena are due to the inconsistency in speed between the process of political change and the changes occurring in the society's social structure. Political sociologists seek at the establishment of party between the social change and the political change and the political change. They aim at modernizing the society and ensuring a high rate of social, political and economic development along with modernizing the society and making certain a high rate of economic development.

As political sociologists have relationship both with the political system and the social structure, they intend to make the political institutions sufficiently modernized so that they may be in a position to cope with the demands of social change. Political sociologists used to give prime importance to political parties and pressure groups for the settlements of conflicts occurring in the political system as well as in the social system. They believe that the political and social processes involve conflicts in society and these conflicts are partly resolved by the political parties after the pressure is imposed by pressure groups.

Political sociologists aims at achieving consensus out of conflicts, and thus preventing the stability of the social system from being distressed by conflicts of different sorts. They also believe that conflicts are not always harmful to the democratic political system as well as to the social structure. In fact, conflict safeguards the vigor of the democratic political system, political sociologists deem. Conflict is rooted in the social structure and is the result of uneven distribution of limited resources, only in favor of the elites. This uneven distribution of political power leads to the emergence of the elite rule. And this is the rule of elites that has been discussed at length by political sociologists. Political sociologists accept as true the notion that liberal democracy is the dynamic political system for the eradication of all sorts of conflicts as it adjusts with the political and social changes and thus avoids violent protest, revolutions and anarchism. As American scholars have contributed a lot in the development of political sociology, they have openly favored political power derived from rational-legal sources with a notion that political revolutions are a distant possibility.

4. Political Sociology and Political Institutions (The state), Authority and Elitism

Writing about the history of the development of social groups, prominent scholar Hob House has claimed that sympathy, cooperation, help and altruistic feelings are the basis of human society. In other words, social groups are constituted of the element, which brings human beings together. The social political groups are Kinship, authority, citizenship etc. And it is only on the basis of various social groups that the foundation of a state is laid. In fact, state is the complete form of various groups social, economic, cultural, political, cognitive etc. and the amalgamation of all these makes a state.

Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle had expressed the opinion that the state is the union of families and villages having for its ends a perfect and self-sufficing life. This is the definition presented by ancient Greek philosopher; the modern characteristics of a state are a definite geographical area, public, government, and Sovereignty. The combination of these four elements makes a state. There are various theories of state rights viz. Industrial state, military state, Ethical state etc. There are various theories of state rights viz. Individualism, Collectives, Pluralism, Totalitarianism, Anarchism, Welfare state etc. At the same time, there exist limits of state rights such as-Fundamental Rights, Rights due to social traditions, customs and conventions, rights of social organizations, international conditions and even

the constitution of the state. The modern state has many functions to be fulfilled, such as defense against foreign attack, maintenance of internal peace and security, protection of the rights of citizens, providing justice to all.

Modern state has other functions too, that are closely related to the society and culture. For example providing education to all falls under the functions of the modern state. State makes arrangements for primary, secondary as well as university level education for its citizens. Along with education, it is the duty of the state to provide health facilities to its citizens by making the provisions of hospitals, medicine, vaccination programmers etc. It is the mandatory duty of the modern states to make the provisions for the protection of the old, poor and invalid beyond arranging public welfare services, social, cultural and economic improvement by encouraging trade-industry and proper management of natural resources. Speaking honestly state's function has been aggrandized but the only theory, which can be universally acceptable, is that the state should function in a manner calculated to add to the welfare of the society and the public living there. It is at this juncture that the guidance of sociologist is needed for the better comprehension of the political issues that are intertwined with the culture and society and this task is accomplished by the discipline of Political Sociology.

Beyond accommodating the conveniences given by the state, the citizens of modern states too exercise special control on the state power holders. It is the people who rule through their representatives. They have the right to give or take away the power to govern by means of vote. But important through this power is, it is not the same as actually ruling the country year-by-year, decade-by-decade (Milliband, 1991). In this regards, John Scott has reviewed several theories of who rules "Britain". His own answer to this question is that no single class rules Britain but that the upper class dominates government. To maintain this dominance, however, it must work in coalition with other social groups forming a power bloc. Members of the power bloc may change according to circumstances.

Antonio Gramsci has criticized the capitalistic tradition of state in the Marxist tradition of challenge to capitalist political and ideological dominance. In it Gramsci has defended his influential concept of hegemony (Political/ideological dominance). In the recent years, the British Labour party has failed to break the stranglehold of Conservative Party's hegemony. Related to the concept of state and its facilities, Ralph Miliband prescribes the view that state can't solely preserve the rights of its citizens as the "New" social movement, particularly the women's movement and the Black liberation movement in USA paved the way for the demand of more rights and facilities from the state. It has been accepted by scholar Alberto Melucci that the new movements go beyond class politics and are harbingers of new politics for a new era. But Ralph Miliband (1991) disagrees with this logic and takes the view that only a class-based political movement can fundamentally change capitalist society and that to be an effective part of this transformation, the new social movements must work within this larger force.

The classic formulation of the concept of a ruling class, of course, comes from

Karl Marx. The orthodox Marxist position has maintained that the division of society into opposed social classes exploitation and oppression of the proletariat. Bourgeoisie and proletariat : the capitalist and the working classes are mutually antagonistic social groupings, and the working class can improve its relations only by building up its power bases outside the formal structures of society. The position of the bourgeoisie as a ruling class is reinforced by its dominance in the cultural spheres, which ensures that the prevailing ideas are mere ideological expressions of its interests and function to legitimize and obscure its power. Collective organizations, class-consciousness and political leaderships are the bases of working class power and will ensure the revolutionary overthrow of the rich Bourgeoisie capitalist class and the total transformation of the society into a classless society.

Political sociology portrays authority as a power to influence the behavior of other due to sanctions behind it. These sanctions make favorable changes in the individual influenced by power. But the point to be noted is that all types of powers are not valid. In the absence of validity, people do not recognize it nor do they surrender before it. Therefore, in order to maintain the use of power, it is not merely sufficient to be powerful but necessary to achieve rights for the use of power. Political sociology analyzes the basis of authority with a firm belief that the authority is based upon surrender by the individual due to certain reasons. The stability and influence of political power is due to its validity. Kumar (2001), quotes prominent political scientist, Robert Dahl, who articulates that "Belief that the structure, procedures, acts, decisions, policies, officials, or the leaders of the government possess the quality of 'rightness', propriety or moral goodness and should be accepted because of this quality irrespective of the specific content of particular act in question is what we mean by legitimacy". From the above expression it is clear that the basis of validity is peoples belief in authority. It is to be remembered that a power becomes authority only when it is valid. In this regard, it is to be conventional that the authority is the faculty of inducing assent and to follow an authority is a voluntary act, at the same time authority ends where voluntary assent ends.

The mainstream of research within the social classes has, however, rejected the clear-cut equation of economic and political power. Researchers have drawn heavily on the Italian and German theoretical traditions which have emphasized the analytical independence of the two sources of power and which introduced the concept of elite to understand the collective organization of political power. The Italian scholars, Wilfred Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, were the important figures in the Neo-Machiavellian tradition of political analysis that stressed the importance of political sovereignty as the essential bulwark (barricade) against social dislocation. Pareto and Mosca argued for the inevitability of minority rules. Mosca even used the phrase "ruling class" to refer to any politically dominant minority.

Wilfred Pareto being the brilliant exponent of "Elitist Tradition" of his time had attempted to base his ideas of the elite on natural inequalities. The "Pareto curve" widely used in economics, was an attempt to measure mathematically the distribution of innate skills and abilities. Wilfred Pareto had argued that such phenomenon, as

the distribution of wealth and property, would follow a similar curve. According to Pareto, those at the top end of each distribution could be regarded as elites of their respective areas, and at the same time there would be a close association between each of the hierarchies. He claimed that Political power should be found in the hands of the governing elites who used to take part in the various activities of the government in an actual sense.

5. Implications of Political Sociology


Political sociology is the brainchild of the marriage between political science and sociology as claimed by Kumar (2001) and it is because of the fact that social and cultural issues can't be solely characterized and solved by the parental qualities of political science. As a discipline political sociology starts with society and examines how it affects the state. It lays emphasis upon the social variables in explanation, that is, emphasizes social as the explanatory variable. Political sociology discusses the ills of the state and governance but with a focus on the social variables. It helps in understanding the political issues by seeking the assistance of social and cultural structures. Political sociology analyzes the entire social life related to the political system. Political sociologists argue that the state is just one of many political institutions, and the political institutions are one of many clusters of social institutions; that the relationship among these institutions and cluster of institutions is the subject of sociology in general, and that the relationship between political institutions and other institutions is the special area of political sociology .

The modern day politics is becoming vary complex and it is not vary easy to comprehend politics without having a clear-cut understanding of social and cultural complexities. At this juncture, it is the inter exchange of the knowledge between two disciplines political science and sociology, that will help in the better understanding of political and social ills and thus paving the way for a clean and fair governance and politics. Political Sociology is a social and cultural appraisal of politics as it holds the nation that man is not only a political animal, but a social animal as well, and his political actions and ambitions are manipulated by the social and cultural variables. This concept of political sociology helps in maintaining the balance between the society and politics. Political sociology helps in explaining the party system in politics but also the conditioning of the society by it. In case of Nepal, it can analyze Nepalese politics and its relationship with caste and stratification and may also enquire about the influence of politics on caste system and vice versa. In general, political sociology helps in resolving the opposition and conflict of state and society and treats them as independent. It gives due recognition to political explanatory variables and yet makes its own characterization of the term politics. The discipline of political sociology can contribute in resolving various sorts of conflicts occurring in the society due to the mismanagement of political and social resources. To conclude, it is to be acknowledged that political sociologists are both political cum social doctors supposed to look at the ills of both politics and society, using both political and sociological lens and thus looking for the therapy.

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