

## CHAPTER 1

# Sociology and Society

CBSE Class 11 · Sociology · Introducing  
Sociology · Chapter 1

CBSE · Sociology · Class 11

### WHAT THIS CHAPTER DOES

**A**

Explain the sociological imagination and tell a personal trouble apart from a public issue.

**B**

State clearly how sociology differs from everyday common sense.

Boards prep that builds confidence, not anxiety.

## TODAY'S MISSION

# Today's mission

- 1 Explain the sociological imagination and tell a personal trouble apart from a public issue.
- 2 State clearly how sociology differs from everyday common sense.
- 3 Describe the intellectual and material contexts in which sociology was born.
- 4 Name who coined 'sociology', when, and the four founding pioneers — and score 8/10 on this chapter.

## WHY THIS MATTERS

# Why this chapter matters

- 1 It is the conceptual foundation of the ENTIRE Sociology course — every later chapter assumes you can think 'sociologically'.
- 2 8-10 marks every annual paper, spread across 1-mark recall, 2-mark distinctions and 4-6 mark long answers.
- 3 It rewires how you see daily life — your jobs, your stresses, your choices are revealed as shaped by society and history, not just personal luck.

TOPIC

**A**

# The sociological perspective

## TOPIC

# What is the sociological perspective?

### SEEING THE GENERAL IN THE PARTICULAR

The sociological perspective is the habit of seeing the general social patterns at work in the particular life of an individual. Where common sense sees a single person making a free choice, the sociologist asks how that choice is shaped by the person's class, gender,

### BIOGRAPHY MEETS HISTORY

C. Wright Mills described the sociological perspective as the ability to grasp the intersection of 'biography' (an individual's personal life story) and 'history' (the larger social and historical forces of the age). Your personal experiences — the school you attend, the language

### QUESTIONING THE OBVIOUS

A defining feature of the sociological perspective is its refusal to take the 'obvious' for granted. Things that seem natural, eternal and inevitable — gender roles, the caste system, the idea that some jobs are 'men's work' — are revealed by sociology to be socially constructed, historically

### WHY IT IS POWERFUL

The sociological perspective is powerful because it lets us understand problems that no individual can see or solve alone. If you see only individuals, mass unemployment looks like millions of separate personal failures; the sociological perspective reveals it as one structural problem

TOPIC

**B**

# Personal troubles and public issues

## WORKED EXAMPLE

# Is it a personal trouble or a public issue? - The unemployment test

- 1 Take the fact: 'a person is unemployed'. Ask first — how many people, and what is the cause?
- 2 If ONE person is jobless in a city full of jobs, it may be a PERSONAL TROUBLE — lying within the individual and their immediate situation (skills, choices), solvable by personal effort.
- 3 If FACTORIES CLOSE and millions across the country lose work at once, it is a PUBLIC ISSUE — rooted in the STRUCTURE of the economy, affecting many, and unsolvable by any one person's effort.
- 4 Conclusion: the SAME fact can be a trouble or an issue depending on its SCALE and its CAUSE. The skill of the sociological imagination is knowing which lens applies — and seeing that big patterns hide behind 'personal' misfortunes.

**THEOREM · LOAD-BEARING RESULT**

# The Sociological Imagination (C. Wright Mills, 1959)

“ The sociological imagination is the capacity to see the connection between an individual's personal experience (biography) and the wider society and history (history) in which they live. It lets us turn personal troubles into public issues — and back again.

## STATEMENT

**PERSONAL TROUBLE:** a private matter lying within the individual and their immediate setting, addressable by personal effort. **PUBLIC ISSUE:** a matter rooted in the **STRUCTURE** of society,

## WHY THIS MATTERS

- It is the single most important idea in the chapter
- It explains the very purpose of sociology — to reveal that what feels purely personal is often shaped by social forces — and it is the most heavily examined concept, worth up to 6 marks.

## WATCH OUT FOR

**NOTE** Do not treat any fact as ALWAYS a trouble or ALWAYS an issue. The same fact (unemployment, divorce, illness) can be either, depending on its scale and social roots. And ALWAYS attribute the concept to C. Wright Mills.

**TRY IT · SOLVE BEFORE YOU PEEK**

A single student fails a test because they did not study. Thousands of students across a state fail because the schools had no teachers all year. Which is the personal trouble and which is the public issue?

**SOLUTION**

**ANSWER** The single student who did not study = a **PERSONAL TROUBLE** (within the individual, solvable by personal effort). Thousands failing due to a state-wide teacher shortage = a **PUBLIC ISSUE** (structural, affects many, solvable only by institutional / policy change). Same fact 'failing a test', two different lenses.

TOPIC

C

# The individual and society

## TOPIC

# Society is more than a collection of individuals

### MORE THAN THE SUM

A common-sense view holds that society is simply all the individuals in it added together — count the people and you have 'society'. Sociology rejects this. Society is the web of SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS, institutions, norms and shared values that connect people, and this web has properties that

### SOCIETY SHAPES THE INDIVIDUAL

From the moment of birth, society shapes who we become. The language we think in, the gender roles we are taught, the foods we find tasty, the gods we worship, the careers we imagine possible — all are learned from the society around us through the process of

### THE INDIVIDUAL SHAPES SOCIETY

The relationship runs both ways. While society shapes individuals, individuals also act, resist, innovate and, collectively, change society. Reformers, leaders, movements and ordinary people altering their everyday behaviour can transform norms over time — the abolition

### WHY THE BALANCE MATTERS

Holding both truths at once — society shapes us AND we shape society — is the mature sociological position, and CBSE answers are rewarded for capturing this balance rather than picking one side. An answer that says only 'society controls everyone' misses human

TOPIC

D

# Sociology and common sense

## TOPIC

# How sociology differs from common sense

### WHAT COMMON SENSE IS

Common-sense knowledge is the everyday, taken-for-granted understanding we use to get through life. It is **NATURALISTIC** (it treats social arrangements as natural and inevitable — 'it is natural for women to cook'), **INDIVIDUALISTIC** (it explains things by individual character

### WHAT MAKES SOCIOLOGY DIFFERENT

Sociological knowledge differs from common sense on several axes. It is **SYSTEMATIC** — it follows defined methods of investigation rather than casual observation. It is **EVIDENCE-BASED** — claims must be tested against data and can be proved wrong. It is **COMPARATIVE** — it

### SOCIOLOGY OVERTURNS COMMON SENSE

Sociology often contradicts what common sense holds obvious. The classic case is suicide: common sense treats it as the most private, individual act imaginable. Yet Emile Durkheim, studying suicide **RATES** across groups, showed that suicide is patterned by

### WHY THIS DISTINCTION IS EXAMINED

CBSE examines this distinction because it captures the entire justification for the discipline. If sociology were merely 'organised common sense', it would tell us nothing new. The whole point is that systematic, evidence-based, self-critical enquiry produces

TOPIC

**E**

# The birth of sociology — two contexts

## TOPIC

# The material forces that made sociology necessary

### INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Beginning in 18th-century Britain, the Industrial Revolution transformed how things were produced — from hand-work in homes and fields to machine-work in factories. It triggered massive URBANISATION as people migrated from villages to crowded industrial cities, created a new industrial working

### THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

The French Revolution of 1789 shattered the old feudal-monarchical order in the name of LIBERTY, EQUALITY and FRATERNITY. It demonstrated, dramatically, that society and its political order were not fixed by God or tradition but could be remade by human action. This raised pressing

### COLONIALISM AND CONTACT

European colonial expansion brought Europeans into sustained contact with societies across Asia, Africa and the Americas that were organised on utterly different principles. This forced thinkers to confront the sheer DIVERSITY of human social arrangements and

### WHY MATERIAL CONTEXT MATTERS

These material changes — industrialisation, revolution, colonial contact — together created a world in such rapid and visible flux that the inherited, taken-for-granted understanding of society broke down. When the social world is stable, people do not feel the need to study it

## TOPIC

# The intellectual ideas that made sociology possible

### THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The Enlightenment was an 18th-century intellectual movement that placed REASON, SCIENCE and the INDIVIDUAL at the centre of human thought, displacing faith, tradition and religious authority as the ultimate sources of truth. Enlightenment thinkers believed the world — including the

### THE PRESTIGE OF SCIENCE

By the 19th century the natural sciences — physics, chemistry, biology — had achieved spectacular success in explaining and predicting the physical world. Their methods of careful observation, measurement and the search for general laws carried enormous prestige. It was natural

### COMTE COINS 'SOCIOLOGY' (1838)

Auguste Comte, a French thinker, COINED the term 'sociology' in 1838. He had at first proposed the name 'social physics', reflecting his ambition to study society with the same precision as the physical sciences, before settling on 'sociology' (from Latin socius, companion, and Greek

### WHY BOTH CONTEXTS TOGETHER

Neither context alone explains sociology's birth. The material upheavals (industrial, revolutionary, colonial) supplied the PROBLEMS that demanded explanation; the intellectual climate (Enlightenment reason and the prestige of science) supplied the METHOD and the

TOPIC

**F**

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# Scope of sociology and the sister sciences

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## TOPIC

# Sociology and the other social sciences

### ECONOMICS & POLITICAL SCIENCE

Economics studies the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services, often in a narrow, specialised way using models of the rational individual. Political science studies the state, power, government and political institutions. Sociology overlaps with

### HISTORY

History and sociology are close kin — both study human society over time. The classic difference is one of emphasis: history traditionally focused on UNIQUE, particular events and individuals (a specific king, a specific war), while sociology looks for GENERAL patterns, structures and recurring social

### PSYCHOLOGY

Psychology studies the individual mind and behaviour — perception, emotion, motivation, personality. Sociology, by contrast, studies the GROUP, the social structure and the relationships between people. The two meet in SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY, which examines how individuals are shaped by

### ANTHROPOLOGY

Sociology and social anthropology are the most closely related of all — historically they shared concepts and methods. The traditional division of labour was that sociology studied modern, complex, large-scale societies (often urban and Western), while social anthropology studied small-scale 'simple' non-

## TOPIC

# The founders of sociology

### AUGUSTE COMTE (1798-1857)

The French thinker Auguste Comte is remembered as the man who COINED the term 'sociology' in 1838, having first proposed 'social physics'. He argued that society could and should be studied with the rigorous methods of the natural sciences, and that such

### KARL MARX (1818-1883)

Karl Marx, a German thinker, analysed modern capitalist society through the lens of CLASS and CONFLICT. He argued that society is fundamentally shaped by its economic system and the relations between classes — those who own the means of production and those who must sell their

### EMILE DURKHEIM (1858-1917)

The French sociologist Emile Durkheim worked to establish sociology as a rigorous, autonomous science with its own subject matter — 'social facts', the patterned forces of society that exist OUTSIDE the individual and constrain behaviour. His celebrated study of SUICIDE showed

### MAX WEBER (1864-1920)

The German sociologist Max Weber emphasised that to study society we must understand the MEANINGS and motives people attach to their actions — an approach he called 'interpretive' or verstehen (understanding). He studied how religious ideas, such as the Protestant ethic, shaped

TOPIC

# What sociology IS

## TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Sociology is the same as social work — sociologists go out and help the poor.
- ✓ **CORRECT** Sociology is an ACADEMIC, analytical discipline that STUDIES society systematically; social work is a PROFESSION that intervenes to help people. A sociologist explains WHY poverty exists and how it is structured; a social worker acts to relieve it. The two can inform each other, but they are not the same thing — confusing them is the single most common Class 11 error.

## TOPIC

# Sociology vs common sense

### TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Sociology is just organised common sense — it tells us what we already know.

✓ **CORRECT** Common sense is naturalistic, individual, taken-for-granted, and unverified; sociology is systematic, evidence-based, comparative, and self-critical. Sociology often OVERTURNS common sense — e.g. common sense says suicide is a purely private, individual act, but Durkheim showed suicide rates are patterned by social factors (religion, marriage, integration). Sociology questions what common sense assumes.

## TOPIC

# The individual and society

### TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Society is simply the sum of the individuals living in it — add up all the people and you have 'society'.

✓ **CORRECT** Society is MORE than a collection of individuals. It is the web of social relationships, institutions, norms and values that connect people and that exist BEFORE any one individual is born and PERSIST after they die. Society shapes the individual (language, gender roles, beliefs) as much as individuals make society — the relationship is two-way (Mills' 'biography and history').

## TOPIC

# Personal troubles vs public issues

### TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Unemployment is always a personal trouble — if one person is jobless it's their own fault.

✓ **CORRECT** Mills distinguishes the two by SCALE and CAUSE. One person jobless in a healthy economy may be a personal trouble (lies within the individual and their immediate setting). But when millions are jobless because factories have closed, it is a PUBLIC ISSUE rooted in the structure of the economy — no amount of individual effort by one person solves a structural problem. The same fact can be either, depending on its scale and social roots.

TOPIC

# The founder of sociology

## TRAP → TRUTH

× **MISTAKE** Karl Marx coined the term 'sociology' / founded the discipline.

✓ **CORRECT** Auguste COMTE coined the term 'sociology' in 1838 (originally proposing 'social physics'). Marx, Durkheim and Weber are founding PIONEERS who shaped the discipline, but Comte named it. Mixing up who coined the term is a frequent 1-mark loss.

TOPIC

# Why sociology emerged

## TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Sociology has always existed — humans have always thought about society.
- ✓ **CORRECT** Reflection on society is ancient, but sociology as a **SYSTEMATIC, SCIENTIFIC DISCIPLINE** emerged only in 19th-century Europe, born from a specific intellectual context (the Enlightenment's faith in reason and science) **AND** a specific material context (the Industrial Revolution, urbanisation, the French Revolution, and colonial expansion) that disrupted the old order and demanded a new way of understanding rapid social change.

## TOPIC

# Sociology and anthropology

### TRAP → TRUTH

- × **MISTAKE** Sociology and anthropology study completely different, unrelated things.
- ✓ **CORRECT** They are CLOSELY related and overlapping. Classically, sociology studied modern, complex, large-scale (often Western/urban) societies, while social anthropology studied small-scale, 'simple', non-literate societies through fieldwork. In contemporary practice these boundaries have blurred — both use similar concepts and methods, and Indian sociology in particular grew intertwined with social anthropology.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

# 5-6 mark question: 'Explain C. Wright Mills' concept of the sociological imagination.

## 1 DEFINE THE SOCIOLOGICAL IMAGINATION

2 m

Open with the definition: 'The sociological imagination, a term given by C. Wright Mills (1959), is the capacity to see the connection between an individual's personal life (biography) and the wider society and history in which they live. It lets us grasp that private experiences are shaped by large social and historical forces.' Name Mills explicitly — examiners look for the attribution.

## 2 DISTINGUISH PERSONAL TROUBLES FROM PUBLIC ISSUES

2 m

Draw the distinction precisely: 'A PERSONAL TROUBLE is a private matter that lies within the individual and their immediate surroundings, which the individual can address with personal effort. A PUBLIC ISSUE transcends the individual; it is rooted in the STRUCTURE of society and affects many people, so it can only be addressed by collective / institutional change.' Pairing the two in one sentence each scores cleanly.

## 3 APPLY WITH A WORKED EXAMPLE

2 m

Use the unemployment example (or a fresh one): 'If one person in a city of healthy employment is jobless, it may be a personal trouble — perhaps a question of their skills. But when factories close and millions across the country lose work, unemployment becomes a public issue rooted in the economy's structure — no individual effort can solve it; only economic policy can.' A second fresh example (exam stress, divorce) earns a presentation edge.

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

# 4-mark question: 'How does sociological knowledge differ from common-sense

## 1 CHARACTERISE COMMON SENSE

1 m

'Common-sense knowledge is naturalistic and individualistic — it is taken for granted, learned informally, rarely questioned, and assumed to be self-evident (e.g. "it is natural for women to do housework").' Frame it as unexamined, everyday belief.

## 2 CONTRAST WITH SOCIOLOGY ON AT LEAST THREE AXES

2 m

Lay out the contrasts cleanly: 'Sociology, by contrast, is (i) **SYSTEMATIC** — it follows defined methods of enquiry; (ii) **EVIDENCE-BASED** — claims are tested against data, not assumed; (iii) **SELF-CRITICAL** and **COMPARATIVE** — it questions its own assumptions and compares across societies and time.' Three sharp axes = full marks here.

## 3 CLINCH WITH AN EXAMPLE WHERE SOCIOLOGY OVERTURNS COMMON SENSE

1 m

'For instance, common sense treats suicide as a purely private act; Durkheim's study showed suicide **RATES** vary systematically with social integration (religion, marriage) — proving a "personal" act has social patterning. Sociology thus questions what common sense takes for granted.'

TOPPER TEMPLATE · MARK-BY-MARK

# 6-mark question: 'Describe the intellectual and material contexts that led to the emergence of

## 1 MATERIAL CONTEXT 3 m

'The MATERIAL context was the upheaval of 19th-century Europe: the INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION transformed production, drew people from villages into crowded, polluted cities (urbanisation), created a new industrial working class and harsh factory conditions; the FRENCH REVOLUTION (1789) overturned the old feudal-monarchical order with ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity; and COLONIALISM exposed Europeans to radically different societies. These disruptions made the old ways of understanding society inadequate.' Name all three drivers.

## 2 INTELLECTUAL CONTEXT 3 m

'The INTELLECTUAL context was the ENLIGHTENMENT — an 18th-century movement that placed REASON, SCIENCE and the individual at the centre of thought, replacing faith and tradition as the source of authority. The success of the natural sciences inspired thinkers to study society scientifically. From this emerged Auguste COMTE, who coined the term "sociology" in 1838 and argued society could be studied with the same rigour as the physical sciences (he first called it "social physics").'

## PYQ PATTERNS




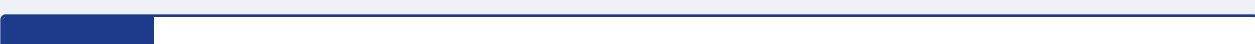



# Top PYQ patterns to drill

#1	Explain C. Wright Mills' concept of the 'sociological imagination' with an example distinguishing a personal trouble from a public issue. (4-6 marks)	Almost every SQP and annual paper
#2	How does sociology differ from common sense? Explain with examples. (4 marks)	Recurring
#3	Discuss the intellectual and material contexts in which sociology emerged as a discipline. (6 marks)	Recurring long-answer
#4	Examine the relationship between sociology and (economics / political science / history / psychology / anthropology). (4-6 marks)	Recurring
#5	Who coined the term 'sociology' and in which year? Name the four founding pioneers of the discipline. (1-2 marks)	Common 1-mark / 2-mark factual

## MARKS DISTRIBUTION

# 10-year marks distribution

### 10-YEAR PYQ MARKS DISTRIBUTION

Sociological imagination — personal troubles vs public issues		14%
Sociology vs common sense knowledge		12%
Intellectual context (Enlightenment / scientific rationality)		10%
Material context (Industrial Revolution / French Revolution / colonialism)		12%
Definition & scope of sociology + Comte 1838		10%
Relationship of sociology with other social sciences		14%
The pioneers — Comte, Durkheim, Marx, Weber		8%

RECAP · MEMORISE THESE

## 5-line revision

**1** Imagination — Sociological imagination (Mills, 1959) = link biography to history; tell a personal trouble (private, personal effort) from a public issue (structural, collective action).

**2** Vs common sense — Sociology is systematic, evidence-based, comparative and self-critical — and it overturns common sense (Durkheim showed even suicide is socially patterned).

**3** Two contexts — Sociology was born from the MATERIAL upheavals (Industrial Revolution, French Revolution, colonialism) and the INTELLECTUAL Enlightenment; Comte coined the word in 1838. Pioneers: Comte, Marx, Durkheim, Weber.

## WHAT'S NEXT

# What's next

- Chapter 2 — Terms, Concepts and their Use in Sociology (builds the precise vocabulary this chapter introduced).
- Sit the 15-MCQ Quick Drill (companion PDF) — under 20 minutes, target  $\geq 12/15$ .
- Then the full annual-pattern paper — a 30-mark school mini-paper with full model answers.

# You've learned to think like a sociologist.

Now prove it. Take the drill, sit the paper, master Chapter 1.

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