

CHALLENGES OF SOCIOLOGY IN IRAN (UPS AND DOWNS AND PERSPECTIVE OF EXIT)

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Abstract: Sociology like many of other sciences is based on methods of gaining and discovering reality, analyzing and evaluating its changes, and it is believed to be one of the newest university fields in Iran. Now, after passing 80 years of introducing this field in Iran, it still encounters many difficulties and inadequacies.

Sociology has not succeed in the ground of theory making and research methods regarding various problems of this country in social, cultural, political, economical, educational, scientific, legal, civic, and rural areas. It also has not gain achievement in recognizing and listing research preferences of different areas of sociology and supporting its studies and findings in order to solve Iranian society's problems.

Along with the formal sociology, informal sociology- mainly with ideological concerns- since 1940s on has sought to conform its theories and assumptions with the contemporary society of Iran by publishing different books and pamphlets, whether written in Persian or translated from the works of European writers.

In this article, we have studied ups and downs of sociology in pre- and post- years of Islamic Revolution in Iran.

Key words: Sociology, Challenges, Iran, Pre- Revolution, Post- Revolution

1. INTRODUCTION

As an academic field emerged in the context of renaissance during the 17th and 18th centuries and developed in the 19th and 20th, sociology has a long history full of ups and downs. Although the formal development of this field rates back to more than two centuries ago in the west, the quality of introducing and developing of this field in Iran has another story. Being based on some methods of acquiring and discovering the realities, analyzing and evaluating their changes, sociology is considered

to be one of the modern academic fields taught and practiced in Iranian academic society.

While the date of introducing sociology in Iran comes back to 80 years ago, still it faces many problems and inadequacies. Among these problems the following are more considerable: (1) Theoretical production is so low; in other words, there have not been so many theories to explain different problems of Iranian's various domains of sociology raised from organized social researches which are based on experiment or analysis. (2) Teachers and lecturers of sociology investigate no theoretical project while conducting research or supervising thesis of complementary post graduated students. (3) Similar to other scientific fields, we have not many independent researchers who can research on theoretical, analytical, or experimental issues without accepting orders from governmental entrepreneurs and organizations; as a result, we have a few, if any researchers who conduct researches based on their presuppositions. (4) Beyond everything else, there is no organic relationship between social and scientific researches in different areas of sociology and policy making, organizer, and administrative institutes in social and cultural affairs of Iran. (5) There are a few findings being able to study theoretical and ultra theoretical design in relation with different problems of the Iranian society. (6) There is a few if any academic or research association dedicated to sociology. The only available association encounters a lot of structural, planning, and budget problems and has got no clear and self-structured guidelines for conducting researches and promoting this field. Furthermore, this association relies on governmental and academic resources' financial and practical aids. (7) Besides, owing to the sensitivity of the studied topics, sociology tends to be subject to serious challenges with different institutes. So, it needs a guild to defend the rights of instructors and students in the case of occupational risks and unemployment. This gap is another shortage felt in sociology in Iran. (8) Training and graduating well-educated students of

sociology in different areas is not in accordance with the needs of work market, research requirements, and academic productions. So, our universities lack students at post-graduated or higher levels; however, most of the graduated students of this field are serving in occupations that have no relevance with their educations. (9) The procedures of teaching English language in formal education and university are so disordered that most of the graduated and even their lecturers are incapable of reading specialized texts in their own field. As a result, our researchers and practitioners study a few theories in original language and they can not succeed in identifying and scheduling priorities of research to solve Iranian society's numerous problems.

II. RESEARCH DESIGN AND ITS IMPORTANCE

This paper aims to deal with the history, role, and stance of sociology in Iran; it goes on to identify the ups and downs, fears and hopes, practitioners and scholars of sociology in Iran to go through the structural and historical reasons. The major questions this paper seeks to answer are as following: When was sociology introduced in Iran? Who did serve as the pioneers of introducing sociological attitudes and schools that made it common among people and challenged it with common sense? How are the quantity and quality of knowledge and analyzing socio-cultural issues among the practitioners in the developing phase of this field in Iran evaluated? Is there any other process called "informal sociology" except for the formal one which has been existing since Pahlavi's period till now in Iranian universities? What are the characteristics, aspects, and main thinkers of these two processes and by whom and how the amount of generalizing this field has been managed?

III. PERSPECTIVES OF CRISIS AND INEFFICIENCY OF SOCIOLOGY IN IRAN

Over the 80 years of emerging sociology in Iran it has got a lot of ups and downs and abundant with fears and panics, contradictory hopes and interwoven with internal and external challenges. It is obvious that sociology inside and outside of academic centers and generally out of government structure has developed noticeably. What is more that is supposed by all the thinkers of this field is that inefficiencies and structural shortages of this field come from the lack of institutionalizing this field in the higher education structure and social-intellectual fields.

Not having certain paradigms in realistic explanation and evaluation of nation's issues, lack of collective work in a structural thought or philosophy school-what we have seen in the collective opinions and ordered work in Frankfurt School-, lack of criticism accepting, lack of organizing relative findings of the

outside and inside university researchers, underdevelopment of the private sector in this field, dependency of the researches on the orders of governmental institutes and commercial organizations, and finally according to Huber Mass, "escaping from social responsibility and commitment" (2002 in Tehran) are just some samples of the problems this field encounters.

In this regard, a sociologist believes that "Crisis in Iran's sociology is far deeper than a crisis once "Goldner" had identified in the sociology of the West. Emphasis on parsonzian structural-functional tradition in Iran's sociology is just a minor sign of this crisis, not the whole of it." (Shahabi, 2007)

Taghi Azad Aarmaki has a two dimensional theory; from one hand he says: "I evaluate Iran's sociology as good; unlike some who have evaluated it as critical , in my opinion it is a cheerful field; it is really an interesting field sentimentally and mentally." (Azad Armaki, 2007) From other hand he believes that: "Instead of dealing with understanding the essential struggles, sociology serves to those who have not a correct understanding of social problems. It is why an administrative attitude has dominated on most sociologists." (Azad Armaki, 2007)

Methodological inefficiencies and methodological decreases are the structural challenges facing this field in Iran. As Mohammad Fazeli has wrote somewhere: "One can sum up Iranian sociology's methodological inefficiencies in four areas: 1. Having tendency to descriptive methods rather than explanative ones, 2. Not following scientific methods, 3. Methodological analysis, and 4. Insufficient arrangement at the time of conducting social researches." (Fazeli, 2006)

Mohammad Abdullahi, an active member of Iran Sociology association, too, points out that "The shortage of academic organization, lack of scientific management and dominance of centralism in curriculum, unsuitable system of selecting students, weakness in communications and interchanges among research and academic centers are the roots of inefficiencies in Iran's sociology." (Abdullahi, 2005)

Others have recount the followings as the structural challenges this field has encountered from its early days in Iran: unproblematic treatment, superficiality of Iranian sociologists' philosophical attitudes, escaping from history, having single-dimensional look on Iranian society, not institutionalization of theoretical and research traditions, lack of academic commitment, conservatism, and pragmatism. (Ismaili, 2007)

Now, for having a relative illustration of sociology evolution in Iran and answering the aforementioned questions, we have to depict a double period to

identify its developments. So, by creating two sectors- formal and informal- we are expected to create two periodical categories, too. The first period begins from the earlier of this solar century (14th century) that is coincident with 1930s, through the early years of Islamic Revolution. The second period includes the early years of Islamic Revolution to these days.

IV. PRE- ISLAMIC REVOLUTION PERIOD: IDEOLOGICAL SOCIOLOGY VICE VERSA FORMAL SOCIOLOGY

A review on the history of introducing sociological thoughts and attitudes in Iran indicates that there have been two main currents in sociology during contemporary period. In his eminent work " Sociological Theories" Hussein Adibi believes that Iranian sociology began its social and academic function in two forms of formal and informal. As the entrance of other appearances, symbols, and modern institutes to Iran in earlier days of the " Mashroote" (that is constitution), their basis were designed and developed during governmental modernist in Pahlavi II's reign, sociology also has entered Iran in two different phases.

It should be said that years before the entrance of formal sociology to Iran's universities and training students in this field, this field was brought to Iran by some critics and scholars outside formal political and educational system. The " Left Movement" is supposed to play the most important role in bringing to and developing this field in Iran. Besides, a current titled " Iran Communist Party", 53-membered group, and specially figures such as: Azad Armaki, Eskandari, and the like were among the individuals and movements that introduced then European sociological theories for analyzing Iran's social, political, and cultural problems in a simple language; it was while they had not been graduated in this field.

In accordance with Hussein Adibi we should point out that sociology, prior to Gholam Hussein Sedighi was introduced and dealt with Iran's problems. Published works in the 1940s, 50s, 60s, and late 70s with all of their ups and downs due to the pressures of governmental despotism and explosions of the sociological publications in the earlier years of the Revolution are considerable. If we consider their quantity and quality, we can claim that the informal sociology like its formal counterpart had academic productions, further access among the audiences to and familiarity with sociological attitudes. While having two independent bodies for developing, this field has had a supplementary feature. (Ahmadi, 2007)

According to the evidence, the process of sociology's introduction and development in the formal sector

and universities before the Revolution had governmental and order nature and obeyed arranged set of regulations in designing theories and analyzing social issues. As a result, this field dealt with designing critical social theories and specially confliction school and ideological (Marxist) theories and categories affected by them. By contrast, in the informal sociology, the noted theories were influenced by previous theories and unlike its formal counterpart, in this field so-called " agreement" theories were not common. Although they have some shortages, these two sectors have some compensator functions.

The informal sector of sociology in the 1940s through publishing books and pamphlets translated from prominent figures of sociology has sought to apply their theories in Iranian society. Whether wrong or right, academic or nonacademic, this process was undertaken by the leadership of left-wing (Marxist) thinkers, subordinates of Iran Communist Party, 53-membered Group, and Mass Party. It is why in this sector of sociology one can exemplify a lot of works instead of testing and coinciding theories with reality, have sought to coincide them with theories. It should be said that the dependency of informal sociology on the Left Movement was not exclusive to it. Most of the thought productions in Iran pass through a channel that the Marxist thought has created to challenge the structure of power and government and in his mind to make socialist modernism dominant over Iran. Literary works, history, mathematics, psychology, politics, arts, biology, theater, philosophy, logic, and sociology were strongly affected by this thought that was based on European and Russian Marxism.

From the early 1940s through the collapse of Pahlavi I's reign, European sociologists' thoughts began to be introduced in Iran. From late 1940s to the early 1970s, this current experienced an interregnum and went ahead with the least works in its political life, not in its social's. Most of the scholars in the mentioned fields have reflected this thought in their works while the decade following that period was a decade of relative activity and development for this field. In the 1960s, especially after the coup date of Mordad 28 and inhibiting political activities especially those of the Left-wing, the development of informal sociology encountered some suspensions. The appearance of scholars like "Dr. Aryanpoor" and later the emerging of Left-wing forces in the informal sociology and the presence of Dr. Shariati paved the ways for introducing different social-political opinions while facing some difficulties. In the 1960s and 70s the political atmosphere of sociological thoughts in Iran, as the main feature of informal sociology was touched with works of these scholars; even in the formal fields like universities and

research centers evidence of this dynamic current is obvious.

Unlike informal sector, formal one which appeared two decades later and trained students, with all of its facilities and huge budgets and freedom in designing its harmless and unchallenging theories has not made a considerable progress. The first lessons of sociology were designed by "Dr. Yahiya Mahdavi" which was taught under the name of "Civil Science". Most of the translated or written works in formal sociology were under the influence of agreement or order scholars in the functionalist or structuralist society. (Torabi, 2007) "The Letter of Social Science" with its active and noted figures and the Center of social Researchers in Tehran university as the first sociological research centers in Iran had provided some useful, and often customized neutral works which tried to reserve the status quo; of course more than that is not expected from such strangulated atmosphere. Translated works of Gorwitsch by Hassan Habibi, works of Kazed Vadiee, Ehsa Naraghi's, Rasekh's and researches of practitioners involved in formal sociology could keep the wandering soul of sociology alive in classes and academic circles.

The quantity of academic productions, including: sociological books, articles, and research reports in these two sectors prior to the Revolution indicates of informal sector's quantity lag and one-sidedness of these two sector's development regarding quality and variation of sociological theories introduced in them.

From other hand, the distinction between these two sectors is that informal sociology along with the informal one, in spite of one-sidedness, incomplete introduction of theories, and unreasonable coincidence of theories with Iran's evolutions and realities, and nonacademic discussions of some theories by scholars with different attitudes could make some successes.

V. POST- REVOLUTION PERIOD

Some years before the happening of the Islamic Revolution, mainly years 1979 to 1982 the situation was appropriate for discussing sociological and political opinions freely. The most works of sociology in formal sector during these years were published and were available for people. Sociological works of some figures such as: Tabari, Parham, Hamidi, Ravandi, Fashahi, Shahryari, Ashraf, Torabi, Aryanpoor, Kamrani, Fazaee, Mirfetroos, Adibi, and so on were introduced among scholars with various opinions; then , discussing and developing different schools of sociology- mainly, order and conflict- were among the most important published works. (Mahdi and Lahsaeizadeh, 1997) Among the scholars and the graduated from the European universities, especially from France ones, the works of some

figures like: Shareeati, Tavassoli, Haji Seyyed Javad, and Hassan Habibi are supposed to be the most effective works ever written.

By the occurrence of the Islamic Revolution, most of the sociologists related to Pahlavi regime were fired out from universities, so the situation was suitable for informal sociologists and also formal ones who did not find an appropriate situation to discuss their opinions. The scatter of the Soviet Union and socialist modernist pattern in the East Block provided further situations for deflating ideological and informal opinions from sociology. So, from the middle of the 1980s on the informal sector of sociology diminished and the formal sector survived strongly. Since early 1990s the process of sociology development in Iran experienced plenty of evolutions. Unfortunately, the present formal sociology in spite of all the considerable facilities it has got, we rarely observe any innovation. The major challenge of sociology, though falsely and superficially, is between two currents as the result of opinion conflict in Iran.

As we said in distinguishing the sociology of pre-Revolution period with post-Revolution one, according to the criterion of designing and developing theories and research methods for problems facing Iranian public society, we can identify some prominent groups: The first group includes the survivors and followers of neo-Marxism, confliction and critical theories that sometimes discuss their opinions in universities and academic centers; moreover, there are some scholars who have sought to discuss Iranian society's cultural and social issues and introduced tested theories across the Iranian society. The members of this group, having a Millizian sociological insight try to do their mission- whether academically or socially, in the society.

The second group, mainly called " professional and academic sociologists are those who are teaching social sciences without any certain bias, as a result they treat this field merely as a knowledge and occupational opportunity. The short review we presented in the analysis of Iran's sociological conditions is different from that of those sociologists who live outside Iran and with different political attitudes serve in different scientific or political activities. A great number of these sociologists are among the first generation of migrants. There are some other Iranian sociologists who are either included in the second generation of migrants who are still interested in Iran's issues, or a group who have graduated after the Revolution and settled in the European or Northern America countries. One of the main limitations facing these Iranian sociologists living outside is their distance from social realities and lack of access to an extensive experimental field

that can produce theories specific to Iran by having control over the related theories. (Mahdi and Lahsaeizadeh, 1997) Studying the performance of these sociologists requires having a close familiarity with their works that is beyond the concern of this paper.

VI. CONCLUSION

Finally, we can conclude that in spite of a relatively long history that sociology in Iran has- whether formal or informal- , due to different political, cultural, and social challenges and evolutions of this field in Iran, it has not succeeded in dealing with three main stages of social and cultural researches, that are: finding, identifying and then removing problem. As a result, at the heart of storing different sociological paradigms and perspectives, ranging from economics, politics, culture, social institutes, government, and family, it has not been able to make efforts in identifying phenomena and then analyzing them and suggesting solutions for them.

This problem is a crisis in Iran sociology that document centers and libraries of higher education centers are turned to prisons of research reports and owing to the absolute empiricism in the present sociology there are just piles of micro-range statistics, questionnaires and researches that we can not draw any theoretical or secondary analysis from them.

With respect to the major challenges presented in this paper's introduction, sociology in Iran lacks appropriate academic and social functions and stance for identifying and solving social problems from one hand, and introducing and developing research findings for accessing valid theories and validity in different areas of sociology. Above all, by more serious purposeful explorations in the dynamic mechanisms of sociology and its fields, especially its ability in finding and solving social problems, the modern societies and governments through applying this science in the social planning and engineering gain a deep experience and a suitable pattern for creating the structure of the society or use the extensive achievements of the developed societies that are really the founders of sociology.

The main duties ahead of sociology are as following: having accuracy and obsession in the principal of " defining and selecting the objectives", closer relationships between governmental and academic sociology with the developing field of non-governmental one, development of multidisciplinary researches, temptation in the system of planning academic or even school lessons, sensitivity to the destination of citizens especially lower classes in the macro/micro social planning, nonideological treatment with the scientific tradition of sociology,

creating plural insights- critical and unconcentrated-, enjoying the rich history of Iran, and more importantly organizing a few researches to inform about their findings and notifying the interested groups and especially governmental planners to include these findings in short or long-term social policies to undertake prevention or treatment procedures. This need is more obvious in the field of social affairs.

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