

CUET · SOCIOLOGY · CLASS XI · CODE 326

Sociology and Society

CUET unit: Introducing Sociology — Sociology and Society

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Snapshot

- Individual student choices (subject selection, gender expectations, family business pressure) are shaped by broader social structures — job market, socio-economic background, kinship. This is the **personal-vs-public** distinction that runs through the entire NCERT Class XI book.
- **C. Wright Mills's "sociological imagination"** is the conceptual bridge between "personal troubles of milieu" and "public issues of social structure"; the Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna-Gramin (2016) is a worked example.
- Sociology differs from philosophy, theology and common sense because it is a **scientific, empirical, rule-bound** study of society whose findings are open to checking by other practitioners (Berger 1963's "sociologist as spy" image).
- The **intellectual** triggers (Enlightenment, scientific evolutionism, Darwin, Comte) and **material** triggers (Industrial Revolution, capitalism, colonialism, slavery, indenture) gave birth to sociology in 19th-century Europe and shaped its arrival in India.
- The **scope of sociology** overlaps with economics, political science, history, psychology and social anthropology. M.N. Srinivas argued for a unique Indian merger of sociology with social anthropology.
- What defines sociology is not the topic studied but the **method** — sociology can study a shopkeeper-customer transaction, a tribal forest-rights agitation, or a transnational flexible-labour regime, provided it treats them as patterned social phenomena rather than individual quirks.

Detailed Notes

2.1 Core concepts

Although individual effort matters, it does not by itself decide outcomes. The **job market**, the **socio-economic background of the family**, **gender expectations** and **kin obligations** all intervene long before personal choice produces a result (NCERT §I, p. 1). Sociology is the discipline that studies human society as an **interconnected whole** and shows how an apparently personal problem — choosing a subject in school — is simultaneously a **public issue**, a collective phenomenon affecting all students of a given class, gender and region (NCERT §I, p. 2).

The notion of "society" is itself problematic. A "good job" means different things in different societies; what counts as one's **"relevant society"** — the neighbourhood, the religious community, the caste, the tribe, the nation — is itself a sociological question, because an individual today belongs to **more than one society at once** (NCERT §I, p. 2). **C. Wright Mills's sociological imagination** is the capacity to grasp **history and biography and the relations between the two within society**. Its hallmark distinction, quoted verbatim from Mills (1959), is between **"the personal troubles of the milieu"** and **"the public issues of social structure"** (NCERT §II, p. 3). Mills gives students a tool to **see** that the homelessness of a couple sleeping on a Delhi pavement is not just their misfortune; it becomes a public issue once society treats housing as a collective responsibility — which is exactly what the **Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojna-Gramin** (operationalised in 2016 under the Ministry of Rural Development) does (NCERT §II, p. 3).

Society contains **pluralities and inequalities**. Satyajit Ray's reflections on the village versus the city, James Freeman's ethnographic account of the Dalit "Muli" forced to sit on the dusty road outside a tea shop, and Amartya Sen's catalogue of inequalities — wealth, education, opportunity, treatment by the police — all show that society is never one undifferentiated mass but a layered structure of **diversity and stratification** (NCERT §III, pp. 4-5). Sociology is defined as the **study of human social life, groups and societies**; its subject matter is "our own behaviour as social beings" (NCERT §IV, p. 6). This contrasts with philosophy and theology (which **prescribe** norms — what society **ought** to be) and with **common sense** (which is unreflective and does not question its own origins). Sociology is bound by **scientific canons of procedure** and its claims must be such that other sociologists can check them; Peter Berger's image of the **"sociologist as a spy"** drives home that sociological reporting must be bias-free, however uncomfortable the findings (NCERT §IV, p. 7).

Poverty is a worked example. **Common-sense explanations** are typically **naturalistic** ("the poor are poor because they are afraid of work, have low intelligence, or come from problem families") or **individualistic** (they made bad choices). A **sociological explanation**, drawing on Jayaram (1987), locates the cause in the **structure of inequality in class society** — chronic irregularity of work, low wages, lack of assets, generations of caste-linked exclusion (NCERT §V, pp. 7-8). The "Unsuspected Connections?" box on p. 8 reinforces this with the example of widows of Kargil soldiers being **forcibly married to their dead husband's younger brother (dewar)** so that compensation money does not leave the patrilineal family — an "unintended consequence" of a state measure that only a sociological lens can decode.

Sociology arose in 19th-century Europe under the joint pressure of **scientific theories of natural evolution** and the **descriptive accounts** of travellers and colonial administrators about "exotic" non-Western societies. Early sociologists Auguste Comte, Karl Marx and Herbert Spencer tried to **classify societies** into hunter-gatherers, pastoral, agrarian and industrial stages (NCERT §VI, p. 9). Two intellectual triggers stand out. First, the **Enlightenment** (late 17th–18th century Europe) emphasised **reason and**

individualism, applied natural-science methods to human affairs, and **reframed poverty from a "natural phenomenon" to a "social problem"**; the **social survey** emerged as one of its signature methods (NCERT §VI, pp. 9-10). Second, **Auguste Comte (1789-1857)**, a French scholar, is **the founder of sociology** — a fact CUET routinely tests (NCERT §VI, p. 10).

The **material** trigger was the **Industrial Revolution** based on **capitalism**, with England as its early centre. Capitalism brought a cluster of new attitudes — the **rational, calculated pursuit of profit**, the conversion of goods, services and even **labour itself into commodities**, and a degradation of work as it was torn out of the guild, the village and the family and re-attached to the factory floor (NCERT §VII, pp. 10-11). Smoky, slum-filled industrial cities followed. A favourite CUET trap is that **clock-time** became a new basis of social organisation: factory work began punctually, kept a steady pace and ran for set hours; time was no longer "passed" but "spent" (NCERT §VII, p. 13).

Sociology's European birth is directly relevant to India because Indian modernity arrived through **British capitalism and colonialism**. In England urbanisation rose from **20% in 1810 to 80% in 1910**, while in India the same period saw **ruined handicraftsmen falling back into agriculture** because British machine-made goods flooded the colonial market (NCERT §VIII, pp. 13-14, citing Desai 1975). Globally, capitalism's transformation was **uneven and brutal** — 24 million enslaved Africans were transported (of whom only 11 million survived), and after 1800 Indian indentured labour was shipped to Surinam, the West Indies and Fiji to staff British plantations (NCERT §VIII, p. 14). The sociology of India therefore could never simply imitate European sociology; it had to grapple with **colonial dislocation** from the start.

Indian sociology and social anthropology differ from the Western convention. In the West, sociology studies industrialised modern societies and social anthropology studies "simple", non-Western societies. M.N. Srinivas (1966) argued that this division **does not hold in India**, because in a country of India's diversity "'the other' can be encountered literally next door" — a tribal village, a peasant community, a slum and a stock-market may all sit within a few kilometres of each other. Indian social anthropology therefore moved beyond tribes to study peasants, classes and modern industrial society (NCERT §IX, pp. 14-15). The **scope of sociology** is broad: meaningful interactions (shopkeeper-customer, teacher-student), national issues (unemployment, caste conflict, tribal forest rights) and global processes (flexible labour, foreign universities). What defines sociology is **not what it studies but how** — it studies social patterns rather than individual idiosyncrasies (NCERT §X, p. 15).

Sociology sits among cognate disciplines as follows. **Economics** focuses narrowly on price, demand and supply; sociology embeds economic behaviour in norms, values and gender — Pierre **Bourdieu** calls for an "economics of happiness" that would count the costs of inactivity and precarious employment (NCERT §X, pp. 17-18). **Political Science** conventionally restricts itself to political theory and government administration; **political sociology** (Max Weber) instead studies actual political behaviour and the

social bases of political power (NCERT §X, p. 18). **History** has moved closer to sociology — social history now studies land relations, gender and customs rather than only kings and battles (NCERT §X, p. 19). **Psychology** studies the individual; **social psychology** bridges the individual and the group; **Durkheim's** classic study of suicide deliberately set aside individual intentions in favour of **social statistics** to show that even apparently personal acts have social patterning (NCERT §X, p. 19). **Social Anthropology** classically used long fieldwork and ethnography on simple, bounded societies; sociology used survey and quantitative methods on complex societies — but in India both have merged (NCERT §X, pp. 20-21).

2.2 Definitions to memorise

Term	Definition	Page
Capitalism	A system of economic enterprise based on market exchange; rests on private ownership of assets and means of production.	22
Dialectic	The existence or action of opposing social forces, e.g., between social constraint and individual will.	22
Empirical Investigation	A factual enquiry carried out in any given area of sociological study, against which theoretical generalisations are tested.	22
Feminist Theories	A sociological perspective that emphasises the centrality of gender in analysing the social world.	22
Social Constraint	The conditioning influence that the groups and societies of which we are a part exert on our behaviour.	22
Values	Ideas held by individuals or groups about what is desirable, proper, good or bad.	22
Sociological Imagination (Mills)	The capacity to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society.	3
Sociology	The study of human social life, groups and societies; its subject is our own behaviour as social beings.	6
Naturalistic explanation	A common-sense explanation that identifies "natural" reasons (laziness, low intelligence) for social behaviour.	7
Common sense	Unreflective everyday knowledge that does not question its own origins.	7
Industrial Revolution	Late 18th- and early 19th-century transformation of production based on factory manufacture, steam power and wage labour.	10
Commodity	A good, service or even labour treated as something to be bought and sold on the market under capitalism.	11
Clock-time	Industrial discipline of punctuality, steady pace and fixed working hours; "time is now money: it is not passed but spent".	13
Enlightenment		9

Term	Definition	Page
	Late 17th- and 18th-century European intellectual movement emphasising reason, individualism and the application of natural-science methods to human affairs.	
Social Survey	An Enlightenment-era method of systematically counting and describing social phenomena (e.g., poverty).	10
Bourgeoisie / Proletariat	Marx's pair — the owners of the means of production and the wage labourers.	22
Stratification	Structured inequality between groups in access to wealth, power and prestige.	4-5
Personal troubles	Private difficulties located in the individual's immediate milieu (Mills).	3
Public issues	Matters that transcend the individual and concern the structure of society (Mills).	3
Indenture	Bonded labour contract under which Indian workers were shipped after 1800 to Surinam, West Indies and Fiji to staff British plantations.	14
Social Anthropology (classical)	Discipline that traditionally used long fieldwork and ethnography on "simple" non-Western societies.	20-21
Political Sociology	The study of actual political behaviour and the social bases of power (associated with Max Weber).	18
Ethnography	Detailed first-hand descriptive account of a community produced through long fieldwork.	20-21

2.3 Diagrams / processes to remember

There are few formal diagrams but several **visual juxtapositions** that convert easily into exam stems. The **Poverty Table on p. 8** is the most testable: it sets two columns side by side — the **Naturalistic explanation** ("people are poor because they are afraid of work / they come from problem families / they have low intelligence") and the **Sociological explanation** ("poverty is caused by the structure of inequality in a class society... chronic irregularity of work and low wages", citing Jayaram 1987). Memorise the two columns as a paired contrast because CUET frequently asks which type of explanation a given quotation represents.

The second testable visual is the **British urbanisation comparison** in Activity 4 (p. 12) — **20% urban in 1810, 80% urban in 1910**. Expect questions that flip the dates (e.g., "60% in 1900") or that ask candidates to contrast this trajectory with colonial India, where deindustrialisation pushed ruined craftsmen back into agriculture. The third is the **C.I.D. (1956) Hindi film song box on p. 12** — "Aye dil hai mushkil jeena yahan... yeh hai Bombay meri jaan" — used as a sociological text on industrial-city life, alienation

and crime; CUET often asks students to identify the analytic point illustrated by a song or film fragment.

Other **visuals worth memorising**: the **homeless couple photograph on p. 3** (linked to PMAY-Gramin), the **"working class neighbourhoods to slum localities" image on p. 11** (industrial city formation), and the **tea pickers in Assam on p. 20** (linked to Santhal migration and British tea cultivation in Assam — a recurring CUET case). The "Unsuspected Connections?" box on p. 8 (Kargil widow remarriage) is a **process** rather than a diagram, and is the canonical example of **unintended consequences of state action**. The **discipline-overlap map** in §X (pp. 17-21) — sociology in relation to economics, political science, history, psychology and social anthropology — should be drawn out as a mental star-diagram with sociology at the centre.

2.4 Common confusions / NTA trap points

- **"Founder of sociology" — Auguste Comte** (French, 1789-1857). NTA distracts with Marx, Spencer or Durkheim, all early sociologists but NOT the founder.
- **Mills's distinction** — "personal troubles of the **milieu**" vs "public issues of **social structure**". Students often swap "milieu" and "structure". CUET 2024 used this exact phrasing as a fill-in.
- **Sociology vs Social Anthropology** — Western convention treats them as separate (industrial vs simple societies); but **in India**, per M.N. Srinivas, no rigid divide exists. NTA likes the qualifier "in India".
- **Naturalistic vs Sociological** explanation of poverty — naturalistic blames the individual ("lazy", "low intelligence"); sociological blames the **structure** ("class inequality", "low wages").
- **PMAY-Gramin** date (**2016**) and ministry (**Ministry of Rural Development**) are concrete NCERT facts — examiners use "year + ministry" combinations as stems.
- **Britain's urbanisation jump — 20% (1810) → 80% (1910)**. NTA flips dates (1800/1900) or percentages (30%/70%).
- **Durkheim's suicide study** left out **individual intentions** in favour of **social statistics** — a classic trap pair confused with Freud's individualistic reading.
- **Bourdieu's "economics of happiness"** vs Sen's "inequality catalogue" — both appear; do not attribute one to the other.
- **Slavery vs Indenture** — 24 million Africans enslaved (11 million survived); Indian **indentured** labour after 1800 went to Surinam, West Indies, Fiji. Numbers and destinations are favourite traps.
- **Comte's nationality** — French, not German.
- **Clock-time** is associated with **factory discipline**, not with the Enlightenment per se — a stem may mis-pair them.
- **"Berger's sociologist as a spy"** — the image is Peter Berger's (1963), not Mills's; confusion between Mills and Berger is common.

2.5 Thinkers / Theories

Name	Theory / Concept	Key Idea	NCERT page
Auguste Comte	Founder of sociology; positivism	Society can be studied with the methods of natural science; classified societies into stages	9–10
Karl Marx	Class analysis; capitalism	Capitalism rests on a class division between bourgeoisie (owners) and proletariat (wage labour); production shapes social life	9–11
Herbert Spencer	Social evolutionism	Societies evolve from simple to complex forms, parallel to biological evolution	9
Emile Durkheim	Social facts; suicide study	Even apparently individual acts (suicide) are patterned by social statistics, not individual intentions	19
Max Weber	Political sociology	Studies actual political behaviour and the social bases of power, going beyond formal institutions	18
C. Wright Mills	Sociological imagination	Capacity to grasp history and biography; distinction between personal troubles of milieu and public issues of social structure	3
Peter Berger	"Sociologist as a spy"	The sociologist must report society without bias, like a spy reporting back faithfully	7
M.N. Srinivas	India's "other next door"	In India the conventional divide between sociology and social anthropology breaks down because "the other" is found locally	15
Pierre Bourdieu	Economics of happiness	Economic analysis must count the costs of inactivity and precarious employment, not only price and supply	18
Amartya Sen	Catalogue of inequalities	Inequalities cover wealth, education, opportunity and even treatment by police	5
A.R. Desai	Colonial deindustrialisation	British machine-made goods ruined Indian handicraftsmen, who fell back on agriculture	13–14
James Freeman	Ethnography of "Muli"	A Dalit man's exclusion from a tea shop illustrates everyday caste stratification	4
Satyajit Ray	Village–city reflections	Cited for sociological reflection on rural–urban distinction	4
Jayaram	Sociological reading of poverty	Poverty rooted in chronic irregularity of work and low wages within class society	8

Practice MCQs

PYQ Alignment

This is the **opening** chapter of the Class XI sociology book and historically supplies 4–6 CUET MCQs each year. The 2023–25 papers have repeatedly tested Mills's sociological imagination, Comte as founder, Durkheim's use of statistics in the suicide study, the naturalistic-vs-sociological explanation of poverty, and the India-specific merger of sociology with social anthropology. Expect direct factual recall (founder, definitions from the glossary), one statement-based question on Mills, and one case/example-based item drawn from the boxes (PMAY-Gramin, Kargil widows, C.I.D. 1956 song, British urbanisation figures). For consolidated practice see </pyq/sociology> on UniDrill.

CUET 2024 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.1 (CUET 2024) Which of the following Sociologists argued that Sociology helps in understanding the links and connections between "personal troubles" and "social issues"?

- A) Durkheim B) C.W. Mills C) Bourdieu D) Weber **Tests:** Mills's sociological imagination — links personal biography to public issues. **Answer:** Not in extracted key

CUET 2023 — Actual PYQs from this chapter

Q.1 (CUET 2023) Wright Mills is a well-known:

- A) French sociologist B) German sociologist C) American sociologist D) British sociologist **Tests:** Identity of C. Wright Mills, author of **The Sociological Imagination**. **Answer:** Not in extracted key