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10.0 OBJECTIVES

Human beings have always lived in societies, and as members of their societies, they have pondered about their nature. This is like saying that human beings have their own bodies and they always had some idea of the organism. The knowledge about different parts of the body, its anatomy, and its working or physiology developed as a special discipline much later. Thus scientific knowledge about our body and other things around us developed along with new methods of acquiring the same. This method began to be called the scientific method. Now we try to get knowledge about society, its working, its modifications and changes through a scientific method. In bringing scientific approach to the study of society, Durkheim played an important part. So we try to know what he did and how he did it. When you study this unit, you will be able to

- locate the characteristics of science
- identify the bases for defining social facts
- point out how sociology is different from some other subjects of study
- describe the types of society
- classify social facts
- list the rules of observation of social facts
- identify the rules for explaining facts.

10.1 INTRODUCTION

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) is best remembered for his efforts in making sociology accepted as an autonomous academic discipline. He won recognition for the idea of a science of society, which could contribute to the study of moral and intellectual problems of modern society. While discussing Durkheim’s conception of Sociology we shall focus on three important aspects (a) general conditions for establishment of **social science** (b) sociology as a study of ‘social facts’ and (c) the sociological method.

10.2 GENERAL CONDITIONS FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

Sociology was just emerging as a distinctive discipline in Durkheim’s lifetime. To the vast majority of educated people including scholars in the universities, sociology was just a name. When Durkheim was a student at the Ecole Normale there was not a single professorship in sociology in France! It was only in 1887 that the first chair in social science was created for Durkheim by the French Government at the University of Bordeaux. It was many years later that he received the title of Professor of Sociology at Sorbonne in Paris.

Given the existing situation, Durkheim was explicitly concerned with outlining the nature and scope of Sociology. Durkheim considered social sciences to be distinct from natural sciences because social sciences dealt with human relationships. However the method used in the natural sciences could be used in the social sciences as well. He was concerned with examining the nature of Sociology as a social science distinct from Philosophy and Psychology. Philosophy is concerned with ideas and conceptions whereas science is concerned with objective realities. Philosophy is the source from where all sciences have emerged (see figure 10.1).

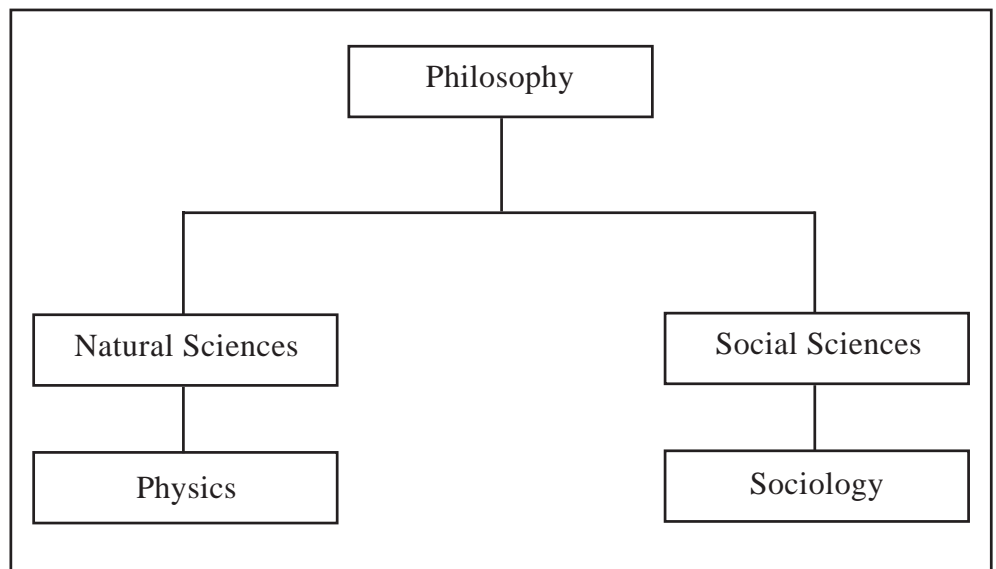


Fig 10.1: Philosophy as a source of all sciences

In his book *Montesquieu and Rousseau*, published in 1892, Durkheim (1960: 3-13) laid down the general conditions for the establishment of a social science (which also apply to Sociology). Let us look at them.

- i) Science, he pointed out, is not coextensive with human knowledge or thought. Not every type of question the mind can formulate can be tested by science. It is possible for something to be the object of the philosopher or artist and not necessarily the stuff of science at all. Thus, science deals with a specified, area — or a subject matter of its own, not with total knowledge.
- ii) Science must have a definite field to explore. Science is concerned with things, objective realities. For social science to exist it must have a definite subject matter. Philosophers, Durkheim points out, have been aware of ‘things’ called laws, traditions, religion and so on, but the reality of these was in a large measure dissolved by their insistence on dealing with these as manifestations of human will. Inquiry was thus concentrated on the internal will rather than upon external bodies of data. So it is important to look things as they appear in this world.
- iii) Science does not describe individuals but types or classes of subject matter. If human societies be classified then they help us in arriving at general rules and discover regularities of behaviour.
- iv) Social science, which classifies the various human societies, describes the normal form of social life in each type of society, for the simple reason that it describes the type itself; whatever pertains to the type is normal and whatever is normal is healthy.
- v) The subject matter, of a science yields general principles or ‘laws’. If societies were not subject to regularities, no social science would be possible. Durkheim further points out that since the principle that all the phenomena of the universe are closely interrelated has been found to be true in the other domains of nature, it is also valid for human societies, which are a part of nature. In putting forth the idea that there is a continuity of the natural and social worlds, Durkheim has been strongly influenced by Comte.
- vi) Although there is continuity between the natural and social worlds, the social is as distinctive and autonomous a sphere of subject matter as either the biological or the physical.

Durkheim was very much against the view held by some scholars that everything in society should be reduced to human volition. Categories of human will and volition, he points out, belong to psychology not social science. If social science is really to exist, societies must be assumed to have a certain nature, which results from the nature and arrangement of the elements composing them.

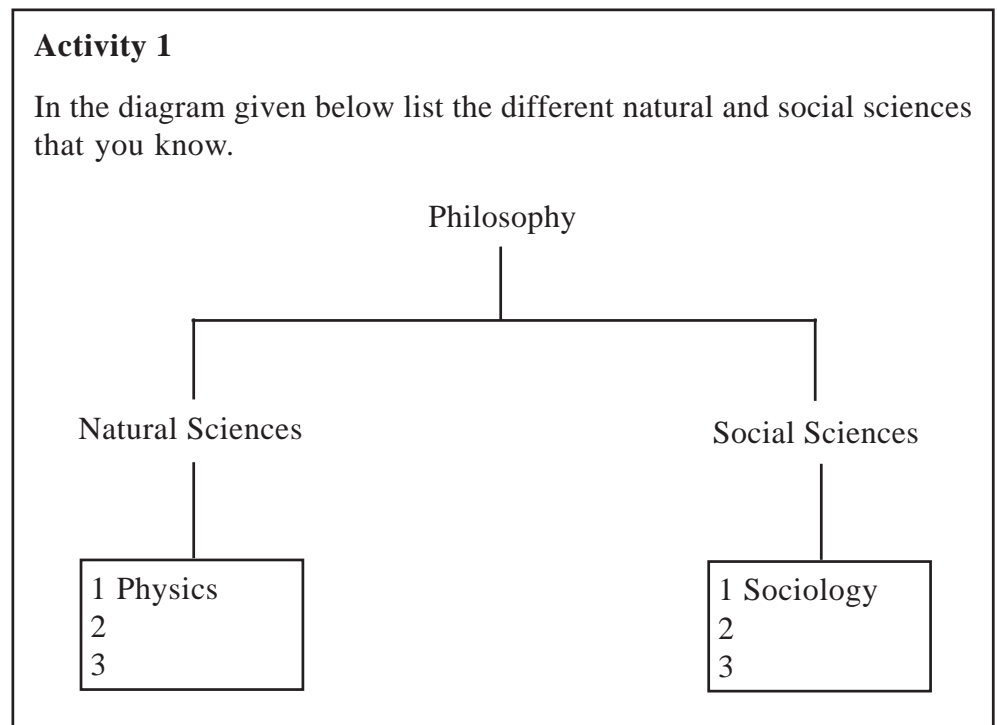
- vii) Finally, to discern the uniformities, types and laws of society we need a method. The methods of science applicable in the field of the natural sciences are valid within the social field.

The criteria of a social science which Durkheim set forth at the beginning of his first published work remained to the end of his life the fundamental

criteria of social science and the identifying attributes of the field he called ‘sociology’.

Activity 1

In the diagram given below list the different natural and social sciences that you know.



10.3 SOCIOLOGY AS A STUDY OF ‘SOCIAL FACTS’

In defining the subject matter of sociology two tasks are involved (a) defining the total field of study and (b) defining the sort of ‘thing’ which will be found in this field. In his book, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, published in 1895, Durkheim (1950: 3) is concerned with the second task and calls social facts the subject matter of sociology. Durkheim (1950: 3) defines social facts as “ways of acting, thinking and feeling, external to the individual, and endowed with a power of coercion by reason of which they control him”.

To Durkheim society is a reality **suigeneris** (see the meaning of this term in Key Words). Society comes into being by the association of individuals. Hence society represents a specific reality which has its own characteristics. This unique reality of society is separate from other realities studied by physical or biological sciences. Further, societal reality is apart from individuals and is over and above them. Thus the reality of society must be the subject matter of sociology. A scientific understanding of any social phenomenon must emerge from the ‘**collective**’ or associational characteristics manifest in the social structure of a society. While working towards this end, Durkheim developed and made use of a variety of sociological concepts. Collective representations is one of the leading concepts to be found in the social thought of Durkheim. Before learning about ‘collective representations’ (subject matter of Unit 12) it is necessary that you understand what Durkheim meant by ‘social facts’.

10.3.0 Social Facts

Durkheim based his scientific vision of sociology on the fundamental principle, i.e., the objective reality of social facts. Social fact is that way of acting, thinking or feeling etc., which is more or less general in a given society. Durkheim treated social facts as things. They are real and exist independent of the individual's will or desire. They are external to individuals and are capable of exerting constraint upon them. In other words they are coercive in nature. Further social facts exist in their own right. They are independent of individual manifestations. The true nature of social facts lies in the collective or associational characteristics inherent in society. Legal codes and customs, moral rules, religious beliefs and practices, language etc. are all social facts.

10.3.2 Types of Social Facts

Durkheim saw social facts as lying along a continuum. First, on one extreme are structural or morphological social phenomena. They make up the substratum of collective life. By this he meant the number and nature of elementary parts of which society is composed, the way in which the morphological constituents are arranged and the degree to which they are fused together. In this category of social facts are included the distribution of population over the surface of the territory, the forms of dwellings, nature of communication system etc.

Secondly, there are institutionalised forms of social facts. They are more or less general and widely spread in society. They represent the collective nature of the society as a whole. Under this category fall legal and moral rules, religious dogma and established beliefs and practices prevalent in a society.

Thirdly, there are social facts, which are not institutionalised. Such social facts have not yet acquired crystallised forms. They lie beyond the institutionalised **norms** of society. Also this category of social facts have not attained a total objective and independent existence comparable to the institutionalised ones.

Also their externality to and ascendancy over and above individuals is not yet complete. These social facts have been termed as social currents. For example, sporadic currents of opinion generated in specific situations; enthusiasm generated in a crowd; transitory outbreaks in an assembly of people; sense of indignity or pity aroused by specific incidents, etc.

All the above mentioned social facts form a continuum and constitute social milieu of society.

Further Durkheim made an important distinction in terms of normal and pathological social facts. A social fact is normal when it is generally encountered in a society of a certain type at a certain phase in its evolution. Every deviation from this standard is a pathological fact. For example, some degree of crime is inevitable in any society. Hence according to Durkheim crime to that extent is a normal fact. However, an extraordinary increase in the rate of crime is pathological. A general weakening in the moral condemnation of crime and certain type of economic crisis leading to anarchy in society are other examples of pathological facts.

10.3.2 Main Characteristics of Social Facts

In Durkheim's view sociology as an objective science must conform to the model of the other sciences. It posed two requirements: first the 'subject' of sociology must be specific. And it must be distinguished from the 'subjects' of all other sciences. Secondly the 'subject' of sociology must be such as to be observed and explained. Similar to the way in which facts are observed and explained in other sciences. For Durkheim this 'subject' of sociology is the social fact, and that social facts must be regarded as 'things'.

The main characteristics of social facts are (i) externality, (ii) constraint, (iii) independence, and (iv) generality.

Social facts, according to Durkheim, exist outside individual consciences. Their existence is external to the individuals. For example, domestic or civic or contractual obligations are defined externally to the individual in laws and customs. Religious beliefs and practices exist outside and prior to the individual. An individual takes birth in a society and leaves it after birth death, however social facts are already given in society and remain in existence irrespective of birth or death of an individual. For example language continues to function independently of any single individual.

The other characteristic of social fact is that it exercises a constraint on individuals. Social fact is recognized because it forces itself on the individual. For example, the institutions of law, education, beliefs etc. are already given to everyone from without. They are commanding and obligatory for all. There is constraint, when in a crowd, a feeling or thinking imposes itself on everyone. Such a phenomenon is typically social because its basis, its subject is the group as a whole and not one individual in particular.

A social fact is that which has more or less a general occurrence in a society. Also it is independent of the personal features of individuals or universal attributes of human nature. Examples are the beliefs, feelings and practices of the group taken collectively.

In sum, the social fact is specific. It is born of the association of individuals. It represents a collective content of social group or society. It differs in kind from what occurs in individual consciousness. Social facts can be subjected to categorisation and classification. Above all social facts form the subject matter of the science of sociology

Check Your Progress 1

The following are a few statements based on what you have learnt so far. Fill in the blanks with suitable words.

- i) Society is a mere sum of individuals. It is a system formed by the of individuals.
- ii) Society is a reality
- iii) In society there are legal codes, customs, moral rules, religious beliefs and ways of feeling, acting thinking etc. Durkheim called them

- iv) Durkheim treated social facts as
- v) Social facts are of the will or desire of individuals.
- vi) Social facts are to individuals. They are capable of exercising upon them.
- vii) There are normal social facts in society. Also there arefacts in society.

10.3.3 Externality and Constraint

We shall examine the criteria of 'externality' and 'constraint' in some detail.

- A) There are two related senses in which social facts are external to the individual.
 - i) First, every individual is born into an ongoing society, which already has a definite organisation or structure. There are values, norms, beliefs and practices which the individual finds readymade at birth and which he learns through the process of **socialisation**. Since these social phenomena exist prior to the individual and have an objective reality, they are external to the individual.
 - ii) Secondly, social facts are external to the individual in the sense that any one individual is only a single element within the totality of relationships, which constitutes a society.

These relationships are not the creation of any single individual, but are constituted by multiple interactions between individuals. To understand the relationship between the individuals and the society, Durkheim draws a parallel to the relationship between chemical elements and the substances, which are composed of combinations of them. According to Durkheim (1950: X), "whenever any elements combine and thereby produce, by the fact of their combination, new phenomena, it is plain that these new phenomena reside not in the original elements but in the totality formed by their union".

A living cell consists of mineral parts like atoms of hydrogen and oxygen; just as society is composed of individuals. Just the living beings are more important than their parts, the whole (society) is greater than the collection of parts (individuals). The whole (society) differs from individual manifestations of it. You must have seen quite often in daily life that there is a difference between individuals and the group, especially when demands are made by a group. Individually members may agree on a thing, but collectively they may not. In wider society, we find a number of rules of behaviour which "reside exclusively in the very society itself which produces them, and not in its parts, i.e. its members" (Durkheim 1950: x/vii-x/viii). In putting forward this criterion Durkheim wanted to show that social facts are distinct from individual or psychological facts. Therefore their study should be conducted in an autonomous discipline independent of Psychology, i.e. Sociology.

- B) The second criterion by which social facts are defined is the moral 'constraint' they exercise on the individual. When the individual attempts to resist social facts they assert themselves. The assertion may range from a mild ridicule to social isolation and moral and legal **sanction**. However, in most circumstances individuals conform to social facts and therefore do not consciously feel their constraining character. This conformity is not so much due to the fear of sanctions being applied as the acceptance of the legitimacy of the social facts (see Giddens 1971: 88).

Durkheim (1950: 4) concedes that to define the social in terms of constraint and coercion is to "risk shocking the zealous partisans of absolute individualism. It is generally accepted today, however, that most of our ideas and our tendencies are not developed by ourselves but have come to us from without. How can they become a part of us except by imposing themselves upon us?" Durkheim put forward his view to counter the utilitarian viewpoint, which was prevalent during his time, that society could be held together and there would be greatest happiness if each individual worked in his self-interest. Durkheim did not agree. Individual's interest and society's interest do not coincide. For social order, it was necessary for society to exercise some control or pressure over its members.

To confirm the coerciveness of social facts in their effects on individuals, Durkheim (1950: 6) looks at education's efforts "to impose on the child ways of seeing, feeling, and acting which he could not have arrived at spontaneously..... the aim of education is, precisely, the socialisation of human being; parents and teachers are merely the representatives and intermediaries of the social milieu which tends to fashion him in its own image".

Durkheim (1950: 7) adds that social facts cannot be defined merely by their universality. Thus a thought or movement repeated by all individuals is not thereby a social fact. What is important is the corporate or "collective aspects of the beliefs, tendencies and practices of a group that characterise truly social phenomena". What is more, these social phenomena are transmitted through the collective means of socialisation.

Thus social facts can be recognised because they are external to the individuals on the one hand, and are capable of exercising coercion over them on the other. Since they are external they are also general and because they are collective, they can be imposed on the individuals who form a given society.

Activity 2

Give some examples of social facts, which are external to individuals and can be defined in terms of constraint and coercion. How does an individual know about these? Write a one-page note on these questions and compare it with that of other students at your Study Centre.

10.4 THE SOCIOLOGICAL METHOD

Having defined the subject matter of sociology, Durkheim describes the method to study it. His sociological method rests firmly on the experience of biology, which had emerged by then as a science of living beings.

10.4.0 Rules for the Observation of Social Facts

The first rule that Durkheim (1950:14) gives us is: “consider social facts as things”. Social facts are real. However instead of being dealt with as things, as concrete realities worthy of direct attention and study, they have been dealt with by other writers in the light of concepts or notions. This is true of all sciences before they emerge as disciplines — thought and reflection precede science. The pre-scientific stage is broken by the introduction of the **empirical** method and not by conceptual discussion alone. This is perhaps even more important in social science than in natural science because there is a strong tendency to treat social facts as either lacking in substantive reality (as creations of the individual will) or, on the contrary, as already wholly known words like ‘democracy’, ‘socialism’ etc. are freely used as if they denoted precisely known facts, whereas actually “they awaken in us nothing but confused ideas, a tangle of vague impressions, prejudices and emotions” (Durkheim 1950: 22). To counter these tendencies, Durkheim said that social facts must be treated as ‘things’. As ‘things’ they have to be studied by the empirical method and not direct intuition; and also, they cannot be modified by a simple effort of the will.

While studying social facts as ‘things’ the following three rules have to be followed in order to be objective.

- i) All preconceptions must be eradicated. Sociologists must emancipate themselves from the common place ideas that dominate the mind of the layperson and adopt an emotionally neutral attitude towards what they set out to investigate.
- ii) Sociologists have to formulate the concepts precisely. At the outset of the research the sociologists are likely to have very little knowledge of the phenomenon in question. Therefore they must proceed by conceptualising their subject matter in terms of those properties which are external enough to be observed. Thus in Division of Labour the type of solidarity in a society can be perceived by looking at the type of law — repressive or restitutive, criminal or civil — which is dominant in the society.
- iii) When sociologists undertake the investigation of some order of social facts they must consider them from an aspect that is independent of their individual manifestations. The objectivity of social facts depends on their being separated from individual facts, which express them. Social facts provide a common standard for members of the society. Social facts exist in the form of legal rules, moral regulations, proverbs, social conventions, etc. It is these that sociologists must study to gain an understanding of social life.

Social facts are seen in “currents of opinion”, which vary according to time and place, impel certain groups either to more marriages, for example,

or to more suicides, or to a higher or lower birth rate, etc. These currents are plainly social facts. At first sight they seem inseparable from the forms they take in individual cases. But statistics furnish us with the means of isolating them. They are, in fact, represented with considerable exactness by the rates of births, marriages and suicides....” (Durkheim 1950: 7).

Social currents are theoretical variables, while statistical rates are the means of obtaining verification for propositions referring to these variables. Recognising the fact that social currents are not observable he insists that ‘devices of method’ must be introduced in order that empirical verification be made possible. It must be noted here that the case of the ‘suicide rates’ is the best example given by Durkheim of the way in which social facts can be studied.

10.4.1 Rules for Distinguishing between the Normal and the Pathological

Having given us rules for the observation of social facts, Durkheim makes a distinction between ‘normal’ and ‘pathological’ social facts. He considers these aspects important because, as he points out, the scientific study of human beings has been held back to a large degree by the tendency of many writers to consider as ‘pathological’ forms of behaviour, which were different from their own. But Durkheim (1950: 64) explains that the social fact is considered to be normal when it is understood in the context of the society in which it exists. He further adds that a social fact, which is ‘general’ to a given type of society, is ‘normal’ when it has utility for that societal type.

As an illustration he cites the case of crime. We consider crime as pathological. But Durkheim argues that though we may refer to crime as immoral because it flouts values we believe in from a scientific viewpoint it would be incorrect to call it abnormal. Firstly because crime is present not only in the majority of societies of one particular type but in all societies of all types. Secondly, if there were not occasional deviances or floutings of norms, there would be no change in human behaviour and equally important, no opportunities through which a society can either reaffirm the existing norms, or else reassess such behaviour and modify the norm itself. To show that crime is useful to the normal evolution of morality and law, Durkheim cites the case of Socrates, who according to Athenian law was a criminal, his crime being the independence of his thought. But his crime rendered a service to his country because it served to prepare a new morality and faith, which the Athenians needed. It also rendered a service to humanity in the sense that freedom of thought enjoyed by people in many countries today was made possible by people like him.

Durkheim was impressed by the way study of medicine had become scientific. The doctors study the normal working of the body and its pathological features. The study of both of these features helps one identify the nature of the body. He applied this method to study social facts. In his study of division of labour in society, he explained the normal features in the first two parts, and the abnormal features in the third part of the book. He considered crime and punishment both as normal.

How is a social fact normal? When the rate of crime exceeds what is more or less constant for a given social type, then it becomes an abnormal or pathological fact. Similarly, using the same criteria, suicide is a normal social fact (though it may be regarded as ‘wrong’ or ‘immoral’ because it goes against a set of values that makes preservation of life absolute). But the sudden rise in the suicide rate in western Europe during the nineteenth century was a cause for concern for Durkheim and one of the reasons why he decided to study this phenomenon.

10.4.2 Rules for the Classification of Social Types

There have been two opposing conceptions of collective life among scholars. Some historians hold that each society is unique and so we cannot compare societies. On the other hand philosophers hold that all societies belong to one species - the human species and it is from the general attributes of human nature that all social evolution flows.

Durkheim takes an intermediary position. He speaks of social species or social types. Though there is so much of diversity in social facts, it does not mean that they cannot be treated scientifically i.e. compared, classified and explained. If on the other hand, we speak of only one species we will be missing out in important qualitative differences and it will be impossible to draw them together.

Classification of societies into types is an important step towards explanation as problems and their explanations will differ for each type. It is also needed to decide whether a social fact is normal or abnormal, since a social fact is normal or abnormal only in relation to a given social type. Durkheim uses the term ‘social morphology’ for the classification of social types. The question is, how are social type constituted? The word “type” means the common characteristics of several units in a group e.g. “bachelors” and “married persons” belong to two types, and Durkheim was able to show that suicide rates are found more among the ‘bachelors’. Please do not apply this to individual cases.

We must study each particular society completely and then compare these to see the similarities and differences. Accordingly, we can classify them. Durkheim (1950: 78) asked, “Is it not the rule in science to rise to the general only after having observed the particular and that too in its entirety?” In order to know whether a fact is general throughout a species or social type, it is not necessary to observe all societies of this social type; only a few will suffice. According to Durkheim (1950: 80), “Even one well made observation will be enough in many cases, just as one well constructed experiment often suffices for the establishment of a law” (see Unit 11 on comparative method). Durkheim wants societies to be classified according to their degree of organisation, taking as a basis the ‘perfectly simple society’ or the ‘society of one segment’ like the ‘horde’. Hordes combine to form aggregates which one could call ‘simple **polysegmental**’. These combine to form polysegmental societies simply compounded’. A union of such societies would result in still more complex societies called ‘polysegmental societies doubly compounded’ and so on.

Within these types one will have to distinguish different varieties according to whether a complete fusion of the initial segments does or does not appear.

Regarding Durkheim's procedure of classifying societies into social species or types, John Rex examines the usefulness of this 'biological approach to sociological investigations'. He finds out cases where biological approaches would be useful in sociological investigations, and where it could become difficult. Cases of the first type are exercises in description, classification and formulation of average types. Difficulties occur in the use of biological approach to sociological investigations when history of societies becomes the subject matter of study. In such cases 'species' are discovered by authors out of the historical process; and a theory of evolution is therefore less helpful here (see Rex 1961: 14).

10.4.3 Rules for the Explanation of Social Facts

There are two approaches, which may be used in the explanation of social facts - the causal and the functional.

- i) **Why:** The former is concerned with explaining 'why' the social phenomenon in question exists. The latter involves establishing the "correspondence between the fact under consideration and the general needs of the social organism, and in what this correspondence consists" (Durkheim 1950: 95). The causes, which give rise to a given social fact, must be identified separately from whatever social functions it may fulfil. Normally, one would try to establish causes before specifying functions. This is because knowledge of the causes, which bring a phenomenon into being, can under certain circumstances allow us to derive some insight into its possible functions. Although 'cause' and 'function' have a separate character this does not prevent a reciprocal relation between the two and one can start either way. In fact Durkheim sees a sense in the beginning of his study of division of labour with functions in Part I and then coming to causes in Part II. Let us take an example of 'punishment' from the same work. Crime offends collective sentiments in a society, while the function of punishment is to maintain these sentiments at the same degree of intensity. If offences against them were not punished, the strength of the sentiments necessary for social unity would not be preserved. (It may be pointed out here that functionalism which was dominant in sociology, particularly in the USA in the 1940s and 50s owes a lot to Durkheim's conception of function; we shall come to this point in the last two blocks of the course).
- ii) **How:** Having distinguished between the two approaches to explain social facts, Durkheim's next concern is to determine the method by which they may be developed. The nature of social facts determines the method of explaining these facts. Since the subject matter of sociology has a social character, it is collective in nature, the explanation should also have a social character. Durkheim draws a sharp line between individual and society. Society is a separate reality from the individuals who compose it. It has its own characteristics. There exists a line between psychology and sociology. Any attempt to explain social facts directly in terms of individual characteristics or in terms of psychology would make the explanation false. Therefore in the case of causal explanation "the determining cause of a social fact should be sought among the social facts preceding it and not among the states

of the individual consciousness". In the case of functional explanation "the function of a social fact ought always to be sought in its relation to some social end" (Durkheim 1950: 110).

The final point about Durkheim's logic of explanation is his stress upon the comparative nature of social science. To show that a given fact is the cause of another "we have to compare cases in which they are simultaneously present or absent, to see if the variations they present in these different combinations of circumstances indicate that one depends on the other" (Durkheim 1950: 125).

Since sociologists normally do not conduct laboratory-controlled experiments but study reported facts or go to the field and observe social facts, which have been spontaneously produced, they use the method of indirect experiment or the comparative method.

Durkheim, following J.S. Mill's *System of Logic*, refers appreciatively to the 'method of concomitant variations' as the procedure of the comparative method. He calls it 'the instrument par excellence of sociological research'. For this method to be reliable, it is not necessary that all the variables differing from those which we are comparing to be strictly excluded. The mere parallel between the two phenomena found in a sufficient number and variety of cases is an evidence that a possible relationship exists between them. Its validity is due to the fact that the concomitant variations display the causal relationship not by coincidence but intrinsically. It shows them as mutually influencing each other in a continuous manner, at least so far as their quality is concerned. Constant concomitance, according to Durkheim, is a law in itself whatever may be the condition of the phenomena excluded from the comparison. When two phenomena vary directly with each other, this relationship must be accepted even when in certain cases, one of these phenomena should be present without the other. For it may be either that the cause has been prevented from producing its effect by the action of some contrary cause or that it is present but in a form different from the one previously observed. For example, if a plant receives direct sunlight it grows straight but when the same plant is given indirect sunlight it bends towards that light. This shows the concomitant variation of plant growth and its relation to sunlight. Of course we need to reexamine the facts but we must not abandon hastily the results of a methodically conducted demonstration.

Concomitant variation can be done at different levels - single society, several societies of the same species of social type, or several distinct social species. However to explain completely a social institution belonging to a given social species, one will have to compare its different forms not only among the societies belonging to that social type but in all preceding species as well. Thus to explain the present state of the family, marriage, property, etc. it would be necessary to know their origins and the elements of which these institutions are composed. This would require us to study this institution in earlier types of society from the time domestic organisation was in its most rudimentary form to its progressive development in different social species. "One cannot explain a social fact of any complexity except by following its complete development through all social species" (Durkheim 1950: 139). This would show us the separate elements

composing it since we could see the process of accretion. We would also be able to determine the conditions on which their formation depends.

The comparative method is the very framework of the science of society for Durkheim. According to Durkheim (1950: 139), “comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology; it is sociology itself, in-so-far as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to account for fact” (for a clarification of this method, see Unit 11 on Comparative Method).

Check Your Progress 2

- i) What rules have to be followed to observe social facts objectively? Answer in about eight lines.

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- ii) What are the two aspects of the explanation of social facts? Answer in about eight lines.

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10.5 LET US SUM UP

To sum up our discussion of Durkheim’s conception of sociology we may say that Durkheim clearly considered sociology to be an independent scientific discipline with its distinct subject matter. He distinguished it from psychology. He identified social facts, laid down rules for their observation and explanation. He stressed on social facts being explained through other social facts. For him explanation meant the study of functions and causes. The causes could be derived through the use of the comparative method.

He demonstrated the nature of these studies through the study of division of labour in different types of solidarities, of suicide-rates in different types of societies, and the study of Religion in a single type. His life and works are regarded as a sustained effort at laying the legitimate base of sociology as a discipline. Further, it follows the empiricist method, which is valid in the natural sciences, biology in particular, observation, classification and explanation through the help of 'laws' arrived by means of the comparative method.

10.6 KEY WORDS

Collective	A combined action, idea or norm formed by people interacting with each other.
Empirical	Use of observation and other testable methods for gathering data objectively.
Horde	Small band of people related through kinship ties. They are found among nomadic hunters and food gatherers.
Norm	It is a specific guide to action. It defines what is appropriate and acceptable behaviour in specific situations.
Polysegmental	More than one segment
Sanction	Reward or punishment to enforce norm. Former is called positive sanction, the latter negative sanction.
Socialisation	The process by which individuals learn the culture of their society
Social Science	In the context of this unit, social science refer to application of scientific method to the study of human relationships and the forms of organisation which enable people to live together in societies.
Sui generis	That which generates itself; that which exists by itself; that which does not depend upon some other being for its origin or existence. Durkheim considered society as sui generis. It is always present and has no point of origin.

10.7 FURTHER READING

Aron, R. 1967. *Main Currents in Sociological Thought*. Volume 2, Penguin Books: London.

Durkheim, E. 1950. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. (translated by S.A. Solovay and J.H. Mueller and (Ed) E. G. Catlin), The Free Press, of Glencoe: New York.

10.8 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) not, association
- ii) sui generis
- iii) social facts
- iv) things
- v) independent
- vi) external, constraint
- vii) constraint
- viii) pathological

Check Your Progress 2

- i) To study social facts objectively as things, Durkheim formulated the following three rules.
 - a) All preconceptions must be eradicated.
 - b) The subject matter of every sociological study should comprise a group of phenomena defined in advance by certain common external characteristics, and all phenomena so defined should be included within this group.
 - c) When the sociologist undertakes the investigation of some order of social facts he/she must try to consider them from an aspect that is independent of their individual manifestations.
- ii) The two approaches used in the explanation of social facts are causal and functional. Causal is concerned with explaining 'why' the social fact exists. Functional explains a social fact by showing the need of the society (social organism) that it fulfils. Both are required to give a complete explanation of a social fact. Logically causal explanation should come before functional explanation because under certain circumstances the cause gives us some insight into the possible functions. Though they are separate there is a reciprocal relationship between the two. For example, the existence of punishment (which is a social reaction) is due to the intensity of the collective sentiments, which the crime offends. The function of punishment is to maintain these sentiments at the same degree of intensity. If offences against them were not punished, the strength of the sentiments necessary for social stability would not be preserved.