**CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENTS**

**SINCE 1850 IN EUROPE**

**Major Intellectual Trends: Institutionalization of Disciplines - History, Sociology and Anthropology**

**Introduction:** In the 19th century, various disciplines came to be organized, marked by specific terminologies and taxonomies and distinctive forms of professional identification. Beginning with the new discipline of history in the 1840s, the human sciences which included history, sociology, anthropology and psychology, constituted themselves with the goal of studying and describing man in the various spheres of knowledge not covered by biological science. Regarding science as the highest achievement of the mind, many intellectuals sought to apply the scientific method to other areas of thought and from the outset the new disciplines claimed a scientific foundation. The belief that the study of humanity could attain the level of science was put forward by the jurist and philosopher Giambattista Vico (Italian philosopher, historian during the Enlightenment 17th & 18th centuries).

One of the most profound efforts to understand the cultural shift that brought about such an emphasis was made by Michel Foucault (French philosopher, historian, writer, political activist, literary critic) in his book – ‘The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences’. He examined the period in which human sciences emerged in archaeological or spatial terms - to try to show where the new disciplines fit in the new order of things and what role they played in the changed worldview that made their status possible. Foucault argued that the most important foundation of human sciences was a preoccupation with man that was neither inevitable in Western history nor destined to reign forever. According to Foucault, each of the human sciences developed its own set of objects and phenomena that constituted its reason for existence.

**Development of History as a discipline**

The 19th century saw the development of history as a scholarly discipline with its new found scientific approach and the gradual professionalization of its practitioners. The role history played in the consciousness of 19th century Europeans exerted a profound influence on a host of other disciplines. Many branches of the natural and life sciences also adopted historical modes of understanding: anthropology, biology, geology and physiology; each sought to explain present form as an outcome of past development.

The 19th century’s preoccupation with history was a consequence of the following-

The process of historicization or temporalization that started in the 18th century with the attempts of Enlightenment thinkers (John Locke, Baron de Montesque, Jean Jacques Rousseau. Voltaire) to divide mankind’s social and economic development into periods or stages and flourished in the ‘Age of Revolutions 1830-1848 when 2 philosophies arose-liberalism & conservatism’. The rapid changes that were ushered in showed the extent to which life was historically determined and prompted an interest in the past.

Rise of modern nationalism across Europe after 1789. History provided the means by which nationalists could construct or affirm the legitimacy of their nation.

Thus history was believed to provide a usable past not only to explain the present but also to mould the future.

The discipline of history emerged as one of the founding human sciences in the 1840s. According to Stephen Bann (Prof. of History, Cambridge), while there were historians before 1800, it is only after that date does it become possible and necessary to speak of the professional historian. It is generally agreed that this development owed much to historians at German universities where history was established as an independent subject. Although history had long been taught in European universities, it was invariably subordinated to the needs of other disciplines such as theology and law.

**German Scholarship**

Leopold von Ranke was the most influential German historian. His scientific empirical approach which required the historian to discriminate between primary and secondary sources, to immerse himself in the former and to interpret these documents critically but sympathetically with the aim of understanding how things actually happened, is invariably singled out as the crucial methodological innovation.

Ranke also assumed the nation state to be the essential organizing principle for the study of history which was perhaps a product of the 19th century fascination with nationalism and national unification efforts. The topics for historical research at the time were individual people, national groups and specific time periods. Ranke held that the twin keys to historical professionalism were emphasis on archival research and historical seminars, which in turn became fixtures for advanced historical study at leading universities throughout the world.

However, in terms of contemporary historical study, Ranke wasn’t presenting the past in all its aspects and placed exclusive emphasis on political and diplomatic history thus limiting the scope. Topics dealing with families, social life and customs, all of which had been written by ‘amateur’ historians of the 18th and early 19th centuries were excluded. Many of these amateurs had been women and excluding such topics from legitimate historical research had the effect of removing women from the historical profession altogether, whether that was the motive or not.

**French Scholarship**

Ranke’s French contemporary Augustin Thierry whose ‘History of Norman Conquest’ was published just months after Ranke’s work, also made extensive use of original documents.

France was home to some major figures of historical scholarship in the 19th century who wrote about the turbulent history of the time. Perhaps the greatest of all French historians was Jules Michelet. Unlike Ranke, Michelet did not concentrate on objectivity in his work and instead focused on the topics of his research. Michelet was inspired by the French Revolution of 1789, and it was one of the many topics he devoted his time and attention to.

Literature as a topic for historical study was the specialty of Hippolyte Adolphe Taine (French historian), who in sharp contrast to Michelet, sought to avoid emotionalism and speculation in his works. Taine wished to apply the principles of Positivism to the study of cultural history. James Winders (Irish political journalist & writer) points out that while the German historians led the way in establishing the distinct nature of the historical profession, in ways to be emulated in England and the United States, French historical scholarship remained closer to literary and philological fields.

**Primary Source Materials**

The eventual triumph of the Rankean method was predicated on a major change in the availability of source material.

Before the 19th century, archives were rare in Europe and most were barred to researchers until the middle years of the century although in France a number of archives had been opened in the wake of 1789. However, Belgium led the way in making its records more freely available in the 1830s. Many other countries followed suit in the 1850s and 60s, and for a new generation of historians the dusty archive became something of a sacred space.

One of the consequences of opening of the archives was to increase the bias in favour of political history. It released a mass of documentation which almost by definition envisaged history in its connection with the government. Thus the most popular of all forms of history in the 19th century was the multi-volume political narrative of a particular country or epoch. Although these included some of the longest works, the new scientific history remained accessible to a general leadership.

There was also the emergence of history’s first professional journals which boasted of stringent standards of methodological rigor and critical accuracy. Most of these journals were published under the auspices of national historical associations, which were founded throughout the 19th century and which helped to bind together the imagined community of historians. The development of history as a discipline is often cited as a major reason for the emergence of a new kind of historical consciousness in the early 19th century. However, it can be argued that the historiographical revolution was a byproduct rather than the effective cause of this unprecedented preoccupation with the past. Scientific history may have offered a fresh and compelling way of making sense of the past but so did the historical novels, paintings and museums of the period.

**Development of Sociology as a discipline**

Sociology or the science of society is the discipline that established the means of obtaining reliable knowledge about the working of human society and all aspects of human social experience. The term “sociology” was coined by Auguste Comte, who advocated the scientific study of society and was the intellectual heir of philosophers such as Condorcet and the Utopian Thinker-Saint Simon and thus sociology owes much to Enlightenment thought.

According to Comte, the sciences were arranged hierarchically, with mathematics as the foundation. Ascending the hierarchy, the succeeding sciences grew more complex and atop them all was sociology, queen of all the sciences in Comte’s view. Comte’s effort inspired many thinkers to collect and analyze critically all data pertaining to social phenomena. According to Winders, Comte was not the only sociological theorist to seek to borrow the growing prestige of science for the field of sociology. Herbert Spencer, one of the most popular 19th century sociologists, famously applied the Darwinian evolutionary theory to society. Spencer was the first to use the phrase ‘survival of the fittest’. He took an organic view of society, likening its operations to those of the natural world, both in static and evolutionary terms. His influence was so strong that many 19th century thinkers defined their ideas in relation to his.

Emile Durkheim, a pioneer in the science of sociology, declared his indebtedness to Comte and despite criticisms of Comte’s work, recommended it as an introduction to the study of sociology. Durkheim’s ideas proved to be useful for sociologists and a generation of French intellectuals. He approached sociology through a combination of philosophical speculation and empirical study and addressed specific social and cultural problems in his studies. Unlike the other sociologists of the time, Durkheim had reservations about the bright promise claimed for science and technology.

He described the threat to existing social structures and ethics and added a new concept called anomie to describe the sense of disorientation being produced by modern social existence, as traditional structures broke down without satisfying replacements. Although he did no fieldwork of his own, Durkheim was fascinated by ethnography and incorporated research on totemism and other traditional practices of aboriginal people.

The wide ranging researches and ideas of Max Weber were extremely important in the establishment of sociology as a discipline in Germany. Weber published his influential and controversial study – ‘The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism’ which marked an intervention in cultural history. Weber argued for a link between the rise of modern capitalism and the Protestant faith, which gave its blessings to the accumulation of wealth, as long as it was justified by a worldly asceticism. This became a founding text for the sociology of religion. Weber was concerned with ways to define the social phenomena that were coming in place of religion. He explained that bureaucracy along with a kind of abstracted rationalization were becoming the driving forces of modern society. Weber was interested in the traditional role of religion in society and tried to characterize what of social value was lost in the process of modernization.

German sociologist Ferdinand Tonnies, who didn't make as substantial a contribution as that of Durkheim and Weber, offered two terms to express this social loss that have remained influential in social and cultural studies. The term Tonnies proposed for an older, more organic human community based on solidarity and traditional patterns was Gemeinschaft. He argued that this was replaced by a new artificial form of social organization called Gesellscaft that was characterized by rational self-interest. Although Tonnies did not use the term, this concept complemented Durkheim’s notion of anomie.

 Thus sociology evolved as an academic response to the challenges of modernity, such as industrialization, urbanization and secularization and a perceived process of enveloping rationalization.

**Development of Anthropology as a discipline**

Anthropology studies humankind from a comparative perspective that emphasizes the diversity of human behavior and the importance of culture in explaining that diversity. The birth of anthropology was a gradual process and the discipline is a product, not merely of a series of singular thoughts but of wide ranging changes in European culture and society.

In the eighteenth century the first attempts were made at creating an anthropological science. An important early work was Giambattista Vico’s “The New Science” which was a synthesis of ethnography, history of religion, philosophy and natural science. Vico was an Italian pioneer, but it was in France that the first steps were taken towards the establishment of anthropology by a group of French intellectuals. These were the Encyclopaedists, led by Diderot and d’Alembert with the aim to collect, classify and systematise as much knowledge in order to further the advance of reason, progress and science.

James Winders stated that there were two main developments that provided the impetus for the new human science of anthropology in the beginning of the 19th century. Firstly, the discovery of fossilized remains of the early ancestors of modern Homo sapiens. Secondly, as the collection and study of these artifacts unfolded, the Europeans were intruding on the far corners of the earth where people they deemed inferior lived. The colonial conquest thus made possible encounters with living humans viewed through the lens of racial hierarchy leading to the second factor.

It was in this context that anthropology first emerged as an academic discipline. The anthropologist is a global researcher, dependent on detailed data about people all over the world. Now that this data had suddenly become available and anthropology could be established.

Although sociology and anthropology developed much in tandem, and it was hard to find a clear line of demarcation between them. This changed as fieldwork became a standard practice in anthropology. European incursions into territories where previously unobserved communities dwelled made possible field work that became obligatory.

While most major nineteenth-century sociologists were German or French, the leading anthropologists were based either in Britain (the greatest colonial power, with plentiful access to ‘others’) or the USA (where ‘the others’ were close at hand).

**Lewis Henry Morgan**

Lewis Henry Morgan, an American anthropologist was a pioneering figure and conducted extensive research on native North American people. Morgan had close contact with the people he studied and published detailed accounts of their culture and social life. In his work on kinship he devised a large-scale study of Native American kinship, and thus created the first typology of kinship systems. He formulated a theory and grounded it in years of study of kinship systems around the world.

In his magnum opus Ancient Society (1877), Morgan attempts a grand synthesis of all his work in which however he did not succeed. Even if his basic evolutionary scheme was accepted, the details were hazy. In fact, Morgan himself was conscious that his conclusions were often speculative, and critical of the quality of his data.

Morgan had considerable influence on later anthropology, particularly on kinship studies, but also on American cultural materialists and other evolutionist anthropologists in the twentieth century. When Marx discovered Morgan he and Friedrich Engels, attempted to integrate Morgan’s ideas in their own evolutionary theory. The unfinished results of this work were published by Engels in the Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State.

**Other Anthropologists during Morgan’s time**

An evolutionist idea that influenced Morgan, Engels and others, but has since been discarded, was the theory of original matriarchy. This was put forward by Johann Jakob Bachofen. Bachofen argued in favour of an evolutionary theory that moved from an initial stage of general promiscuity to the first organised form of social life –matriarchy. This idea, which implied that humanity progressed as female leaders were replaced by males, gained many followers, and was almost taken for granted by the next generation of anthropologists.

The only nineteenth-century anthropologist to rival Morgan in influence was Edward Burnett Tylor, a British archaeologist. Tylor developed a theory of cultural survivals. Survivals were cultural traits that had lost their original functions in society, but had continued, for no particular reason, to survive. Such traits were of crucial importance to the effort to reconstruct human evolution. Tylor advocated a comparative method, which allowed him to isolate survivals from the larger social system. He thus put forward the concept of culture which took into account the full range of human activity from the everyday to the most exalted expressions of art and ideas. This view of culture formed the basis for cultural anthropology. Though influential at the time, this method was abandoned by the next generation of anthropologists.

In the period, it was uncommon for the anthropologist himself to carry out field studies, althoughMorgan and Bastian were prominent exceptions. But the vast majority of anthropologists gathered their data through correspondence with colonial administrators, settlers, officers, and other ‘whites’ living in exotic places. Given the uneven quality of this data such studies were almost always full of the kind of speculation and would later be dismissed as conjectural history. But in spite of these shortcomings, the research on anthropology at the time was theoretically focused and empirically grounded to an extent that had never been seen before.

**20th century Anthropologists**

The discipline of anthropology as we know it today developed in the years around the First World War, and was pioneered by four outstanding individuals – Franz Boas, Bronislaw Malinowski, A.R. Radcliffe-Brown and Marcel Mauss. They agreed that evolutionism had failed but acknowledged the fact that the evolutionists, from Morgan to Tylor, established some of the basic parameters of the discipline. The transition to a modern, largely non-evolutionist social science occurred in different ways.

According to Franz Boas the chief task of the anthropologist consisted in collecting and systematizing data on particular cultures and only then could one embark on theoretical generalizations. Boas recognised that no individual could contribute equally to all parts of this subject and therefore advocated a ‘four-field approach’ that divided anthropology into linguistics, physical anthropology, archaeology and cultural anthropology. Students were trained in all four fields, later to specialise in one of them. Specialisation was therefore an integral part of American anthropology from its inception. Boas dominated American anthropology, but left no grand theory or monumental work that is read by succeeding generations of anthropologists.

British anthropologists placed fieldwork at the center of their disciplines and two of the most important early 20th century re-inventors of anthropology, were A R Radcliffe Brown and Bronislaw Malinowski. Radcliffe-Brown, who did fieldwork among the aboriginal tribes of western Australian argued for the need to use scientific means to study the collective consciousness of people and singled out kinship patterns as the key to understanding the mental world of the primitive people. Through a functional analysis, he tried to show that the scientific study of kinship could be the basis for a general science of society and he thus influenced many later anthropologists.

Between 1915 and 1918 Malinowski conducted a nearly 2 years long field study on the Trobriand Islands, off the coast of New Guinea. After the end of the war, he returned to Europe to write Argonauts of the Western Pacific possibly the single most revolutionary work in the history of anthropology. Malinowski invented a particular fieldwork method, which he called participant observation. The simple, but revolutionary, idea behind this method was to live with the people one studied, and learn to participate as far as possible in their lives and activities. For Malinowski, it was essential to stay long enough in the field to become thoroughly acquainted with the local way of life, and to be able to use the local vernacular as one’s working language. Malinowski’s ‘participant observation’ set a new standard for ethnographic research.

Marcel Mauss, the nephew of Emile Durkheim was a French sociologist and anthropologist. Mauss regarded his work as a continuation of Durkheim’s, and believed that society was an organically integrated whole, a ‘social organism’. Mauss, on this background, divided the study of anthropology into three levels: ethnography – the detailed study of customs, beliefs and social life; ethnology – the empirically based craft of regional comparison; and anthropology – the endeavour to generalise about humanity and society on the basis of the two former research efforts. Mauss never carried out fieldwork himself, but focused on methodological issues for his students who had to learn to become ethnographers before they learned to theorise. Mauss’s chief interest was in non-European and ‘archaic’ cultures. He sought to develop a comparative sociology based on detailed ethnographic descriptions of real societies and his project was closely related to that of Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown or Boas.