

Challenges of Sociology in Iran

(Ups And Downs and Perspective of Exit)

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Abstract

The sociology in Iran, as a scientific discipline, has been established in the academic and research centers around 70 years ago. This scientific discipline is continuing to produce knowledge and educating students despite many ups and downs during these seven decades. An overview to the history of developing of the sociology in Iran shows that it still facing with many challenges and serious crises although many books, articles have written or translated to Persian and many research projects have been conducted. In this article, through a historic perspective to the processes of development of the sociological schools affected by different ideological viewpoints from Marxism and Islamism; first, I try to define the main approaches of analyzing social problems according to these ideological viewpoints. The other aim of the article is studying the historical periods of formation and the development of various sociological approaches in this scientific discipline. In this process, I will analyze the development of sociology in two formal and informal sectors. Finally, I conclude that the sociology in Iran has many structural crises that will face many obstacles and difficulties for problematizing and resolving the socio/cultural issues without identifying the causes and consequences of these crises.

Keywords: Marxism, Islamism, Sociology, Ideology, Iran, formal and informal sociology

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, I 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, I 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 Ill-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 the lecturers of sociology are incapable of reading specialized texts in their own field. Therefore, a few theories have been actually understood by experts and researchers in this field.

(10) Finally, this discipline could not succeed in theorizing and planning research methods around problems of society of Iran in different fields of sociology such as social, cultural, political, economic, educational, scientific, legal, urban, rural and etc. both in the academic centers and non-academic ones, to identifying and scheduling priorities of research to solve Iranian society's numerous problems.

The main aim of this paper deals 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 have been 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 viewpoint called "informal sociology" except for the formal one which has been existed since Pahlavi's period till now in Iranian universities? What are the characteristics, schools, and main thinkers of these two viewpoints and by whom and which amounts of generalizing not vulgarizing this field has been managed?

To profile the transformations of the sociology and to answer the mentioned questions requires periodicalization and dichotomization which can explore these processes and important rolls of growth of the sociology in Iran. Therefore, through dichotomizing of the sociology to formal and informal, two different periods should be identified: first from the 1920s to Islamic revolution in 1979, and second from the revolution till now.

1. Pre-Islamic Revolution Period: Marxist 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 viewpoints in sociology during contemporary period. In his eminent work "Sociological Theories" Adibi H. and Ansari A. (1997) 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 institutions to Iran in earlier days of the "Mashroote" (that is constitutional movement), their basis Were designed and developed during governmental modernist in Pahlavi II's reign, sociology also has entered Iran in two different phases and trends.

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: Taghi Arani, Eskandari, and the like Were among the individuals and movements that introduced the 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.

Without any assessment of this process which resulted in misunderstanding of this discipline due to its dependency to the left movement in Iran, in accordance with Adibi and Ansari, I 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 I consider their quantity and quality, I 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 & Tayefi, 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 conflict school and

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 "consensus" 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 adjust their theories and hypothesizes 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 Tudeh 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 and arrestment and suppression of "53-membered Group", European sociologists' thoughts began to be introduced in Iran. From late 1940s to the early 1950s, 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 1950s, this school has been relatively grown. In the 1960s, especially after the coup date of Mordad 28 (against the government of Dr. Mosaddegh) and inhibiting political activities especially those of the Left-wing, the development of informal sociology encountered some suspensions. The appearance of scholars like Dr. Aryanpour and the emerging of Left-wing forces in the informal sociology and later the presence of Dr. Shariati paved the ways for introducing different social-political opinions while facing some difficulties. In the 1960s and 70s the conflict thoughts in sociology in Iran, as the main feature of informal sociology was touched with works of these social thinkers; 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 "Umrani Science" (borrowed concept from Ibn Khaldun). Some years later, Dr. Gh. Seddighi has imported the term "sociology" to Persian scientific literature. Most of the translated or written works in formal sociology were under the influence of consensus or conservative scholars in the functionalist or structuralist schools (Torabi, 1979). "Nameye Olume Ejtemae" (Social Magazine), 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 Gurvitch G. by H. Habibi, works of K. Vadieci, E. Naraghi, B. Rasekh 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 whether by Marxist or religious thinkers could make some successes in publicizing the sociological theories among some stratus of people and even students in the formal sector.

2. Post-Revolution Period: Scientific Vise Versa Islamic Sociology

Some years before the happening of the Islamic Revolution, mainly years 1979 to 1981 the situation was appropriate for social and political thinkers and activists to discuss 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, Aryanpour, Kamrani, Fazaei, Mirfetroos, Adibi, and so on were introduced among left scholars with conflict theories (Marxism bibliography, 1980). Among the religious social thinkers the works of some figures like Shariati, Tavassoli, Hajiseyyedjavadi, and Habibi and so on are supposed to be the most effective works ever written (Ashrafolketabi, 1987).

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 some formal ones who did not find an appropriate situation to freely discuss their opinions. Increased political conflicts in Iran and suppression of most of the critical and opposite thoughts to Islamic regime have gradually resulted in repressed political atmosphere. Repetition of vicious circle “despotism-freedom-despotism” or “silence- scream-silence” was reproduced as a historical bottleneck of the un-development of Iran. The filtering of universities in Iran after revolution has grounded repression in the field of sociology. 1980s has passed within hot hatred of revolutionists and pro-wars and during these years many of sociologists in the informal sector including conflict theorists and Marxists were murdered or emigrated. The scatter of the Soviet Union and socialist modernist pattern in the East Block provided further situations for deflating of this viewpoint toward sociology. So, from the middle of the 1980s on the informal sector of sociology diminished and the formal sector survived strongly.

During post-revolutionary years and shutdown of universities after the “Cultural Revolution” the revolutionists started to carry out new programs to compensate expelled non-Islamist scholars through sending students aboard, educational rationing for ideological supporters of revolution especially for state managers, militants and semi-militants “Basijis”. Therefore, the new phenomenon of “pseudo-elites” was appeared by the graduation of these groups of students who were admitted to higher education system due to their proximity to power (Tayefi, 2003). Since early 1990s the process of sociology development in Iran experienced plenty of evolutions. The present formal sociology in spite of all the considerable facilities it has got, I 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 I 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, I can identify some prominent groups:

The first group includes the survivors and followers of neo-Marxism, confliction and critical theories that sometimes smartly discuss their opinions in universities and academic centers with; 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 Millsian sociological insight try to do their mission- whether academically or socially, in the society.

The second group is the post revolutionary or ideological sociologists. A considerable amount of them were admitted to higher education system due to their proximity to power. This group includes two spectrums from extremists to the moderatists. On the one side, there are extreme Islamists who are still following the ideas of first years of revolution and founders of the “Cultural Revolution” to Islamize universities and academic disciplines including sociology. Although, the first generation of revolutionists has later revised their ideas, some ideological social thinkers are still dreaming Islamic sociology. Among them are justifiers of political system who hold the directorial positions in academic and research centers. These thinkers without any theoretical and methodological knowledge about differences between science and religion defend their ideas which seem there are also Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and Confucianist sociology, as well.

On the other side of this spectrum, there are social thinkers who are criticizing the power and seeking for the alternative plan to protect the political system via semi-democratic and religious frameworks. This group's priority is keeping the status quo not resolving the social problems in the society. They defend the same extremist perspective in their semi-scientific and semi-theoretical initiations through self-created concepts such as Iranian modernity, Islamic or religious democracy. The main characteristic of two spectrums within the second group is neglecting the differentiation between concepts, theories and methodologies or as called in the philosophy of science paradigms of two different fields of religious and scientific knowledge (Tavakol, 1996). This perspective is resulted from mixture of self-created concepts which not only has not ended in any innovation and development but also has devoted a considerable part of energies from other thinkers and scientific institutes to omit or decrease their destroying effects. In terms of stratus benefits, social and professional positions, and religious and political attitudes, this group

imagines that the methods of objectification, testability and responding of this scientific discipline and its related theories, is awkwardly localization of scientific and modern concepts through Islamic-Shi'a or Alavi, Iranian, Eastern, Asian and etc. adjectives which can not be find anywhere else.

The third group, mainly called " professional and academic sociologists are those who are teaching social sciences without any certain bias according to what "Cultural Revolution Council" has defined, and treat this field merely as a business. These sociologists are like wooden dolls that have little creativity. Among them are many of sociologists who graduated after revolution and nowadays are neutral without any ideological biases. Although, these sociologists are familiar with the scientific introduction of this discipline, rarely produce any scientific products and innovations without updating their knowledge and effective studies. They avoid any criticism in official sphere and present critical social problems. These sociologists are just conducting state or private ordered research projects.

The short review I 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 who enforced to leave Iran after revolution whether were proximate to Pahlavi monarchy or were revolutionaries who in conflict with Islamist revolutionaries emigrated. 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 & Lahsaeizadeh, 1997). Studying the performance of these sociologists requires having a close familiarity with their works that is beyond the concern of this paper.

3. Conclusion

Finally, we can conclude that in spite of a relatively long history that sociology in Iran has- whether formal or informal-, due to political reactions of authorities and critics in the process of development of this discipline 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 theories, ranging from economics, politics, culture, social institutions, 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.

On the other side, the pseudo-elites in the sociology are trying to prioritize and suggest resolutions which are not practical because most of the social problems are rooted in the structures and performances of the power and government. With respect to the major challenges presented in the introduction, sociology in Iran lacks appropriate academic and social functions and stance for identifying and solving social problems, and introducing and developing research findings for accessing valid theories and validity in different areas of sociology. According to Kavakebi in his book "The natures of tyranny", within the authoritarian regimes, social sciences especially the sociology can not grow up.

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