**Epistemology of Sociology: A Neglected Discipline of Sociology in Pakistan**

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Epistemology of Sociology is a philosophical branch of describing the amount of knowledge production based on sociological issues and debates whereas the discipline of sociology offers a great deal of critical learning about society and social groups, and an individual’s interpersonal understanding towards life goals as well. The purpose of writing this research article is to critically examine the academic status of sociology discipline, and to identify the role of Higher Education Commission (HEC) in achieving the academic excellence of the subject in Pakistan.

In contemporary world, the association of economic value enhances the acceptability of an academic discipline. Hafeez (2001) has extensively researched that although sociology subject has been formally institutionalized in Pakistan at the development process of the discipline, but it is not fully internalized and professionalized yet. Globally, sociologists play a key role for epistemic sociology, disciplinary growth and development, and for the public policy making and service delivery. Conversely, the public state policies in Pakistan has neglected the social sciences in general, and the discipline of sociology in particular. According to an in-depth case studyon’The Case of Social Sciences in Pakistan’conducted by Sabir and Sabir (2010), it has been studied that the social perception about a discipline could be maintained at both state and societal level. They compared both French and Pakistani societies, and identified a huge gap, as the sociology discipline is totally ignored, sociologists’ contributions areundervalued and the sociological critical debates are discouraged in Pakistan. In contrast, the French society is very converse in sociological discourse analysis on public issues, andadaptive towards sociological knowledge contribution in the process of public policy formulation at state level.

While discussing the challenges faced by the discipline of sociology in early developmental stages in Pakistan, the relationship between state ideology and sociology is very important to understand. It is especially associated with the birth of Pakistan because this developing country was conceived of as an ideological state with the expressed purpose of establishing Islamic social justice. This has affected the academic growth of the sociology discipline in Pakistan, which resulted in creating a wide ideological divide between various groups of sociologists in the country, at initial level. As academic sociologists have remained tied to the Western theories and the Islamic sociologists are strictly committed to the Islamic ideology, whereas, the development sociologists have achieved satisfaction with their role as a planner or an analyst for non-governmental organizations projects in the country (Younas and Rizvi, 1987).There are several contributing factors behind that restricts the development of Sociology discipline in Pakistan such as the absence of an active sociological forum to promote collectivity and networking among sociologists. Secondly, the absence of a genuine research culture among sociology students, faculty and professionals in the absence of an enabling environment, including research facilities, and funding opportunities. Lastly, lack of training in the advanced scientific research methods for social scientists, insufficient provision of qualified teaching faculty, failure to attract high quality students by the sociology departments, poor quality of curriculum, and non-availability of standard textbooks in local context, the prevailing social stereotypes about the subject, are multivariate factors behind the dilapidated and deteriorated status of sociology discipline in Pakistan.

The present government’s poor state policies for education in response to the agreement on IMF bailout schemes for Pakistan, has worsen the sociological development scheme in Pakistan as majority of the scholars wouldn’t be able to get financial assistance from the HEC in coming years

In order to promote the sociological epistemology, Yunas and Rizvi (1987) proposed that academic sociologists should take the lead in revitalizing the lost status of Sociology discipline in Pakistan.Initially, the establishment of the Pakistan Sociological Association (PSA) in 1964 has provided a common forum whereby meaningful discourse could be a greater opportunity to highlight various socio-economic, religious and political issues. This medium can be fully utilized to generate concrete debates and research ideas to bring the Islamic ethos of the Pakistani population as well, without disturbing their respective ideologies. It is evident to say that there is a dire need of a sociological explanation of Islam as an ideology, and how it can come to offer the solutions for the problems of human society in the 21st century.In order to institutionalize the social welfare dimensions of sociological epistemology, and to integrate the sociological knowledge in public policy making process in country, the role of Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan is indispensable in achieving above mentioned goals.

It has been discussed that the importance of a discipline is recognized by its academic contribution and professional scope, whereas the status of sociology discipline depends on the socio-political and religious ideological differences in Pakistan. Despite the existing challenges and opportunities available for sociology discipline, the role of Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan, is inevitable to gage the development process of the subject in contemporary time. This constitutional body is responsible to lead the educational policies for quality education and ensure the implementation, since its establishment in 2002, after 18th Constitutional Amendment.In order to fulfill the academic needs of the sociology discipline, HEC is dependent on the government’s financial assistance. It has been observed that HEC itself is facing state’s austerity as the latest budget cut of April, 2019 with respect to HEC’s recurrent expenditures from 10pc to 15 pc in public sector universities, and about 50pc reduction in all the developmental projects has affected the ongoing and future programmes to be postponed or cancelled. The present government’s poor state policies for education in response to the agreement on IMF bailout schemes for Pakistan, has worsen the sociological development scheme in Pakistan as majority of the scholars wouldn’t be able to get financial assistance from the HEC in coming years. Another challenge is itself HEC’s structural system, where nepotism is a common norm in candidate selection while the meritocracy laughs under the pile of eligible scholars.

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