

Teaching Sociology at Kathmandu University: A Glance

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1. Introduction

Study of sociology contributes to understand society, social institutions, and relationship of people scientifically. It is a scientific discipline which aims to link its basic ideas to the prevalent in the society. So as a discipline, sociology produces a unique type of knowledge that distinguishes it from various disciplines such as law, education, economics, politics, and so forth. Sociology occupies an important position in social science however the boundary of sociology is blurred and has been established as multi-disciplinary subject in the recent days. The sociology as a subject integrated to education, medicine, engineering etc. In this context, this paper explores the state of teaching sociology at Kathmandu University (KU). Even if KU is considered as a leading university, it has not introduced study of sociology as a major discipline yet. In other words, the study of sociology is not found established as a pure social science rather integrated with different other discipline. Establishment of school of arts, school of education and school of law are positive effort towards incorporating and strengthening sociological thoughts within the university. Also, there is latest trend to offer some sociological courses in science, management and other disciplines. The guiding philosophy that politics should not be invited within the university seems established in all the schools of the university, however, the absence of national contextual issues in the curriculum has still confined the university within the closed and limited circle. Furthermore, while establishing and continuing the very notion of seeing critical assessment of the society as 'politics', the idea neglects the national issue as well as discussion about popular sociological ideas i.e. issue of marginalization, electoral system and affirmative action toward injustice in teaching as well as research.

Keywords: Sociology, Teaching Sociology, Sociology and Politics

Contextualizing Sociology

Human society has a very long history, however scientific study of societies and human began only few centuries back. Etymologically sociology speaks of the society. Furthermore, it systematically explains structure and happening in the society more closely (Giddings, 1984). Sociology is a study of social relation, among group of people which eventually forms social institutions, based on social interaction. Sociology is defined throughout the history as a study of society. Moreover, the scholars (Parsons, 1961; Weber, 1922) emphasized sociology as study of social interactions. The social interaction helps us to understand social structure, social relations, and social system more closely (Parsons, 1961). However, scholars such as Durkheim (1964) expanded the horizon of sociology and emphasized the importance of studying various social units or organs and their mutual relations as a social process. Afterward the sociology continuously expanded and is established as one of the major discipline in the academia (Doda, 2005) consequently, at present, sociology is not only the study of society but also study of its functioning manifested with multiple realities.

Social change has been a global phenomenon in the present world. With the help of modern technology a society is enabled to interact with rest of others in the world, as a result, many social

values are either integrated into other society or are in the verge of disappearance. However, along with changing society, there has been continuous shift in the paradigm of social understanding (Beck, 1999) as well. The study of sociology in this sense, gradually, changing along with social change. Sociology, in the twenty first century, is not limited within social science but also extended to other disciplinary such as education, engineering etc. Despite its contextual transformation, sociological study has been established as a major aspect in development process. Unlike other developed countries in the world, developing countries, particularly in South Asian, the study of poverty, inequalities, and social exclusion, as well as disparities in economy and aloof from the state have been established as an important discourse in sociology (Patel, 2018). In this sense, sociology has impact globally; however, the nature of the study in relation to particular context is different.

Furthermore, study of sociology has contributed understanding perpetuating inequality in the world. The underlying structure of society, where one form of social stratification (Caste, ethnicity etc.) is declining, while other form (poor and rich) is emerging; as a result, few people have control over many of others. In this sense, it has become indispensable to understand nature of social institutions and its functioning to make peace and harmonious society. In other word, study of sociology has become an important aspect for a country, more specifically for its prosperity.

In addition, sociology, through education, connects the people in the world. It helps to justify people's beliefs of the society and finally, it teaches human being how to live in the society. So, education can be one of the best approaches to enhance the sociological understanding to the people. Furthermore, education is a process of continuous dialogue that enables people to acquire collective knowledge which they can use to change the society (Frerie, 1970) in rational way. More specifically, sociology education increases the knowledge about the society enabling people to their sustainable business (Dewey, 1916). Moreover, the knowledge about society and culture enhances one's ability to adopt the society more efficiently.

Sociology helps to understand power functioning in the society. Power affects more than personal relationships; it constructs a big social institution like group of people, professional organizations, and government agencies (Weber 1922). Likewise, a government's power is not necessarily limited to control of its own citizens. A powerful nation, for instance, often uses its power to influence other governments and attempt to seize control of other nation states. Such power is manifested through many forms such as economy, religion, politics etc. In the present world, economic power has been exercised as a tool to impose ones will over others. In this context, sociology, in the twenty first century, is expanded as a crucial subject to assess the structure of human society and analyze the consequences of human relations.

Sociology in Nepal

Sociology as a science of society is globally established discipline in the academia. Nevertheless, Nepal only institutionalized sociology in academia after the establishment of democracy in 1950s (Hachhethu, 2002; Pyakurel, 2018). However, in the beginning, sociology was introduced only in government agencies for various purposes (Subedu & Upreti, 2014). In this sense, sociology in Nepal is emerging science which flourished in academia only after 1960s. It was taught formally preparing the syllabus of sociology and anthropology in Tribhuvan University (TU), the oldest university in Nepal since 1981 (Pyakurel, 2018). Although, other universities have incorporated sociology as multidisciplinary subject in different levels, it has not been functioning as a large department similar to TU. In this context, the study conducted by Subedi and Upreti (2014) found that

inadequate staffs, excessive workload, lack of research opportunities, and insufficient research skills are some constraints resulting the sub-standard quality of teaching learning and research of sociology in the context of TU. The quality in higher education is closely related to research productivity and particularly social issues come to academia through such research activities. For Kias (2018), lack of research fund, well equipped study places and limitation of I/NGO conducted research are some common problems in the developing countries. Consequently, the overarching problem of lack of sufficient academic knowledge seems to have perpetuating. Nepal also faces problem of adequate research funding and conducive ecology for the quality research in the academic institute. Nevertheless, in the recent days, some of the universities in Nepal seem flexible with designing and updating course syllabus timely; they are struggling with insufficient staffs and academic research opportunities to contribute knowledge. More specifically, the contribution in the knowledge of sociology by faculties of sociology is difficult to find.

The importance of sociology in the context of Nepal is felt important by various scholars in different times. Sharma (2015) elaborates the importance of studying sociology to understand the society and bear the social responsibilities. He further shows the possible problem that there is a chance of losing social value and thus the future generation could be more individual and self-centric. In this sense, education should not be limited with achieving degree rather should be used to prepare skillful human resource and fulfill social need.

Sociology is taken as a means to promote political harmony in the country. It explores the possible solutions for existing social problems as a result democratic norms such as access, rights and justice are strengthened in the country. Providing space to express feeling of every person, whatever his birth or occupation, will develop the ability and have the opportunity to take part in the social functioning. However, in the present context, Idea of justice society which is the basic aspect of democracy is weakening. There is large number of people who yet to be mainstreamed in the nation to become a dignified citizen. So, it is clear that there is nexus between prosperity and the democratic rights of the people assured by a particular country in the present world. To establish citizen friendly system, there is need of understanding the existing society and prevalent social system. In this sense, sociology can bridge the gap of knowledge about the society of newly structured Nepali states in the present context. Universities are the major actors for bringing such issues and seeking the solution in the country. Nevertheless, sociology aspects are often connotatively understood as political regime when there is no space is given in the academia.

In the present context of Nepal, the study of sociology and social change is important since the country has transformed politically from a centralized unitary system to a decentralized federal system after a decade-long conflict and protracted political instability. The 753 local government units (Municipalities and Rural Municipalities) and seven states are the new government structures expected to play crucial role for strengthening the development process. The representatives in all level of governments who are selected through democratic process aspire to strengthen prosperity. Although Nepal has been practicing a democratic system since more than 50 years, nearly 25 % people are still living below the poverty line and this plight is even extended in geographically remote area (NRB, 2012). According to United Nations Human Development Report 2014, citizens from Western, Mid-Western and Far-Western regions are deprived of their basic needs, with the lowest Human Development Index (HDI) of 0.398 across the country. This disparity also varies in relation to peoples' social background (caste, gender etc.) where Dalit has the lowest HDI of 0.434 compared to any other

castes in the country. In this sense, there is need of rational actions in the development process to improve the livelihood of common people and uplift their living standard. And sociology can contribute to make the affirmative action structurally.

Moreover, the universities in the country can bear the crucial role for generating knowledge in long run. It should be universities which often explore the social realities and even provides possible solutions. However, if the influencing academic institutions which often contributes for making national policies and plans remained neutral for current sociological issues, anticipated progressive development in the country would be far from expectation. In this sense, the university possesses the responsive role for producing relevant knowledge and human resources who would be able to settle the current socio-political issues in the one hand and serve the country as a competent citizen on the other hand. So, universities have greater responsibility to fulfill the gap of knowledge in such sociological issues.

3. Locating Sociology at KU

Kathmandu University (KU) was established in 1991 under the Act of Parliament, however as a precursor to an establishment of the University, a team of academicians established Kathmandu Valley Campus (KVC) in 1985 to provide education in Intermediate in Science (ISC) with academic affiliation with Tribhuvan University. The university, in the initial days, offered science and engineering streams and only in 1995 granted provisional affiliation to St. Xavier College Kathmandu for Bachelor in Social Work (BSW). Gradually, the university offered the social science courses with the establishment of School of Arts in 1996 with the aim of producing able professionals that can contribute to the development of the nation. Additionally, establishment of School of Education in 1997, with the aim of contributing to enhance the quality of education in the country, also started contributing social science, particularly after launching the Master program in Development Studies in 2005. Although Sociology, one of the major disciplines of social science, is not taught by any school/department in the university, it has been incorporated to make a multi-disciplinary subject, more specifically, in School of Arts and School of Education among seven other schools of the university. The following table present existing situation of sociology related subjects offered in two schools of Kathmandu University.

Table 1: *Schools with offered programs and sociology related subjects*

SN	Schools	Offered Programs	Offered Total Subjects	Sociology Related Subjects
1.	School of Arts	Master in Development Studies/	29	24
		Master in Human and Natural Resources Studies	24	21
		Bachelor in Media Studies	41	6
		Bachelor in Ethnomusicology	44	5
		Bachelor in Community Development	42	15
		Bachelor of Social Sciences/ Bachelor in Development Studies	43	32
		Bachelor in Economics	42	3
2.	School of Education	16	187	3

Source: KU website compiled by authors

The table 1 shows KU offers quite a good number of courses in its Master program. In Master program in Human and Natural Resources Studies, all other subjects except subjects like Ecosystem Analysis, Development communication, and Environmental Impact Assessment are not different than a Master in sociology. Almost was the case for Master in Development Studies where courses i.e. Macro Economics, Micro Economics, Development Finance, Development Communication and Ecosystem Analysis might be seen different than sociology studies. Coming to its undergraduate programme, one finds fairly a good number of courses offered to Bachelors in Community Development, Bachelor of Social Sciences and Bachelor in Development Studies.

Likewise, the school of education, In 2018 runs sixteen academic programs of different level: Bachelor in Chinese Language Teaching; Post-graduate Diplomas in Early Childhood Education, and Primary Education; Master of Education in Leadership and Management (one year and two year), English Language Teaching, Math Teaching, Sustainable Development, and Master in Technical and Vocational Education; M Phil in Leadership and Management, Development Studies, Math Education, and English Language Education; and PhD in Leadership and Management, Development Studies, and Curriculum and Instruction. There are 187 different subjects offered in these sixteen however only three sociology related subjects; Sociology of Education, Sociology of Work and Occupation and

Sustainable Development are found offered in the school. Nevertheless, these offered sociology related subjects are not offered as pure sociological discipline rather integrated with discipline of education, work and occupation and development.

Till today, sociology has not been established as an independent subject in KU rather it is offered as a multi-disciplinary in some of the schools. Multidisciplinary refers to cooperation of scholars belonging to different academic disciplines. In the multi-disciplinary, scholars from more than one discipline work together on a common problems without altering their disciplinary approach (Uwizeyimana&Basheka, 2017). We found similar approach of disciplinary practice in the KU. For instances, sociology in School of Arts is integrated with other social science subjects such as Development studies, Media studies and so on. Similarly, sociology in school of Law is offered to understand the sociological aspect of law. In the same vein, School of Education providing sociology related subjects in some of the programs with different disciplines such as education, work and occupation and sustainable development. The sociology related subjects in all three schools shows that sociology is not as core subjects but it is offered as to explore the sociological dimension of development, law and education. According to Choi and Pak (2006) multidisciplinary approach helps to resolve the problems which are structurally prevalent through different perspective. The sociological subjects offered in KU are also found widening the mono-disciplinary approach of development, Law and Education. The sociology has provided space to explore the subjects in different context as a result School of Arts, Law and Education has broadened the study area crossing the mere mono disciplinary boundary.

In the contrary, Buraway (2013) also sees danger of integrating the disciplinary in many cases. According to author, the process abandons the core disciplinary value and becomes incompatible fusion leading to superficial knowledge. The scholar further argues that dissolution of the discipline with one another misses its theoretical, methodological and empirical value. We cannot deny the possible threat in KU through the integration of sociological subjects in other disciplinary. Although sociology has broadened the disciplinary horizon of development, law and education, it also is blurring the boundary of disciplinary values in terms of theory and methodology. In this regard, the situation of sociology in KU shows that on the one hand sociology is not recognized as an important discipline and on the other had it has lost its thematic relevancy. As a result, it seems that the sociology as a pure discipline is facing an identity crisis regarding the exact location in the sociological knowledge - sphere. Sociology proposed by August Comte is a social science which studies human society scientifically. But in the present context, the nature of sociological subject offered in different disciplinary are the examples that sociology has crossed the disciplinary boundary. Incorporation of sociological perspective in different programs such as education, law etc. implicates that sociology as a multi-disciplinary subject. However, the existing sociology as a multi-disciplinary subject also reveals absence of core sociological issues in the university. As the result, university has not been able to put effective contribution to solve the perpetuating inequality in the developing country like Nepal. In this situation, the issues of marginalization and political and structural transformation in the country are far from academic discourse.

4. Sociology at KU: Connotation of politics

The world has long history of research that are related to the concept and meaning that are emerged in the society. The issues of the societies are often structural and it needs sociological research to explore the possible solution based on existing knowledge within the functioning society. In this context, academic institutions have crucial role to explore the issues of the society and

contribute for harmony and development. The academic institutions, particularly those which offer higher education in the country have greater role to make the positive change happen. They can play an important role to serve purely intellectual and cultural function for overall development. It not only shows direction in present context but also creates a new knowledge for progressive social change.

KU as a university was established to prepare skilled human resources for the country. The university has significant contribution for producing skilled human resources particularly in the field of medicine, engineering, management, education and arts. Consequently, the university is established as one of the leading universities in the country. During the interaction with the former dean of one of the schools of the university, we found the similar understandings amongst the senior faculties while talking about university's guiding principle. He also expressed the basic principle of KU referring that politics should not be invited within the university (M. Banskota, personal communication, 5 December 2018). According to him KU has been place of respect for all as it has been creating its neutral position in the politics. It is true that academia should be free from political influence but academia can contribute to politics for prosperity of the country. Furthermore, the university has responsibility to generate knowledge about the current issues so that the structural problem can have sustainable solution. Here, it can be argued limitation of politics that it covers. Additionally, the negative connotation of politics obviously confine it as a result serious social issues such as issue of inclusion, deprivation etc will be neglected. If sociological issues are perceived only as politics of collective bargaining platforms i.e. student unions, teachers' union, reservations policies, it would be injustice to other serious issues which study of sociology covers. There are equally the issues of current sociology. In this sense, it can be argued that the university seems to be away from sociological issues in the pretext of 'politics'. The individualistic perception of the politics that it is only beneficial for personal interest rather than whole society misses the sociological perspective. The situation is also the evidence that social science could not create its space in the university. Although it is true that politics does not determine all the development, the liberal politics definitely influences the success of the development (Sharma, 2015). So, basis of politics is development and citizen rather basis of development is politics. Nevertheless, politics should not be only perceived in the sense that it is professional organization made for collective bargaining, discussion about progressive ideas such as issue of marginalization, affirmative action etc. That is where one could see the contradiction as sociology/social science by-and-large focuses those aspects in teaching as well as research. Nevertheless, a university which shares its ambition to be the best university in the country cannot sideline socio-political issues of the country.

Historically, universities have been playing crucial role in knowledge generation globally. In this sense, universities have influencing contribution in developing relevant knowledge as per need. As a result, they have always been vehicle for planning and socializing dominant groups in the country (Castells, 2001). Knowledge generation seems most important function of the universities however preparing skillful and relevant human resources is equally crucial. At present context of globalization, university primarily can enhance the global knowledge in the society. This implies that the ability of people, society, institutions, and prosperity of country depends on effectiveness and relevance of the university system to the society (Castells, 2001). The scholar further argues that Universities are the critical source of equalization of chances and democratization of society by making possible equal opportunities. It's not only a contribution to economic growth but also contribution to social equality. Furthermore, university also is helpful with their ability to develop new cultures; that is, to be the source of cultural renewal and cultural innovation. In this regard, the university can significantly contribute to understand existing problem structurally and even has ability to explore possible solution

for it. National social, cultural and other aspects of development can be greatly contributed by universities.

Nevertheless, the very idea about the importance of sociology could not be reflected in the real practice at KU. The integration of sociology with other subjects has lessened the importance of core sociological issue. More specifically, less importance to social science is neglecting the prevalent social and political issues of the nation. If we go through the sociological subjects offered in KU, the teaching of sociology at graduate and post graduate level is a multidisciplinary subject. There are different graduate programs which offer sociology with certain specific area such as education, development, work and occupation etc. But, fundamentally the offered subjects contributes very less as per the national need. As a result, core areas of sociological aspect remains neglected. Yes, university has offered the social science subjects. Establishment of school of arts, school of education and school of law are the example that social science is present in KU. Additionally, some social science courses are also offered in science, management and other disciplines. However, the university largely fails to cover the contextual issues in any of the school. Consequently, the issue of discrimination, inequality, problem of employability, the mobility of youth etc remains silence in the academic field which perpetuates the problem structurally in the society. Additionally the country is transforming from unitary system to federal system but the university has not offered the relevant subjects related to federalism, secularism, state restricting caste/ethnicity, regionalism etc. Hence, the subject offered in the university largely either neutrals or multidisciplinary in nature thus neglects the current national issues.

The KU as one of the leading universities has crucial role for contributing knowledge on national system thus the curriculum taught and courses which are offered should help student to grow according to changing context. The university needs to serve as resources to connect people, enable social harmony and solve existing problem. According to Sharma (2015) the university aims to contribute politics rather than expecting any from politics. However, KU is not visible in such issues neither through academic curriculum nor with research.

Nonetheless, teaching sociology in universities in Nepal is subject to multifarious challenges. One of the genuine problems in teaching and learning culture is pervading climate of uncritical and reflexive intellectuals (Mishra, 2005) in their academic works. This has led to an acute shortage of quality text books in the country. Only very few sociologists, of Nepal are engaged in writing sociology books that are contextual to the Nepali society. In the absence of quality books in the country, teachers and students have to rely on foreign knowledge product. This knowledge crisis has created significant effect in the national context, however in the particular; three overarching problems can be easily anticipated. The first, there remains possibility of declining national knowledge heritage. The contextual knowledge would be unexplored as a result the national knowledge would be unavailable which means perpetuating social issues will remain unexplored. The second, it will lead to literary dependency consequently the students and teachers will be compelled to buy knowledge product in unfair prices. This will particularly create the crisis in local knowledge to explore the solution at local level. Finally, there would be big gap in the contextual knowledge. The theoretical model adopted in the different context may not have similar result as a result there is a risk of increasing gap between theoretical knowledge which is produced in different context, mostly European and American, and practical application in Nepal. In this sense, there would be big question about sustainability of intervened development programs. So, there is a need of academic work, particularly in the university, to produce the national guiding knowledge in the context of Nepal. And

university is one of the possible academic institutions which can fulfill the need of structural analysis of emerging situations.

In this sense, sociology is important in the institution like KU which can have meaningful contribution in nation building. Sociological inquiry will help built a better understanding of the problems that are structurally underlined in our societies and contribute to forming policies and action that will make for less violent, more just societies.

6. Conclusion

Sociology is established as one of the important discipline in the university globally. Human society is dynamic and it is because of nature of the society, the nature of the sociology is also changing through the history. As a result, the boundary of sociology is expanding day by day. Sociology reflects the existing society and helps to understand more clearly. More specifically, sociology provides the structural solution to deal the social issue rationally. In this sense, sociology can be crucial tool to enhance the development in democratizing Nepali state. Sociology also can be a vehicle for generating local knowledge hence supporting the national development. Sociology as an academic discipline in Nepali academia is still immature. One of the emerging Universities, Kathmandu University, has also incorporated sociology as a multidisciplinary subject in graduate and post graduate level in its different schools. The sociology in the course of time is transforming from single to multidisciplinary genre in the university. Sociology courses are offered in the different programs which show sociology is losing its legacy of humanities and social science. There are several reasons for substandard sociological teaching learning in the university. Insufficient human resources, lack of research ecology, and lack of funding resources are more genuine. As a result, the research in the study is limited to project based research which hardly contributes in the academic knowledge and it has been overarching problem in the developing countries. Hence, there is need of establishing research environment in the university and the effort will not only help to fulfill the need of contextual knowledge but also explore local knowledge heritage. Sociology is always oriented with such societal issues. But the subject is introduced as multidisciplinary subject in KU as a result the university is not visible in national issues. The university has influencing role for the structural solution of national problem. However, all the national problems are linked with mere politics, the social problems are chance to perpetuate continuously. Hence, in the present context, both academic discourse and research of sociology is important which would be real contribution to the society and in general to the country as per the philosophy of KU envisioned by founding fathers of the university.

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