

Description of the Module

Items	Description of the Module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Classical Sociology
Module Name/Title	Harriet Martineau
Pre Requisites	Classical theory, Positivism, Patriarchy
Objectives	This module seeks to assess the contribution of Harriet Martineau to classical sociological theory
Key words	Patriarchy, Classical sociology, Patriarchy, Feminism

Module Structure

CLASSICAL SOCIOLOGY MODULE: Harriet Martineau	Introduction, Positivism and translation of Comte's work by Martineau, Classical sociology and Comment on American Society
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Team Details

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Classical Sociological Theory

Profiling Harriet Martineau

HARRIET MARTINEAU (1802-1876)

“Men who pass most comfortably through this world are those who possess good digestions and hard hearts”. – Harriet Martineau (1802-1876)

Harriet Martineau (June 12, 1802- June 27, 1876), barely known for her contributions to Sociology is today known as the '**mother of Sociology**'. She has started gaining recognition only recently, although she was a staunch political and sociological writer and a journalist during the Victorian era. How come, women like Martineau, Ida B. Wells and Jane Adams are being talked about now? Where were the women Sociologists then? Why don't scholars of Sociology recognize these women?

We must keep in mind that the time when Sociology was born, facts have pointed us to believe, that although the participation of women in the academics existed, they were not recognized because the society was male dominated. The very fact that the ASA (American Sociological Association) did not allow any women to hold offices or even if there were women, their role was overshadowed by the male Sociologists, indicates that the contribution of female writers were not considered important. It was only during 1892-1920 that women were given higher official posts in the ASA and Jane Adams gained the recognition for being the foremost female Sociologist during that period, leading to the formation of a separate 'women's network'. The 1920's-1930's saw that the level of women segregation in the academics were decreasing and it is during this period that the women's started fighting for their rights and the outbreak of the Feminist movement gained momentum (Thomas and Kukulan, 2004 pp. 252-263). This is the reason why it is important to track female Sociologists from the time of August Comte.

Harriet Martineau was famous for her translation of August Comte's philosophy of Positivism which was published in 1853. It was so remarkable that Comte himself started reading Martineau's translation instead of his own original and he had Martineau's work translated into French again. Martineau was also famous for her series of fictional novels *Illustrations of Political Economy* (with 25 volumes, 1832-4) proving Martineau to be one of the first women to discuss the political matters in her works. Her *Autobiography*, which was written in 1855 but published in 1877 by her friend Maria Weston Chapman (Kannar, 1981 pp159-161) has major discussions on issues of the political conditions, it also reflects the personal lives of the people during the Victorian era. This work includes letters that were passed on to her friends and it in some way gave away the Sociological background of how the personal security of the people are brought to question just like Michel Foucault (1926-1984), discusses about the personal lives of the people during the Victorian era in his first volume of *History of Sexuality* (1976).

Her work, *'How to Observe Morals and Manners'* (1838), is said to be one of the first attempt towards 'objective observation' as a methodology in Sociology. She was raised by a middle class family and her works on 'morals and manners' was largely influenced by her mother's behavior towards her children. She was technically the first person to introduce the concept of methodology in Sociology and Anthropology, but was never given the credit because the credibility that the method of observation being one of the methodology in Sociology was not foreseen by anyone. Martineau was already discussing the then overlooked issues such as marriage, children, domestic and religious life, and race relations, suicide and other topics which has gained momentum in the field of Sociology today and yet Sociologists like Karl Marx (1818-1883), Max Weber (1864-1920) and Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) are talked about first for the same premises that Martineau was already discussing about. Seymour Martin Lipset points out (1968:2), "The volume on (*How to Observe Morals and Manners*) is perhaps the first book on the methodology of social research in then still unborn discipline of Sociology and Anthropology. Martineau realized that the study of social systems were a separate scientific discipline, and called it the 'science of morals and manner'". Since her work has been considered to be one of the first Sociological towards observational research, we must also know that she did propose that the observer must have an 'objective' way of looking at matters. The centrality of

objectivity and symbolic interactionism can, therefore, be seen in Martineau's works.

Harriet Martineau's work, "*Society in America*" (1837), is also another example of objective observation. In this work, she has highlighted her role as a feminist by describing the lives of the women slaves in America and also by giving a detail about the law and order of America. With this she turned her supposed to be 'guide to America' an important piece of evidence of the existence of Classical women Sociologists during the time when only male sociologists were made famous for their work.

Martineau's role as a feminist is also reflected in her works *Five Years of Youth* (1831), and *Household Education* (1848) which discusses the role of a woman in the public as well as at her own private sphere of life and the illustration of which can also be seen in her letters to her friends which was requested to be burnt after it was read. This work also shows an active participation as a sociologist or rather, a person highly interested in her society, and the will to learn despite her being half deaf and yet able to adjust so well with the society. She was of the view that the women should get equal freedom as the men to go out of her domain of domestic work and be allowed to study and make an important mark in the academia because it went 'hand in hand'.

Harriet Martineau died of bronchitis in 1876 at 'the Knoll' (a name she gave for her home in Ambleside). During her stay there, she published, *Letters of Mesmerism* (1844), as mesmerism had become a popular culture. She also published, *Eastern Life, Present and Past* (1838), *The History of the Thirty Year's Peace* (1816-1846), *A Complete Guide to the English Lakes* (1855), *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* (1851) and from 1852-1866, she became a regular contributor of the daily news, until she fell ill and died after completing her autobiography within three months.

Although Harriet Martineau is being recognized after so many years of her death, we must keep in mind that her contributions to social issues like marriage, personal laws, suicide, women's issues, should not be overlooked at because if we can study Emile Durkheim for his work on suicide and consider him to be a Classical Sociologist, we must also acknowledge Harriet Martineau for her works.

Finally, it is important to note, that Anthony Giddens, the well-known contemporary Sociologist, while describing the contribution of Harriet Martineau states that, "*She called on Sociologists to do more than just observe, but also to work to benefit the society*"

(Giddens, Griffiths 2006).