(A) Nature and Scope of Social Philosophy:

Social philosophy as a branch of philosophy deals with social problems, especially those issues pertaining to social values. A sound social philosophy is the need of the day to tackle many a problem, which faces the society such as inequality, injustice, oppression etc. Social philosophy is touched by social life implying social relations, family, marriage, institutions and other new trends, ideals, values, thinking and living pattern. It is an influencing factor in its cultural life and implies relationships between individuals, means and ends in themselves. Social philosophy is the philosophy of the human society. As society is in constant growth, innovation in thinking and living categories, new perspectives are to be envisaged to build up a harmonious world vision, to cope up with the demands and new value understanding. This flexibility and accommodative nature makes defining social philosophy difficult. There is never a perfect definition of social philosophy.

The term social philosophy does not have fixed meaning in current philosophical circles. When a thinker or scholar has an intense experience of crisis, he starts a vigorous study and analyze of social conditions which evolves a new set of ideals and values with a view to helping man to avoid a
similar crisis in the future and for making human life fuller and the well being of the societal happiness.

The social philosophy of any age, in a sense, reflects the agonies and sufferings of the ages and suggests a way out of them by stressing the ideals of individuals and social happiness.

It is only in recent times, that social philosophy has come to be recognized as a 'distinct subject of study', different from sociology. Sociology is an empirical of, "the origins of human communities, the study of their various forms, laws, customs, beliefs, ways of thinking, feeling and arting". It, in a sense, deals with all knowledge pertaining to human life and social existence, social philosophy, on the other hand, has a much more limited province to study. Sometimes, it is used as more or less equivalent to 'political philosophy', that is, to the normative discussion, analytical or substantive of questions about how society should be organized and also non-normative discussion of what is involved in having social organization? What sorts of entity appear with the on set of society and of how they relate to individual human subjects? Social philosophy in this latter sense, as a sort of social ontology, as an account of what there is in the social world.

Social philosophy, in the ontological sense takes as granted that there is no society without individual intentional agents. Without subjects who apparently act, other things being equal, on the basis of their beliefs and
 desires and who are capable of seeking to exhibit rationality, in the formation and maintenance of those beliefs and desires.

The philosophy of any science comes in two varieties as the methodology or as the ontology of the discipline. The methodology looks at questions to do with the nature of observations, laws and theories, the logic of induction and confirmation, the requirements of understanding and explanation etc., whereas ontology looks at questions with what the discipline posits and whether those posits are consistent with more or less common beliefs. The methodology of social science concerns itself with the implicit claim of social science to be able to generate knowledge of social world, in particular, it has tended in recent years to focus on the claim of social science to be able to provide distinctive explanations. The ontology of social science concerns itself with the sorts of entity that the discipline posits entities like aggregate regularities and structural constraints and also at how far those entities are consistent with our more or less common place view of human beings and their relationships.

Social philosophy has a scientific value as it investigates the social nature of man in his universalistic dimensions, not restricting only to the social structural dimensions. It sees society as a unit of order and relationships among human persons. As society consists of human individuals bound together by the same patterns of behavior knit together by
a common structure, legal and moral understanding, end and goals, natural and supernatural. Social philosophy upholds that human development, as a person is possible only in unison with other fellow human. Social and communitarian aspects of human kind are inseparable and empirically observable. Many aspects such as biological (marriage and family), psychological (authentic membership of social group) and teleological (self-realization, being fully human in society) are to be taken into account in understanding the philosophical dimension of society. Sometimes the problems of the society they are grave in nature, which the common people does not understand in proper perspective. The social values, ethics and morality may create conflicts among the people and then society will be divided either vertically or horizontally. The inequalities which are created on the basis of caste, occupation, religion and race may create not only confusions in the society, but it may lead to chaotic conditions. To set right the unconducive atmosphere, the society requires an ideology or a philosophy which would bring a social harmony and cohesion. Hence, the social philosophy analyzes the nature of human persons, community’s institutions, their interactions and inter-relationships in society. Hobhouse says, “We set before ourselves a conception of the harmonious fulfillment of human capacity as the substance of happy life and we have to enquire into the conditions of its relations. We consider laws, customs and institutions in
respect of their functions not merely in maintaining any sort of social life, but in maintaining and promoting a harmonious life\textsuperscript{2}.

Social philosophy emphasizes the social nature of values, “social relations, activities and attitudes are considered purely as problems, how to seek values how to choose when values conflict with one another in a given situation, how to choose means of value fulfillment evaluated by society as desirable or undesirable, whether to conform or deviate from social norms, how to arguments, discard or modify some values according to the demands of the situations. This is one of the vital needs of social philosophy”\textsuperscript{3}.

Since social philosophy is a normative study, it seeks to evaluate things. It does not merely describe but prescribes on ideal. It studies social thought and patterns with its focus of concern on social ideals. Hence, it analyzes the nature of human persons, community’s institutions, their interactions and inter-relationships in society.

(B) Functions and Formulations of Social Philosophy:

The roots of social philosophy, lie in a perceived divergence between how a society has been functioning, leading it to intermittent crisis and chaos and how it should function with a view to realizing the ideals of happy social life.

There are two aspects of social life on the one hand, ‘social interaction’ between individuals in virtue of which various relationships get formed,
relationships involving communications, affections, collaborations, exchange, recognition etc, and on the other hand, the ‘social aggregation’ of individual attitudes and actions in virtue of which various institutions get established. These institutions include common instrumentalists such as language, culture, groups, etc., whose essence is to have a mode of collective behaviour. But the social philosophy concerns itself both with issues raised by interaction and with questions associated with aggregation.

On the side of interaction, the main issue in social philosophy is that which divides atomist from non-atomist. The atomist holds that the individual human beings do not depend on social relationships for the appearance of any distinctive human capacities. The non-atomists deny this believing that it is only the experience of social relationships that the human beings comes properly into his own.

The nature of this divergence relates to whether or not the existing institutions, their relationships and the mode of their functioning prove instrumental in realizing certain values that the social philosophy enunciated as essential components of human happiness. Social philosophy springs from the awareness of this divergence between existing social order and normative values.

Social philosophy tries to get at the social unity of mankind and interprets the significance of the social aspects of human life in relation to
that unity. It is value oriented in its assessment of social ideals and institutions. Social philosophy differs from the special branches of sociology in the way in which philosophy in general is distinguished from particular science\(^4\). Social philosophy seems to be the meeting point of sociology and philosophy. Its role in the social sciences is the study of the fundamental principles and concepts of social life in their epistemological and axiological aspects. The epistemological aspect is concerned with the questions of value. The former deals with the fundamental principles and concepts of social life such as man, society, justice, happiness, etc. It also delves deep into the validity of the assumptions, principles and inferences of the social sciences. It also tries to synthesize its results with those of the other sciences that deals with man. The latter, i.e., axiological aspect deals with the ultimate values of social life and the means of attaining them. It thus tries to interpret and estimate the social phenomena in terms of ethical principles. The object of social philosophy is, therefore, the attainment of social good itself.

The study of society is inextricably mixed up with moral values. Because the subject matter of sociology is human behaviour which is directed and guided by values on the one hand and impulses and interests on the other. Thus the social thinkers, is bound to study values and human variations, as facts. To do this, he must have some knowledge of values in their own context, that is, in moral and social philosophy. For example, he must know
the role and influence of 'dharma' in the making of Indian institutions and that of individualism and liberalism in the making of the American institutions. Hence the concepts such as dharma, individualism and liberalism are mostly ethical in nature, but they are studied as objects of knowledge. Only social thinkers who are capable of distinguishing between questions of fact and values can make such studies more objectives. As Bottomore writes, "Only by some training in social philosophy can the sociologist become competent to distinguish the different issues and at the same time to see their relationships to each other"5.

(C) Significance and Implications for the Study of Social Philosophy:

Philosophy as distinguished from science, is an effort to view particular object in relation to the whole within which they are included where as the different sciences study the particular and the laws of governing their behaviour, philosophy studies and interprets the particular facts with a view to discovering their position and importance in the cosmic scheme. In the same way, the social philosophy seeks to interpret the significance of social life and institutions with reference to the social unity of mankind. "It thus means mainly to study values, ends, ideals, not primarily what exists or has existed or may be expected to exist, but rather the meaning and worth of these modes of existence"5.
A social philosophy undertakes such a study to enquire into the best possible social arrangement wherein the highest social ideal of a ‘happy man in a happy society’ could be realized.

The principles of social philosophy and to their implications for some of the main areas of social philosophy, is that a good society is in a deep sense for the people who live in it and that the principles on which it is organized will protect their freedom as autonomous, self-motivated and self-directing individuals valued as end in themselves. The ‘individualism’ is to be taken to mean and it carries the implications that programmes and policies which aim at social justice and social equality must ultimately be justified by the contribution they make to individual freedom.

In brief, the significance and implications of social philosophy may be seen in the following spheres:

(1) Social Life.

Society consists of groups. It starts with an aggregate of people, which develops in family, marriage, occupation and other institutions. All of them are influenced by social philosophy. But the mere congregation of people in a physical area does not make them a social group. A social group exists when two or more people are in direct or indirect contact and communication. Society is rooted in social interactions. It represents the conditioned
behaviour of persons and groups. Both society and culture are the products of social interaction. Social interaction is the most elemental social phenomenon from which springs all other social phenomenon. When interaction recurs often enough so that we can perceive a pattern of behaviour, a social relation exists. Social relations may be friendly or unfriendly, intimate or non-intimate, inclusive or non-inclusive, specialized or non-specialized in character. The nature and character of social relationships underlie different forms of social groups. In social life, the importance of social groups and social relations cannot be exaggerated.

(2) Cultural Life.

'Culture', is one of the most important concepts in social science. It is a unique possession of man. The study of society or any aspect of it becomes incomplete without a proper understanding of the culture of that society. Thus the social philosophy reflects its climax in cultural development. It influences every aspect of cultural development. For example, in India, the influence of social philosophy, on customs, conventions, religion and culture is very clear. Revolutions in the spheres of social philosophy cause revolutions in the field of culture. Today we, in India have lost faith in ancient social philosophy, which has caused the diminishing of ancient culture and spread of the influence of western culture in the former's place.
(3) Economic Life.

Man is not only a social animal; he is also an economic being. He is incessantly engaged in what are known as economic pursuits or activities. These activities are so multifaceted, varied and complex that they constitute what is known as economy. Modern economy holds that the aim of man’s economic activities is not only to earn but also to secure welfare. But where lies the welfare cannot be explained by economics. This is philosophical problem; social philosophers like Marx and Gandhi have deeply influenced the economic matters. The social philosophy of Socialist Russia is different from that of Democratic America and the impact of this difference is to be seen clearly not only on their economic system, but also in their political and social life.

(4) Political Life.

Politics is essentially an ancient and universal experience. The art and science of political analysis have developed over several thousand years throughout many parts of the world. It is one of the unavoidable facts of human existence. In political life, social philosophy examines the rights and duties of the state in the light of the ultimate ends of human life. Thus it is clear the influence of social philosophy on the important political aspects such as forms of government rights and obligations of state with citizens, importance of laws and international relations.
(5) Field of Education.

Education is one of the basic activities of people in all-human societies. The continued existence of society depends upon the transmission of culture to the young. It is essential that every new generation must be given training in the ways of the group so that the same tradition will continue. Every society has its own ways and means of fulfilling this need. ‘Education’, has come to be one of the ways of fulfilling this need. It is clear that social philosophy constructs the philosophical foundations of educational system.

Thus social philosophy, though theoretical, has its own practical utility. It shows the value on which depends the social progress of ‘Man’. Though it does, not give us a formula for social, political and economic reforms, yet it does not explain the guiding principles, which determines the course towards such reforms.
References:


3. Hobhouse, Hindu Social Philosophy, p.8

4. See: Gopalan, Outlines of Social Philosophy, p.3

5. See: C.N. Shankar Rao, Sociology: Primary Principles of Sociology with an Introduction to Social Thought, (S.Chand & Company Ltd, New Delhi, 2000) p.90