



Sociological Studies in India

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Abstract: In India sociology and social anthropology can be traced to the days when the British officials realized its need for smooth administration. The aftermath of 1857 new science had to come to understand the roots of Indian society. It was with the rise of ethnography, anthropology, and sociology which began to provide empirical data of the colonial rule. According to the history Herbat Risely was the pioneer of ethnographic studies in India. By the second half of the 19th century, Indian sociologists have made a prominent contribution to the development of indigenous studies of Indian society. Certain trends of development of sociology may be identified in the pre independence period. But strong scientific empirical tradition had not emerged before independence. Sociology was considered a mixed bag without a proper identity of its own (Rao, 1982). Sociology established its identity as discipline by separating itself from psychology, anthropology and social philosophy in post independence period. Many scholars who richly contributed to the promotion of sociological studies and research in the country. G. S. Ghurye, N. A. Toothi, D. N. Majmudar, B. N. Seal, K. M. Kapadia, Iravati Karve, S. V. Karanadikar, M. N. Srinivas, A. R. Desai, I. P. Desai, M. S. Gore and Y. B. Damle are some of the outstanding scholars who shaped the destiny of the discipline. And helped in the establishment of the development of sociology in India

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Introduction:

Today, Indian sociologists are becoming more aware of the ruthless inequalities operating at national and international levels. But in the history of the development of sociology has not been much soothing. The discipline of sociology was partly responsible for the survival of colonialism and feudalism in princely states. The medieval mentality of Indian people is thus due to sociology, anthropology and ethnology. Must be said that this discipline has not been worth its salt in India. Many challenges that Sociology is facing in India, like pertaining to the quality of students, concerned to the paucity of faculties and Funding because of neglect and failure on the part of state governments. Indian Sociological Society is making every possible effort to make stronger the reach and extent of Sociology in India.

The influence of the British academic tradition on Indian education is responsible for the relatively undeveloped character of sociology in India. Sociology was not regarded as respectable by Indian intellectuals who looked up to Oxford and Cambridge for providing them with their standards and ideals. It was only after Independence and the launching of the programme of planned development that a widespread need was felt for sociological research.

Since Independence several important field studies of villages have been carried out by sociologists Indian and foreign. But the pace of social change in India has been such that villages are increasingly affected by forces outside and the growing links between villages and towns have forced sociologists to study the process of urbanisation and even the urban centres themselves. Problems in political sociology and the analysis of the role or non-economic factors in development are also beginning to receive attention.

The relatively undeveloped character of sociology in India today is a direct result of the influence exercised by British academic traditions on education. It is noteworthy that there was only one chair in sociology in Britain prior to 1947, but during the post war years there has been a tremendous growth in the subject the number of Chairs being over forty today. Perhaps no other subject has expanded so fast in British academic history.

Until recently, sociology was not regarded as respectable by Indian intellectuals who looked up to Oxford and Cambridge for providing them with their standards and ideals. It is only with India's independence, and with the launching of a programme of planned development that a widespread need was felt

for sociological research. Independence also marked the increasing exposure of Indian universities to intellectual traditions other than the British, and in particular, the American. (It is not sufficiently realized that there has been a sea change in India's intellectual orientations since Independence.) Today fourteen Indian universities have separate departments of sociology, and besides, there are research institutions where sociology has an important place.

Sociology, as a discipline, came much after the contributions made by social thinkers, philosophers, administrators who worked at understanding the Indian society, in general, as well as studying some specific aspects of Indian society, such as law, family, religion, caste system and so on. It is the contributions made by the Indologists such as Henry Maine, Alfred Lyell, etc. which helped the development of sociology in India. They emphasised the need to preserve the indigenous social institutions found in Indian society rather than destroying them and imposing an alien way of life on her people. They recognised the past glory of Indian cultural and literary tradition. Besides the Indologists there were the British administrators who made extensive study of Indian people, their races and cultures. Most of these studies helped to generate a body of knowledge, preserved in the Census Reports, Imperial Gazetteers, District Gazetteers, etc. as well as in books and monographs which are referred by social anthropologists and sociologists even today.

DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY IN INDIA

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continent such as European countries like France, Germany and England.

The origins of sociology in India go back to the days when British officials discovered that knowledge of Indian culture and social life was indispensable to the smooth functioning of government. Since then many British officials and missionaries had made efforts to collect and record information regarding the life and culture of their Indian subjects. And it is in context of the development of sociology in India. Indian sociologist had made a prominent contribution to the development of indigenous studies of Indian society. It is difficult to understand the origin and development of sociology in India without reference to its imposing history. Herbat Risely was the pioneer of ethnographic studies in India. Thus, the ethnographic studies came into prominence under the influence of Risely. This period of 19th century gave rise to ethnographic studies, i.e., studies of caste, religion, rituals, customs which provided a foundation to colonial rule for establishing dominance over India.

Sociology developed in India in the colonial interests and intellectual curiosity of the western scholars on the one hand, and the reactions of the Indian scholars on the other. British officials had to require the knowledge of customs, manners and institutions in Indian society for better administrations. Thus they acquire the knowledge of this subject and also Christian missionaries interested in understanding local language, culture and manners. These overlapping interests led to a series of tribal, caste, village and religious community studies in India. Another source of interest in Indian society was more intellectual. While some western scholars were interested in Sanskrit, Vedic and Aryan civilization, others were attracted by the nature of its ancient political economy, law, religion and institutions. From the begging William Jones, Max Muller interested in growth of indological studies, Karl Marx and Frederic were interested in the nature of oriental disposition in India to build their theory of evolution of capitalism, similarly at that time Henry Marine was attracted by Hindu legal system and village communities and Max Weber got interested in Hinduism and other oriental religions. Thus, Indian society and culture became the ground of various theories and field to study such problems as growth of town, poverty, religion, village social organization and other social institutions. According to M. N. Srinivasan and M. Panini (1973 : 181), the growth of the two disciplines in India falls into three phases: the first, covering the period between 1773-1900 AD, when their foundations were laid; the second; 1901-1950 AD, when they become professionalized; and finally, the post-independence years. Lakshmana also (1974: 1) tries to trace the

development of Sociology in three distinctive phases. The first phase corresponds to the period 1917 – 1946, while the second and third to 1947 – 1966 and 1967 onwards respectively.\

SOCIOLOGICAL RESEARCH IN INDIA

Since independence, research in sociology got a significant boost in the country. Also with the rapid development of the universities and colleges, and increase in the number of research studies on different aspects of sociology. Many previous surveys of the establishment of sociology in India present the process in different phases and trends, notably those by Backer and Barnes (1961), Saran (1958), Bottomore (1962), Clinard and Elder (1965), Vidhyarthi (1972), and the Indian Council of Social Sciences Research (ICSSR) (1972). Several studies directed by sociologists were financed, sponsored and supported by several agencies. By the UGC Review Committee on Sociology (1960) also emphasized another welcome trend in the introduction of the courses on methods of social research as part of the MA syllabus. In the field of doctoral research, the progress in sociology has been notable. There are facilities of doing research seen at the university department level and it does not exist at the college level. The ICSSR and the UGC have suitable schemes for providing these facilities. The ICSSR, which is the main agency for promoting research in sociology and social anthropology, has laid down priorities in keeping with social goals.

In fact those almost till the middle of the fifties, a much less number of recognised supervisors were available for the guidance of the doctoral research students in the department of the universities. Moreover these limitations, sociology and other allied fields granted as many as 438 doctoral degrees up to 1970 and economics and political science exceeded these figures. Still personnel position in sociology on the lower side. Sociology is behind only from economics, political science, and commerce. Also on college level the position is same. In spite of limitations of personnel, very large number of research projects (50), constituting the highest share (25.5%) of the ICSSR grants, were undertaken by scholars of sociology. If we add social anthropology in it then position is still brighter. In fact, the acceptance of the largest number of projects (above 20%) in sociology was a matter of satisfaction because the formulations of the problems were realistic and sound (Lakshmana, 1974: 10-11). In this period seen the publications in EPW of a number of articles discussing and criticizing the current state of research and teaching in sociology (see Das, 1993; Deshpande, 1994; and the latest of these by

Rege, 1994; and Beteille, 1996). In Western India, they support the view that sociology in India has become a rather dreary discipline, its leading concepts presented through outdated mass market American texts, and remarkably devoid of engagement with the social world outside the class room.

In the 1990s have seen engaged debate on the crisis in the discipline. In this debate saw a series of responses from the scholars in the field assessing the “Tiredness of the discipline”(Deshpande, 1995), the possibilities of a “community of discourse”(Giri, 1993), the dangers of “uncritical metropolitanism”(Murthy, 1993) and the relevance of gender and feminist pedagogues as strategies to confront the crises (Rege, 1994; Uberoi, 1994). The discussion has been made on the construction of sociological discipline (Thappan, 1991; Hegde, 1992) and teaching of sociology in Indian Universities (Uberoi, 1989-90; Deb, 1997). In the recent years, a new dimension has been reflected in the debate taking the issue of gender studies (Dube, 1986, 1996, 1997; Bhagwat and Rege, 1991; Patel, 1994; Uberoi, 1994) and women’s movement (Niranjana, 1992; John, 1996). According to Veena Das (1993), the crisis in sociological research in India in three institutional structures – the universities, the UGC and the professional bodies such as the Indian Sociological Society. First, at the level of the universities, the proliferation of the subject has simply not been matched by the will to ensure competence in teaching and research. Second, if the universities are to take a share of the blame for the falling standards for research, the UGC cannot escape its major responsibility either. The decision making bodies in the UGC seem to have completely misguided notions about the state of social science research in the country. Finally third, professional bodies have one little to salvage the situations. The interests of the profession lie not only in producing greater number of jobs for sociologists but in ensuring that ethical practices in the discipline are maintained.

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