

Lecture 55

Classical Sociological Theory and Modernity _ A Recap

Welcome back to the class. And, with this class, we are entering into the final session of the 11th week and there is only one more week of classes are left. And today also marks the end of our discussions on specific scholars. I hope if you remember, from the beginning, from the very beginning, we have been discussing classical sociological theory through the perspectives or through the contributions of important thinkers.

I think the first one or two weeks we spent trying to understand what is the sociological perspective, we discussed about C. Wright Mills. We discussed about you know Sigmond Bowman and we also discussed about Peter Berger. Okay, then for a week or so, we discussed the very specific context in which sociology emerged, a series of factors, both, social economic, political, and historical factors, which really generated a discipline, like sociology.

And then after that, we looked at a series of important social philosophers starting with the Saint-Simon, Tocqueville, Auguste Comte and then, we have elaborately discussed some of the most important stalwarts of sociology. And in the past couple of, yesterday and day before yesterday, I have also discussed the two people who generally do not find their places in the conventional sociological textbooks on classical sociology.

They are not really included in most of the textbooks, nor are they taught in many of the, in most of the places. But I felt that it is important that we look at these people who occupy the marginal positions the scholars who spoke about race, the scholar, who spoke about women's issues, gender issues, as early as the early 20th century.

So now and this class, I want a, kind of a brief recap about this whole idea of modernity. Okay. The whole idea of modernity and the connection between classical sociological theory and modernity. So, when you talk about classical sociological theory, we say that a very rough time period is usually between, say, or theoretical arguments till 1930s. Maybe till the time of Max Weber, 1920s, 1930s. So that's a time mostly scholars identify as a time of the time of classical sociological theory.

After that there are, you know, very interesting development of sociological theories. There are development of theories from a functionalist perspective, from a conflict perspective, from an interaction perspective. And I will be maybe discussing each of these traditions by taking one session each in the coming week, because the next week is our last week.

So, I want to give some introduction to the development, the further development of sociology in these, through these disciplinary perspectives or through these theoretical perspectives. But, in today's class, I want to dwell more on this whole cost of modernity. And what do we mean by modernity? Why that, or how influential has been the construct of this particular idea and how powerful has been the, this particular construct of this idea of modernity.

And it's combination with colonialism and how did it affect the rest of the countries? How did it affect the lives of people like you and me, and are there, you know, are they critical thinking about the kind of theoretical perspective about modernity and what is a kind of a contemporary, social scientific understanding or arguments about the time of modernity, how we pass in the face of modernity?

So there are quite a lot of theorists who argue that we are in postmodern era. Okay. There are a lot of others who do not agree that we are in a post-modern, they would use other categories, like they would use a late modernity. They would use liquid modernity, they will use a high modernity.

So, but this category of modernity is at the core of all the theorization, and it is extremely important. It's extremely important, not only to understand the discipline of sociology, but also understand yours and mine life, the way in which we live, the kind of predicaments that we come across, the kind of situations that we find ourself in. And this is extremely important for us to understand our own society, the kind of institutions that are surround us, the kind of, you know, social processes that are happening around us.

So that is a beauty, or that is a promise of sociology, try to offer you, it actually makes you highly informed individuals by making you familiar with these kind of theoretical

formulations from the disciplinary perspective of sociology, so that you know how to understand our history. We know the whole conquest of, conquest by the British, it was not only about political conquest, or it was not only about economic conquest, but it actually meant a lot more.

It actually, fundamentally changed the way Indians lived. The fundamentally changed the ways Indians lived for the past, so many centuries. Okay. A whole set of ideas and practices were brought in. And that's what we understand it as the product of modernization, modernization of Indian tradition, a very, very, important process.

So, I want to connect this the classical sociological theory and modernity, because without the help of classical social theorists, you cannot understand this whole process of modernity. And I hope that by now, it must have been clear for you that why that all these scholars whom we discussed so far, have been identified as the theorists of modernity, because they lived at the time of modernity. They thought about the process of modernity, because a host of processes of modernity were unfolding in front of them. They were witnessing the kind of sweeping changes in front of their own eyes.

So, they saw the crumbling of old social order. They saw the emergence of new social order and they saw the vanishing of extremely cherished long cherished value systems influence of religion, they saw the emergence of alternative epistemological basis. They saw the emergence of alternative explanatory platforms, explanatory frameworks.

So, these are the scholars whom we discussed so far. They tried their level best to make sense of each of all these things and that their arguments, their consensus, their agreements, their disagreements, their different ways of looking at it. All these things really produced a huge body of sociological knowledge about modernity, about society. And once we place these scholars, in that particular context, we realize that they are the scholars of modernity. They are the scholars who really try to formulate the initial impressions about modernity.

Of course, the later sociologist and thinkers, even now, we are trying to theorize modernity, even now we are trying to theorize modernity. So, modernity is not something that is being analysed and done with, okay, even now we try to understand how we made sense of modernity or how we constructed an image about a situation called us modernity.

So, I want to highlight, or I want to emphasize the point that as sociology students, you need to be really familiar with this whole idea or at least some of the important debates revolving around this concept of modernity. What does it mean to be modern and is it opposite to something else or modern and traditional are they completely incompatible? Are they completely binary because they are always presented as binary? Like when you say that somebody is modern, you mean you think in your mind that he's for sure is not traditional.

So, we are living in a society when these two things are presented to us as binary, modern and tradition, but in a society like India, it's very interesting to see what constitutes modern, what constitutes modern does our appearance make us modern. Does our profession make us modern? If you are professionals, okay, wearing a three piece suit, and then speaking English, does it make us modern, okay, what is the meaning of modern and have we completely said goodbye to tradition?

And especially in a contemporary society where you see that religion and caste and ethnic identities, they're all coming back with more and more power. So how do we reconcile that? So each of these questions assume significance once you try to understand this whole concept of modernity and its connection with the classical sociological theory.

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- Sociology as a product of modernity
- Modernity as a product of a unique context
- Socio-economic, political and technological changes
- Emergence of nation-state and modern institutions
- Emergence of rationalism and individualism



So, I have mentioned a couple of points, which we have already discussed. So we discussed sociology as a product of modernity. Okay. I hope you remember that because I argued that, or I explained that every discipline emerges as a product of a particular time, every discipline emerges as a particular time, because one, when the existing explanatory platforms are insufficient to understand the kind of scenario scholars look for alternative methods.

So, every discipline is a product of a particular time when the thinkers realized that you know, the existing frameworks are not sufficient, they look for alternative framework. And then, when there is more and more people are convinced about this new alternative framework, it gets a kind of a, it gets solidified. It gets a kind of crystallized and the scholars, try to build up a kind of epistemological, methodological basis for this particular discipline.

And this particular discipline offers completely novel completely new, fresh insights to make sense of the society. And that's how every discipline has come into picture. That is how even, even recent disciplines, like say environment studies, cultural studies, or media studies, or a host of other studies, women's studies, gender studies, sexuality studies, they are all, they have all come up, mainly because the existing scholars felt that the new phenomena that are emerging in front of you cannot be explained on the base of this existing disciplines.

So, that is why we understand sociology as a product of modernity. That is why it claimed to be a science. Okay, so along with other disciplines sociology is identified as a discipline of modernity. And that is why sociology is under tremendous pressure, maybe at a contemporary time, because a host of other disciplines that have emerged in the post-modern era are challenging the epistemological as well as methodological basis of sociology.

So, I am not getting into that debate, whether you need to have a scientific orientation or though I am not getting into that debate, but we need to really understand the historical and intellectual context in which this discipline emerges. And of course, we know that it emerged as a product of a unique context, Western Europe, it's a combination of factors as we discussed so far.

It was scientific revolution, new technologies and colonialism and industrial revolution, a host of factors came together. A host of factors came together, and that produced a kind of a

particular kind of society, a particular kind of philosophical thinking in that, during the particular time, one or two centuries.

So that is the, undoubtedly that is the kind of very unique, you know, period in human history where so much of change happened and the old orders crumbled very fast, and we can be critical. We can say that, Europe went through all those processes through violence, through exploitation.

It is all true, because the European prosperity during those times, or the European story of industrial revolution, the story was built on the blood and sweat of people from third world countries, people from Africa, people from Asia, there's no doubt about it. Without colonialism, the European countries would not have been able to see the kind of progress that they had.

They are all important historical factors. And what did colonialism do to entire humanity. How did we nurtured and then, you know, facilitated at then encouraged a scientific racism for a long time, which is who's remnants even now exist in the society. So, all these questions are important, but we understand modernity as a unique product as, as a unique process that happened in Europe and a host of socio economic, political, and technological changes that happened during the particular time.

And some of the most important aspects is the emergence of the nation, state and modern institutions. We, the idea of a nation state, the idea of a nation state and its globalization of that particular idea, that a host, a whole lot of kingdoms, which were empires and kingdoms and principalities who were ruled by different kings and feudal Lords, they were all crumbled and they became, and the most accepted or the most dominant form of governance, it became the nation stage, whether it is democratic or whether it's autocratic, that's a different thing.

But nation state emerged as a new social order in the place of kingdoms. And this is a very, very decisive shift and a host of modern institutions, including the judiciary, including police, including law, including education institutions, modern educational institutions, where open admissions that are possible, secular topics are dealt with.

So, these ideas. These, these are extremely powerful, important changes that happen. And we only need to while on the one hand we can be critical of the colonial conquest of India because they completely broke the backbone of Indian economy. They completely impoverished India. But on the other side, a host of important institutions that we cherish today, including that of democracy, including that of election, including your parliamentary system, your judicial system, your police system, your legal system, they are all your modern education system. They are all the product of a Western model of education.

And, these Western model of education, without a doubt, we can say that they had more egalitarian outlook. You had a law, you had a universal law, you had a law legal system, which does not discriminate people on the base of their birth, on the base of their caste. Your punishment for a same crime did not vary on the base of your caste or your religion.

And that egalitarian values, that the modernity upheld the enlightenment values, the European enlightenment values, the values of fraternity, value of Liberty, value of equality, and the institutions of democracy. The whole argument about rights, women's rights, ethnic rights. And these concepts have become so commonplace in our contemporary society. We can not even think of a time when these terms or these slogans are unheard of, but that was a time.

Those who are familiar with Indian history, those were familiar with the history of Indian caste system, understand how segmented and segregated society we were, how a substantial section of Indian population were not even treated as human beings. Their existence was worse than that of animals.

So, from such a scenario, if at least nominally, everybody can claim the equal, right. And definitely we owe our thanks to this particular process. Of course, we can be critical, even they were hypocritical, many of those who, many of these some of the most celebrated of philosophers of European enlightenment, they were blatantly racists. They were blatantly racist.

But you know that is a part of the story that does not really discredit this whole idea of European enlightenment values, certain important values. So, they play a very important role and the emergence of rationalism and individualism. The ability that you use your rationality,

you be more open to different ideas and the idea of individuals.

You do not have to follow the dictates and the rules and traditions of your family, of your community. You can get married to somebody, to anybody whom you want and as simple as that, okay, whether do I have the right to choose my partner? It's a very, very basic right, because every other animal does that, listen, I don't know whether you have observed this. Every other animal has the, even the animal who are supposed to be at a much lower level. Every animal does that. They do this at least as a part of their natural instinct, they choose their own partner.

But when it comes to human beings, when it comes to especially traditional societies like ours, that is not done, isn't it, the selection is done by somebody for us. And I host, a whole lot of other considerations are brought in, isn't it, age, and then job and caste, class, religion, even height, you know, color, a host of a socially constructed ideas are brought in, in deciding whether who can get married to whom.

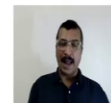
So, this idea of individual right, human right, is specifically a product of European modernity. And if we are, if you can talk whether these institutions of human rights have been weakened, or that's a different story, the very fact that every individual, every human being, just because of the fact that they are, human beings have certain kinds of alienable rights.

That is a, that's a terrific argument. That is a very important argument. And that argument emerged in the context of modernity and it is across the globe. And in spite of the fact, whether it's been followed rigorously or not that legal frame, that discourse has made tremendous changes in the lives of everybody.

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- The overarching framework of 'progress' and 'evolution'
- Foundations of 'developed', 'developing' and 'underdeveloped' countries.. And sociological theoretical justifications for the same
- The domination of capitalism and the communist challenge...
- The promise of science and the confidence of 'mastering the nature'...
- Elisions and deletions of thinkers...role of gender, ethnicity and so on..



And, yeah, modernity also brought in this overarching framework of progress and evolution, as we must have discussed several times that modernity as all the scholars who were heavily influenced by Darwin and every scholar, thus all whom we discussed so far, they all had a grand scheme. Okay. They had a grand scheme of our talking about a story from how simple societies develop and become more and more progressed.

So, this term called as progress as if, you know, we are destined to improve our own situation and then reach a kind of a particular destination. And that particular narrative became extremely influential. It became extremely important. It kind of percolated into, through the official government, it percolated through educational institutions. It percolated through social theory, it percolated through policy, policy implementations, policies circles, policy people who formulate policies and the combination of progress and the evolution put forward a particular vision of development, a particular vision of development.

The whole question of how do we leave in a far better way. How do we live in a far better way? And that resulted in the division of this whole world into, you know, developed and developing and under developed, we know that we declared ourself as a developing nation, and we know that who are the developed nations. And we know that there are more unfortunate nations who can't even claim the status of developing societies because they are underdeveloped.

So, what are the basis on which these categorizations are being made? How can we categorize, you know, millions of people or huge country or several countries, and put them together and say that you are only developing, whereas we are already developed. And then you get into a host of other very, very problematic criteria that are used including human development indices, nature of per capita income. You know, your GDP, your rate of industrial growth, your nutrition level, a host of other factors that brought into statistically divide people.

And there was a sociological theoretical justification for that the Europe, especially the Western Europe, they represent the model and everybody else is supposed to follow the suit. And especially when you discuss structural functionalism, especially theories of Talcott Parsons, we will see that how Parsons provides a very, very cumbersome, very difficult, yet very effective sociological theorization for the development narrative.

He argues very convincingly that why Western civilization, Western societies far capable. They have inherent qualities which make them capable of moving ahead compared to other societies. Okay. So, sociology also is his party to this whole project of dividing societies into do different things. Okay. And that really gave quite a lot of discussions and debates about this whole idea of development.

I must have mentioned in some of the previous classes that the Western model of development, Mark Dubois increased, industrial production increased, the personal consumption democracy, and other things were seen as the model and all other countries, all other countries in the world, including countries in Asia, Latin America, Africa, they were seen as countries who are lacking and countries who are lagging behind, and they were supposed to do the catching up business.

Okay. And without really considering the historical reasons why that these countries are being impoverished. So, that leads to some of the very interesting theoretical debates within a development theory by, especially by, people like Immanuel Wallerstein, Gunder Frank and host of others, and modernity also really gave birth to capitalism.

And, as one of the most resilient and efficient, economic system, and, you had the whole world divided into two sections, one set of countries which follow the capitalist form of economy, the other subset of countries, which follow the communist you know, line of economy led by USSR and China. And, a host of other countries, Poland, Cuba, Venezuela, a lot of other countries.

But later we know that after 1990s with the disintegration of Soviet Union with the fall of Berlin wall, communism is no longer is offered even as a resistance, even as an alternative to capitalism and capitalism really thrives.

So, modernity we understand that as a time, as a context that gave birth to this extremely influential element extremely influential aspect of capitalism, then modernity also provide you with the promise of science and the confidence of mastering the nature. Modernity also gave you a kind of a completely new narrative about the capabilities of human beings. Modernity reaffirmed that you are capable of mastering the whole world.

You are seen as the most important creature of God, a kind of a medieval understanding, which was given more kind of theoretical argument here, theoretical justification here. Human beings are seen as having endless ability to make use of the nature. Nature was seen as a resource natural resources, whether it is your water or timber or soil, or what would it be that, and we believe that we are in a position to master the nature.

We are able to secure our life more and more, but now when we look back, whether is our life more secured, the answer is an emphatic, no, And it is not because we have less control over the nature, but mostly we, the consequences of our own inventions, consequences of our own discoveries and our own efforts, have become so complicated that we have no way of controlling them.

The consequences of first modernity and in that consequence of first modernity. There are very interesting theorization about it, especially by scholars like Anthony Giddens and, Ulrich Beck, a German sociologist who speak about the risk society. Why that our own creations are now turning out to be the Frankenstein who would, you know, would attack us. And the elation and deletion of thinkers, role of gender, ethnicity, and so on.

So, in this whole narration of modernity and the people who contributed for that, we know that there are a number of people who are being ignored. Number of people who have been deleted, there is major elation, there's major deletion, there is major people have been ignored and the role of gender ethnicity. And so on.

We had a discussion about two such people, okay, who spoke about in a very, very different way through the language of lens, through the lens of gender and race, but who are never seen as important, figures in classical sociology. So every place and every phase, you see the connection between power and knowledge. So what we are you know, what we are given as a body of, as a trajectory of a particular discipline as a history of a particular discipline is always a contested history.

We may have people who have either been forgotten or very will fully, made to be forgotten. So that is true in the case of science as well, that is true in the case of science that's true in the case of every discipline. But the story of modernity is also the story of such people.

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- The globalizing effect of modernity
- Questions of modernity elsewhere- multiple modernity, alternate modernity and so on
- The Indian experience of modernity...
- Relevance of classical sociological theory to Indian contexts



And then we have this globalizing effect of modernity through earlier through you know, colonization and then through the kind of international trade and international institutions like, United Nations and WHO and then UNESCO and the host of UNSCR and a host of other international institutions by 1950s -60s, these whole ideas of European modernity it is spread across the globe.

And, they all believed that the European model of an increasing rationalization, increasing secularization will become the model elsewhere that will become the models through the globe. So, there was a major globalizing effect of modernity. And then what happened to that the questions of modernity elsewhere, how did modernity had influence, how did modernity articulate itself in different parts? Think of what has been the experience of India? What has been the experience of Japan or China or Africa?

So, that really gives rise to a lot of interesting arguments about multiple modernity, alternate modernity and so on, whether can we think of not, moderately as a singular form, or can we think of modernity as having different forms? For example, in India to give you an example, the electoral process, the electoral process is what we follow is democracy and democracy is based on your singular vote. Every universal adult franchise, every adult is entitled for one vote. And how are you supposed to vote? You are supposed to vote for the candidate on the base of ideas.

The candidates are supposed to campaign on the basis of certain ideas, political ideas about how, what is the kind of political imagination that they have. Okay. But when, and that is again, an ideal system, it doesn't happen anywhere, but that's how it, the ideal system, but when democracy was implemented in India. And we had already existing forms of mobilization, for example, caste was an extremely important form of mobilization in India. It was already an existing, very, very powerful, very effective social institutions, which gives a kind of identity for the people.

And when you introduce democracy to a country like India, people naturally broke in caste because there is, caste is the already existing way of mobilizing people. And you integrated caste with politics and caste became an extremely important player in this whole world in this whole scenario.

Ideally, we say that castism in politics is something bad. Interference of region is something bad, but we are seeing it today. And ideally all these things are against the spirit of modernity. But then do we call it as multiple modernity? Do we call it as alternate modernity? Those debates are really endless and the Indian experience of modernity.

Whether what have to the, another very interesting debatable topic is about secularism. How did India adopt this particular idea of secularism? Is it something same as what the European secularism mean? What does that secularism mean in a country like India, which has multi-religious society, a country, which has so many religions in the world. And how do we make sense of that, that relevance of classical sociological theory to Indian context, another very important point that we hardly discuss about, or even our curriculum or classes we hardly think about.

For example, the, classification of social stratification Marxian framework, to what extent, if Marxian framework is suitable to understand in India, how do we understand caste through the lens of classical social culture? Do we, accept Max Weber or do we accept Marks. Is Weber in understanding of caste system.

And he gives some, some space for status, Ritual status. Does it explain cast system effectively, or the Indian caste system? Is it devoid of its material background? Is it devoid of its economic and political power structures? Can Marxism, why cannot we use Marxism to understand out agrarian relations, the questions of landless people, the questions of feudal Lords. And is the caste and class are completely different in India, or are they, are they coterminous? Are they, are they parallel in India? And, and quite a lot of in the same social media studies show that, they are coterminous, they are parallel.

The upper class tend to be upper class and lower costs tend to be lower class. So, in a host of also any student who studies Indian society from a social point of view will have to be, extremely critical about using the classical sociological theory, classical sociological framework to understand Indian, society.

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- Continuing relevance of classical thinkers in the contemporary times



And the continuing relevance of classical thinkers, even in the contemporary times. So those who read the most recent, academic literature in sociology would realize that how often these scholars invoke the classical thinkers, it is not that they have laid the foundation and then that is the, and social media was built over that and they are forgotten and then gone. It is not even now some of the most important scholars of today. They revisit these people. They reinterpret these people, they rediscover their arguments.

So, Marxists read repeatedly that Durkheim and Weber are read repeatedly and new interpretations, new insights are brought in, and there are some of the important and original observations are so valid even now, whether you take Marks or Weber or Durkheim in the analysis of education or democracy or economy, we always go back to these corridors.

So, in the typical social ethical tradition, you never read a scholar and then forget about it. It is not like that you go back and you do this, you know, for you, you do this exercise of visiting them again and again, and then coming back and then, and then trying to make a better sense of, okay. So the relevance of classical social ethical theory for that matter, any theorist, any theorist of any discipline, because they are the one who laid foundation, they were the ones who, defined the trajectory of the discipline. They were the ones who demarcated the methodological and epistemological foundation of a discipline, and they continue to be relevant.

So, my simple advice for you is to those who are genuinely interested is to, is to read these scholars more seriously, possibly read their own original words, because they, can never be outdated. They are never outdated. They are as valid as, as any time, even like the time in which they lived. So, let us stop here. And we have one more week of class.

That means we have five more session and I will discuss three important traditions within a theoretical tradition within sociology, after the period of classical sociology. And then maybe a one class on the relation between methodology theory and epidemiology, and a final concluding session with that, we will be completing this course on classical social orders. Okay. So for today, let us windup and thank you.