

Indian Society: Sociological Perspectives
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Lecture-12

Development of Sociology and Anthropology in India

Welcome back to the class. We are starting a new chapter looking into the development of sociology and anthropology in India. So, I hope you remember the previous classes, where we, I think this is the third week we are into the third week. In the previous two weeks, we were discussing very broad themes about sociology in general, anthropology in general, and the kind of historical connections between sociology and anthropology. And in the last week, we had a rather elaborate discussion about the very interesting, very intense scholarly debates about the power relations and politics of knowledge production. So, we discussed Edward Said's work, Orientalism in detail.

I think we had two or three sessions. And in the last two sessions, we discussed the Ronald Inden's work, the oriental construction of India, which is also a part of his larger work on imagining India, where he adopts almost a similar kind of framework to say that the colonial knowledge production about India must be seen as a kind of a larger discourse, which comes from a particular episteme. So, we had a discussion about that. And we also had a session which critically looks at Edward Said's argument and the kind of various very important, very significant criticisms raised against his overall argument of Orientalism.

So, after this larger theoretical debate, we are moving into the development of sociology and anthropology in India. And this particular session, we will look into some of the important milestones in terms of the genesis and institutionalization of sociology, some important names, some important places, some important frameworks and arguments that played very significant role in the establishment of sociology as a discipline. So, these are the main reference books that we are basically available looking into these questions. One is there is an important book titled Anthropology in the East edited by Patricia Oberoi, Satish Deshpande and Nandini Sundar, published in 2003. And especially the chapter introduction, the professionalization of Indian anthropology and sociology, people, places and institutions is a very, very useful material.

And they have very, very elaborate discussions about individual anthropologists and sociologists and how they have, how their individual worldviews and theoretical

orientations were influenced by larger frameworks, larger intellectual influences. So, it is a very important work. And then the second work which is important again is published in 2011, edited again by Professor Sujatha Patel and it is titled *Doing Sociology*. And the full title is *Doing Sociology in India, in India, Genealogies, Locations and Practices*. This is the book, a very important book, which is, which again has an introduction written by Professor Patel, which is titled *Ruminations on Sociological Traditions in India* and is published by Oxford University Press.

And this also has a very interesting set of analysis about some of the important people, analysis about important places, for example, how Lucknow School of Sociology developed, how Bombay School of Sociology developed. And it also has kind of more specific essays on kind of a regional development of sociology, for example, how, what has been happening with the development of sociology in Karnataka. There Professor Jairam has a paper and there is a paper on Goa. So, it is a very interesting collection of essays. It has three broad classifications.

One is past and the present debating disciplinary genealogies, looking into these various schools of thought. Second one is between the nation and region situating sociology, looking into specific institutional spaces. For example, there is an article by Maitreyi Choudhury on JNU. And then there is also a chapter negotiating practices, re-scripting agendas, looking into larger debates. So, it is a very, very, very useful work.

And there is another essay, which slightly older essay published in 1991 by Professor Meenakshi Tapan. It appeared in *Economic and Political Weekly*, titled *Sociology in India, A View from Within*. And also, is important is a book written by Professor T.N. Madan published in 1996 titled *Pathways, Approaches to the Study of Society in India*.

That again has a very detailed analysis about the people and the themes. There are specific essays on Dumont, on M.N. Srinivas. So, these books are very important.

So, for this particular class, I will be using the essays by Professor Tapan and Professor Sujatha Patel, because we cannot go through all the material, but I would suggest these materials or other materials, this particular book *Anthropology in the East* and T.N. Madan's essay. We will refer to these books in the coming classes. But these are very important resources that, that any serious student of sociology must be familiar with.

In this class, I am discussing this essay, *Sociology in India, A View from Within*, an EPW essay published by Meenakshi Tapan. I am not going to discuss this essay per se, but I have taken specific paragraphs and sentences and then made it into a PPT. I thought that would be better in this section. So, this, the classes that we are going to, the coming

section will be a kind of discussion of Meenakshi Tapans paper. But before that, let us, there is one slide where we have to have some discussion about the nature of Indian sociology and the kind of scholarly attempts made by Indian sociologists and anthropologists to have a critical look at this discipline.

Indian sociology and anthropology is widely considered as a self-reflexive one. So, what does it mean? Sociology in general is supposed to be a reflexive one because sociologists always vouch by their ability to be reflexive. So, so you, all the time you try to understand what is happening to that, you try to develop a larger historical process. So, sociology demands the kind of ability to be reflexive or even to be reflective about how your discipline works, how you as an individual works in this larger field of sociology. So, if you look into the past, maybe 20, 30 years or even slightly more than that, there have been various attempts to chronicle, analyze and critic the trajectories of the discipline.

So, that is something very interesting to see how the practitioners of a discipline itself, they are constantly looking at and then reflecting over the trajectories of this particular discipline. And that is why it has brought in quite a lot of very, very, very, very rich resources of, resources and materials, which discusses and talks about the genesis and development of sociology in India. So, apart from the books that I have mentioned, which kind of looks at the growth and development of sociology, there are a lot of other works which discuss the so-called crisis of Indian sociology. So, this, whether sociology's discipline is in crisis, if it is in crisis, then what kind of crisis, what kind of questions that it is able to address, what kind of questions that it is unable to address. So, what has been the trajectory that a particular discipline is taking, what are its major concerns, what are the areas that it is not paying attention to.

So, there are quite a lot of very reflective critical works on sociology has been produced by its practitioners. So, that is something I do not think that you will find such a very rigorous engagement with one's own discipline in many other social science disciplines. In that sense, sociology is something very, very interesting. So, it tries to attempt to analyze theoretical schools, individuals and institutions that have played vital roles in the growth of these disciplines. You require, you need to understand what have been the theoretical schools, important frameworks, then the important individuals, very, very, very important individuals who occupied very, very central positions and institutions, departments or universities that have played very vital role in the development of sociology.

So, coming back to our discussion, we are, as I mentioned, we are looking at Meenakshi Tapan's essay, Sociology in India, a view from within as it appeared in economic and

political thinking. So, what she does in this essay, we are not discussing this whole essay, we are only discussing the first part of the essay where she summarizes the major concerns and the second part is more to do with her analysis about individuals and other things which I am not included in this slide, but you are always welcome to read that. Informed largely by the work of the French sociologist, Pierre-Bourdieu, this article attempts to identify and analyze the field of sociology in India. It traces the development of sociology as a discipline and then its institutionalization in the Indian context. So, she is not simply trying to trace or chronicle the genesis and development of sociology as a discipline, but she wants to use Pierre-Bourdieu's idea of the field.

It has a much broader understanding and let us see what she means by that. I would however like to distinguish sociology as a discipline from sociology as a field. This necessitates an explanation of the term field as it is being used in this paper. Field as Bourdieu uses it in particular, the intellectual field since this is our concern is like a magnetic field made up of systems of power lines. In other words, the constituting agents or systems of agents may be described as so many forces which by their existence, opposition or combination determines its specific structures at a given moment in time.

So, she understands sociology as a field composed of different systems of agents as so many forces of different systems of agents may be described as so many forces which by their existence, opposition or combination determines its specific structures at a given moment in time. So, this is a larger understanding about a particular discipline not confined to a very narrow chronicling of its genesis and development, but also brings in a host of other power dynamics and then try to understand in a much broader sense. Now, she begins with one of the very old debates whether sociology and anthropology can be used synonymously in Indian context. And this is something interesting because we will discuss that down the line, but usually there is a kind of a consensus that in India we use sociology and anthropology synonymously or interchangeably. We do not really make a big distinction between a watertight distinction between sociology and anthropology and quite a lot of scholars, almost every important scholars agree to that looking into the say the common origin of these disciplines from the British scholars or from the Britain and also its continuing practices.

For example, Beteilie suggests that there is in fact no clarity in the conception or the usage of sociology and anthropology in India. It is therefore not possible to formulate neat definition and following Beteilie, I would argue that both disciplines have the same approach to the study of social life that their methods are similar, but they have developed different techniques of investigation and analysis, Beteilie's argument. He suggests that the most common difference in techniques is probably that between intensive fieldwork and extensive survey method. So, he would argue that their

theoretical orientations and then the important methodologies are same because you cannot really argue that in India anthropology looked only at the primitive institutions and sociology studied the modern institutions. That was not the case in India.

Important people, they studied villages, they studied caste system, they studied Hindu religion, they studied kinship, and it was very difficult to distinguish whether it was a sociological approach or was a kind of an anthropological approach. In Indian sociology, it was heavily influenced by the British anthropology. So, the only possible difference according to Beteilie is that sociology used a kind of more intensive fieldwork while, anthropology used the intensive fieldwork while sociology used extensive survey method. British impact in the institutionalization of sociology and anthropology in India. So, this is again we mentioned a couple of times, but this is something very important.

Of course, the colonialism worked as a major reason why Indian society was heavily influenced by British anthropology, but even otherwise the British anthropologists including, you know, Ratu Brown and Malinoski and Evans Pritchard, they all had very, very specific influence on Indian sociologists. Srinivas, for example, was student of some of them. So, British anthropology exerted a direct influence on Indian society. The manner in which the discipline took roots in the colonial context is reflected in two events. An increase in a kind of social and cultural activity or sociological reflection as it were that could be considered as intellectual activity of a sort and the institutionalization of the discipline in different universities in India.

So, Meenakshi Tappan argues that there are two reasons why sociologist as a discipline got its roots in India or it is began to get established in India because of a combined efforts of two processes. One is that there was a increased intellectual activity regarding topics and themes related with social. Just like we say that the social emerged as a point of enquiry, social emerged as a matter of enquiry in the 18th and 19th century in Europe, paving the way for the emergence of sociology. The late 18th and early 19th century, you see quite a lot of organizations and institutions, colonial institutions, coming up with a very specific focus on the social dimensions of India. And second one is of course is the institutionalization of the discipline, opening up of sociology departments in different universities, in Lucknow University, in Bombay University, teaching it in Mysore University, so a lot of other things.

The political field of colonial bureaucracy influenced the development of the intellectual field in two ways. On the one hand, it influenced the establishment of certain social and cultural societies for the benefit of intellectual activity. Sir William Jones founded the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1784 and in 1828, the academic association was started by Henry Derozio in Calcutta, Brahma Samaj by Raja Ram Mohan Roy, and others. So,

these institutions, especially Asiatic Society of Bengal established in 1784 played a very, very key role in gathering scholarly attention to the affairs of society. So, this academic association established in 1828 and then Brahma Samaj by Raja Ram Mohan Roy.

So, all and she lists quite a few more voluntary associations, scholars, groups that got established in Bengal, specifically in Calcutta and also in Jaipur and other places, which began to look at the social dimensions of Indian society. On the other hand, the colonial bureaucracy contributed inadvertently to the further development of sociology through requirements of purpose of administration. That is, British officials realized the importance of an adequate knowledge of Indian culture and social life at one efficient functioning of India. This is something again which we are familiar with, the way in which colonialism took roots in India, the way in which the objectives and outlook of colonialists change shifted from the early agenda of coming here and then doing trade and then going back into a kind of a more, having a kind of a complete authority over India or complete control over India. That also necessitated quite a lot of other administrative changes because British administrators really wanted to have a firm grip on the realities of India.

Because they could not make sense of the complexities of India, many of the institutions and practices, culture, religion that existed in India was something quite beyond their comprehension. So, they started to collect, to collate and to classify and then to record a series of information about the social life. For example, this decennial census started in 1871 and a host of other systematic survey, survey of the flora, survey of the fauna, survey of human races, human caste. So, all these and then survey of the land. So, a huge array of initiatives were established by these people to look into that.

And this had far-fetched implications of these official documentation and we will discuss that later. For example, how these bureaucratic intervention and bureaucratic classification of social data, to what extent that contributed for its consolidation, to what extent it contributed to their crystallization is a very, very important theme that has been discussed extensively by social anthropologist. So, there is even an argument that caste system was kind of, is constructed by colonial administration. So, it does not mean that caste system did not exist in India. But the argument is that colonialism or colonial administration really consolidated or reified many of these categories or made them more crystallized or made them more kind of a very, very homogenous categories and this categorization had quite a lot of long-lasting consequences, which we will discuss in detail later.

Now, second dimension is the institutionalization of the discipline. This is a kind of basic information about how sociology got established. The first university department of

sociology was started at Bombay as the School of Economics and Sociology in 1919. But prior to that, sociology was being offered as a course or a part of a course in different departments in the country. It was, but Professor Geddes who headed the department of sociology in Bombay in 1919, a very, very important architect and urban planner.

So, the first known university to start teaching sociology as a part of a course was Mysore University in 1917-18. Soon after the assumption of headship by A. R. Wadia. Parvathama, Parvathama was a very important scholar, a lady, you know, who headed the department and considered to be very important scholar.

She was quite active during 70s and 80s. In 1917, sociology was introduced in the Postgraduate Council of Arts and Sciences and in 1921, a department of anthropology was established at Calcutta University. So, this is a rough, you know, idea from between 1919 to 21 or 1917-18 and 1921, you see sociology as a discipline taking groups in the form of specific departments in different universities in the country. In 1921, a combined department of economics and sociology was started under the headship of Radhikamal Mukherjee at Lucknow.

He was joined in 1922 by D. P. Mukherjee and in 1928 by D. N. Majumdar. And this is a very important development because what is later came to be known as Lucknow School as a very formidable place of sociological education, sociological teaching happens during this particular time.

And all these people Radhikamal Mukherjee and D. P. Mukherjee and D. N. Majumdar, they are all very important stalwarts in the field of sociology. So, there are quite a lot of academic articles and arguments about the growth and decline of the so-called Lucknow School. And as you know, you associate, you know, the place of an institution with a school because it means that that institution succeeded in producing a discernible set of ideas or frameworks or theoretical formulation, which is having long lasting, you know, implication.

You have Frankfurt School, you have Chicago School. So, you have, you know, different schools are kind of popular among its practitioners for the role that they played in the development of a particular discipline. Now, the agents of practitioners responsible for the different institutions belong to their, belong to other disciplines and had varying, varying interests, not limited to sociology alone. This Wadia was essentially a philosopher, Geddes as a biologist, human geographer, and town planner.

R. K. Mukherjee was an economist with an interest in ecology, social work and so on. So, this interesting, you know, observations that the people, all these important people

who played very important role in the, in the founding of the discipline, they were not strict sociologists in that sense. They had varying interests and these interests also kind of started influencing the way in which they conceived of sociology and then wanted to get it established. So, this is a kind of a concluding slide in this, this particular section. Sociology in India has thus been characterized by different approaches and methods, all of which reflect underlying theoretical and ideological convictions.

There is also the important influence of western interest in India as an object of study. This suggests the interplay of different fields and proves beyond doubt that in terms of condense at least sociology does not constitute an autonomous field in India. The conduct of sociology in India is thus not specifically limited to a particular area or discipline nor to a single approach. So, this is something we all now take for granted. We understand that while sociology as a discipline offers a very unique perspective, a very unique framework to understand society in different or in, when you compare it with other social science disciplines like history or political science or others.

Within sociology there are so many diverse strands and as a discipline has been influenced by quite a lot of other influences, ideological influences, theoretical influences, methodological orientation. So, in that sense the kind of a perspectives offered within sociology are quite diverse. Especially kind of western interest in India, we discussed it elaborately when we discussed Ronald Inden, when we talked about how the westerners wanted to look at India as a land of tradition, as an exotic land, a land of spirituality, a land of non-violence, very, very different from theirs, a very different philosophy and outlook and life compared to that of their society. So, that is also getting reflected in India how Indian society and its caste system, its religion became very important elements of interest for the western scholars.

So, this is the first part of Meenakshi Tapan s essay. As I mentioned earlier, I am not going to discuss the second part which takes the discussion in a slightly different direction. So, let us conclude this session today and we will move forward with a kind of a discussion on Sujatha Patel's, Professor Sujatha Patel's essay in his book Doing Sociology in India. Thank you.