

**Indian Society: Sociological Perspectives**  
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**Lecture-13**

Sociological Traditions in India I

Welcome back to the class. We are starting yet another session looking into the development, original development of sociology in India. And in the previous class, we had a discussion on the essay written by Meenakshi Tapan, an essay appeared in EPW. We discussed the first half of the essay looking into the institutional and intellectual influences of the discipline. And in today's class, I want to go through the introduction, introductory chapter written by Sujatha Patel in her book, in her edited book titled *Doing Sociology in India, Genealogies, Locations and Practices*. It is published by Oxford, and I had mentioned this book as one of our references.

So, this is an introductory chapter, introduction to this whole edited volume. So, every, any introduction for that matter to an edited volume consists of two things. One is that it talks about the general theme at hand, the theme of the book, the topic of the book and then it tries to place it in a larger context. And it also gives some kind of an introduction or a summary of the specific contributions or contributors or specific essays in this edited work.

That is what an introductory chapter in any edited work is supposed to do, to bring in the larger debates, larger, the problematic of the book, larger theme of the book, along with the specific contributions of the scholars who have contributed chapters or papers for this volume. So, I will be focusing only on the first part, the kind of larger arguments and observations about the development and growth of sociology, and not on the individual contributors, because that goes beyond the purview of this, these introductory classes. But I will return to many of these, those specific papers, when I discuss specific people, specific theoretical orientations in the coming classes. So, let us begin. So, she says that this book proposes that any account of sociology in India needs to be, needs to acknowledge four features, that the discipline and its traditions are various and diverse, something that we discussed earlier, and that some of them draw their lineage from anthropology, while others draw from sociology.

Again, something that we discussed earlier, that these find expressions both in subjects and objects, scholars and the scholarship curriculum and research together with the

social relationships established in the teaching and learning process within the profession and also within process outside academia, in movements and associational groups, which together represents its traditions. So, this influence that, the diverse influence from sociology and anthropology, it has implications on to the discipline and as well as again, the larger processes starting outside, happening outside. See that these diverse traditions need to be examined in terms of two phases. One is colonial and post-independence. And this is another very important argument we will come across very forcefully in Sujatha Patel's essay, but even in quite a lot of others.

What did colonialism do to these disciplines? And to what extent these disciplines change their trajectory in the post-independence period? What are the kind of continuities? What are the ruptures? What are the kind of new diversions that these disciplines have taken up? And finally, that these traditions are enmeshed in political projects of constructing a society taking place in India since the last 100 years or more. So, again, it is a very interesting question. She is trying to pose these questions in the larger framework of the questions of nationalism. You have a Indian nation state, especially after 1947. And even before that, you had the idea of a nation with much more larger boundaries.

So, how did we conflate the idea of a society with that of the nation state? And that is something very interesting discussion that will follow in this particular paper. So, these are the four themes that she identifies as something centrally constituting to any discussions and debates about the nature of the development, establishment, and development of sociology in India. The papers affirm there have been strong and weak traditions of scholarship in India and outline some of the features as these are embedded in different scholarship. Also, most of them highlight two separate but connected dominant positions that have structured the formation of sociological tradition in India. They are colonialism and its practice and ideologies of nationalism and notions of nation and nationhood, some of the point that we discussed.

So, starting with colonialism, anthropology and sociology, a very important theme that we have had quite a lot of discussion in the previous weeks. So, there is one important issue that needs clarification before we proceed. It relates to the general and by now, commonsensical notion within scholarship in India and in particular, sociological scholarship that there is no difference between the practice of sociology and anthropology. This claim was first made in print in 1952, when M.N. Srinivas wrote an article advocating the unity between sociology and social anthropology in the first issue of sociological bulletin. Sociological bulletin is a very important journal published by Indian sociological society that is an official, professional body of Indian sociologists. This position was implicitly held sway since the 20s and reflected in the works of

sociologist pioneer, G. S. Ghurye. So, this is something that we discussed in the earlier discussions. So, most commentators including Indian sociologists and anthropologists such as Beteilie and recently Oberoi and Oommen have argued that the division of the two arrows in the West for pragmatic purposes and represents that best and ambiguity. As many scholars suggest, in a world in which barriers between social sciences are being diluted and multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives being articulated such divisions are unnecessary. This in a recent commentary Oberoi has suggested that it is actually rather nonsensical distinction from the perspective of non-Western sociologists and anthropologists. Others have suggested that such legacy augurs well for Indian scholarship and is a testament to Indian scholarship's early entrance into interdisciplinarity.

Something we discussed this point in the previous class as well. We remember how Meenakshi Tappan quotes Beteilie for his very strong argument that there is no point in trying to make a distinction between these two disciplines. However, it is also clear that these divisions were not merely pragmatic in the Western context. These emerged in the late 19th and early 20th century not really as means of identifying entry into studies, scholarship and recognition of scholars and their lineages but were part of a political project of colonialism imbibed in Europe and the West where social sciences originated. The political project divided the study of two kinds of societies into two disciplines.

Sociology as a study of us, the modern Western society and anthropology as a study of other the non-modern society. This again we have discussed how anthropology was preoccupied with the study of the non-modern other whereas sociology was seen as a study of a industrial capitalist urban society. Oberoi have done an exemplary survey of this debate as it exists within anthropology. They have, they note as others have done before that this discussion progress from the initial deliberations regarding the processes which made possible anthropological knowledge. That is a colonial exploits sponsored by imperial states to an analysis of the colonial state on whose demands the discipline study of the other or the natives was conceptualized.

Anthropologists studied this discipline's history in order to understand how anthropological knowledge increasingly implicated itself to uphold the civilizing mission of the colonial anthropologist and became in turn instrumentalized through the use of various administrative practices. So, this again I think we have discussed earlier how say by 1970s and 80s anthropologist in the West became more conscious about the kind of a colonial legacy that this particular discipline has and how colonialism directly and indirectly influenced or shaped the theoretical and methodological orientations of this particular discipline so as to make use of this discipline as a way to facilitate the colonial domination and exploitation. So, that is something important. So, they studied the

production of instrumental knowledge through census, the documents of the state, the use of statistical table, legal codes, term investigative modalities by Cohn and excavated the archives to understand and locate them. Cohn has called the latter process as objectivation of knowledge.

That is the coding of the colonized countries such as India to make available for colonization. So, this is again a very, very crucial point which we made a mention in the previous class. So, Cohn talks about it as objectivation of knowledge where you come from an outside context and then you categorize, you label, you categorize, you differentiate, you hierarchize the society and its traits into different categories. And these particular categories are then ingrained into the administrative logic. It is ingrained into the logic of the governmentality with far reaching consequences on the everyday lives of these people themselves.

Because for example, in the census, you are asked to identify either as a Muslim or as a Christian or as a Hindu or as somebody who belong to particular religion. And studies have shown that there are so many communities who could not identify their religion or who could not identify with only one religion. But the logic of the census, the logic of the colonial governmentality would insist that they cannot be both Hindu and Christian at the same time or Hindu and Muslim at the same time. They have to be either a Muslim or a Hindu. But that is not how they have lived for a long time.

So, these colonial interventions really played a very important role in the rigidification or making these categories very, very rigid and crystallized. It is not sociologist in India had to, had not recognized, and commented on the role played by colonial state in the formation of anthropological knowledge. For example, Srinivasan Panini has stated anthropology as is well known was the product of European expansion of the world during the last 3 or 4 centuries. The need to govern men and various races and vastly different cultures created the European rulers a need to study the life and cultures of the ruled. So, colonialism, the connection between colonialism and anthropology cannot be overstated.

I think we have mentioned it several times. For example, how say categories like tribe and caste and villages were kind of made as a part of this larger argument and then it looked as if Indian sociology is only about these categories. So, Cohn has indicated for India that for India, British played a major role in identifying and producing Indian tradition that is beliefs and customs of these living in the region which in turn became the norm on which to judge a culture and intervene to protect it through the laws and order machinery. For instance, he states, the concept of scheme which the British created to understand and to act in India, they constantly followed the same logic. They reduced

vastly complex codes and associated means to few metonyms.

The process allowed them; this process allowed them to say themselves the effort of understanding or adequately examining subtle or not so subtle meanings attached to the actions of the subjects. Once British had defined something as an Indian custom or traditional dress or proper form of salutation, the any deviation from it was defined as a rebellion or an act to be punished. India was redefined by the British to be a place of rules and order. Once British had defined to their own satisfaction what they constructed as Indian rules and customs, then the Indians had to conform to these constructions. Very, very important argument, very important argument, something similar to what we have been discussing.

This is how maybe for the first time in the Indian history an invader, a foreign ruler was able to exert so much of influence into the Indian culture. And what has happened during colonialism is unparalleled to any of the previous forms of outside invasion or any such kind of a foreign rule. Because whether the Mughal kings or any other previous people who invaded India did not go into so much into the details or so much into the depth of both professional, personal, and social lives of people, the public and private individual lives of people. So, here they for them India appeared as an extremely complex, confusing, and messy society and they wanted to make some sense of that. So, they bring in certain classifications and rationalities and they define, okay this is how traditions work and once they were kind of codified anything that goes beyond that is seen as a deviant behaviour.

Because these oversimplified models were important for them to understand Indian society and govern it properly. At the same time, they did not have the patience nor the necessity to understand the kind of complexities of Indian society which does not really obey the rigid logic of many of the western ideals and systems of classification. In pre-colonial India, groups were defined by multiple markers of identity and their relationship with each other were contingent on complex processes which were constantly changing and were related to political power. Varied groups classified as differently as temple communities, territorial groups, lineage segments, family units, royal retinues, various sub-castes, little as opposed to large kingdoms, occupational reference groups, agricultural and trading associations, networks of devotional and sectarian religious communities and priestly cabals were later standardized under the name of caste as being the only rather than one among many ways of representing and organizing identity. So, this is a very, very important coined by Nicholas Dirks, the author of the very famous book, *The Caste of Mind*, who argues that a country like India, it represented myriad ways of identification, myriad ways of social organization, many times flexible, confusing, overlapping ideas and identities and which was not kind of legible or which

was not comprehensible for a western mind that comes from a very, very different context.

There are very fascinating discussions about even this term religion. Hinduism as a way of religion, Hinduism as a religion, this is a misnomer, it is a misnomer because Hinduism is not something similar to any of the Semitic religion. Hinduism does not have a text, it does not have a prophet, it does not have an established system of rules and regulations. So, it is a much, much complicated set of traditions and rituals and worship patterns. There is hardly anything which is not there within Hinduism and this cannot be compared with a Semitic religion or Abrahamic religion.

But the term religion was imposed on Hinduism and Hinduism was to a large extent shaped after these religions that were familiar to these people. So, look at these kinds of categories that Nicholas Dirks has provided. Very, very interesting set of categories which we do not really hear many of them now because many of them have been erased, many of them have transformed into more categories and what is Dirks argument is that all these different forms of identification, different forms of associational lives were all lumped together under the category of caste. So, for example, varied groups classified as differently as temple communities, territorial groups looking into the geographical things and the lineage segments, maybe within the same caste but having different lineage systems and then family units of extended family units into much larger geographic areas, royal retinues and then various sub-castes, little as opposed to large kingdoms, very small fiefdoms or very, very small principalities, then occupational reference groups, then agricultural and trading associations, networks of devotional and sectarian religious communities. Again, a very fascinating area about how there were so many different traditions of believers, traditions of worship, traditions of religiosities, not only Vaishnavism or Shaivism but so many internal divisions and priestly cables.

Cables were later standardized and under the name of caste and being the only rather than one among many ways of representing and organizing identity. So, that is why he talks about the colonial construction of caste, how colonial administration, colonial governmentality constructed caste as a rigid, as a homogenized, rigid system of identification. With the help of anthropological theories and methods, colonial rulers constructed a new genealogy or hierarchy wherein they entangled European race and evolutionary theories with those articulated by native elites, for example, Brahminism in India. Anthropologists project of the colonial state also legitimize its role by using the language of native elites. So, the way in which the Britishers depended on the native elites in India and the native elites in India is undoubtedly the priestly class or the class of the learned people which are Brahmins.

So, it is very interesting to look into how the kind of a relationship between the Brahmins as a caste and the Brahmins as a scholarly group got involved in this whole project is something very interesting. There are very fascinating studies that looking into that, Dirks himself talks about it, Cohn talks about it and there are very fascinating studies by say historians like Lathamani who has studied extensively the practice of Sati. It is a fascinating work, the contentious traditions of work and there are I think two essays in the EPW on colonial construction of Sati. So, it tells you exactly how the Britishers who could not make sense of it, they wanted to classify good Sati from bad Sati, then they wanted to see whether this practice has scriptural sanctions because they believed that Hinduism is also modelled after Christianity. So, whatever is practiced by Hindus must have kind of a scriptural sanction, it must have been permitted or enjoined in the scriptures.

So, they ask a group of scholars, Brahmin scholars to go through all the Hindu scriptures and to see whether there is any scriptural sanction for that and Brahmins come up with different interpretations obviously because Hinduism does not have a scripture that tells whether Sati is good or bad or it has to be followed or not followed, it is impossible. So, they come up with quite a lot of different perspectives and then the Britishers choose certain interpretation as per their convenience, overlooking other equally valid interpretations and then pass this particular law prohibiting. So, Lathamani's intervention is something so interesting to see how the colonial enterprise worked along with the native elites and then produced very specific kind of knowledge. No wonder Dirks has asserted that the colonial conquest was sustained not by superior arms and military organization nor by political power and economic wealth but also through cultural technologies of rule, anthropology and its knowledge together with its theories and methodologies became part of this process of rule. So, the cultural technique of rule is something we often say that the Britishers resorted to divide and rule policy.

Divide and rule policy is mostly spoken in the context of Hindu-Muslim divisions in colonial India but that is only part of the story. That is only part of the story that the British rule which really epitomized the kind of a modern rationality, modern rationality of very watertight compartments, watertight norm-overlapping social forms of identifications. They really proved to be very important tools of governance and administration which had very serious implications on Indian society. Following the footsteps mapped by theories such as Dirk and Cohn, Meena Radhakrishna has explored how theories and methods of physical anthropology constituted the language of high and low caste races. She has argued that there was a convergence of interest between scientists, ethnographers, colonial officials, travelogue writers, fiction writers and local structures of power fused politics with academics, history with myth and science with fictions by its practitioners.

These indigenous people were made out to be the relics of the past thereby denying their struggle as being modern and legitimate place in the present. So, the whole story of physical anthropology which believed that people can be divided into different unique watertight compartments into six or seven major races. And that was all presented through the language of science. There was a scientific racism that was very very powerful during 1930s and 40s.

So, that was again had its implication on India. So, where does this discussion take us? We can highlight two themes that can help to comprehend the trajectories and the formation of traditions in sociology in India. First, we have, we would need to accept that notwithstanding the contemporary imperative of interdisciplinarity and the practice of conflating with two disciplines as one, there is a need to recognize and enumerate the historical processes that divided two disciplines of sociology and anthropology and the political project that embedded this division in the West. So, there is a need to recognize and enumerate the historical process that divided the two disciplines of sociology and anthropology and the political project that embedded this division in the West. Thus, a text debating the history of intellectual traditions need to distinguish and juxtapose those of sociology from those of anthropology in order to understand where these interfere, interface, where these interface and where they do not. Following this volume on the history of these two traditions need also to highlight when, how and why scholars conflated them and for what purpose.

We initiate such an attempt here. So, she is not kind of ready to take it for granted that from the very beginning sociology and anthropology were one and the same and then they were used interchangeably. Rather, he, she argues that there are very specific history. There are very specific reasons why these two traditions of sociology and anthropology were conflated at some time, not conflated at certain other times. So, that kind of a history needs to be relooked again and that is, she claims is one of the purposes of this book. This volume not only recognizes but argues that the discipline of anthropology since late 19th century legitimized a colonial frame of reference for examining and evaluating communities and thus became a powerful instrument and tool for understanding contemporary sociability.

So, her argument is the discipline of sociology and its specific orientation since the late 19th century legitimized a colonial frame of reference for examining and evaluating communities. Communities belonging to the, with the traditional markers, the caste, the religious, the village communities and this became a powerful instrument and tool of understanding contemporary sociability. Following this, we contend that historians of knowledge need to assess and map the ways in which colonialism constructed and the



myriad practices of anthropology. Within the scholarship in India, this project has been recently initiated and needs to be taken further. So, she looks into how the colonialism as a combination of political or economic and cultural domination that specifically influenced Indian anthropology.

In this context, it is imperative to call the cautionary remarks made by Dirks. He has suggested that scholars studying anthropological knowledge need to propose a nuanced analysis of the relationship between knowledge and power. While affirming that the overall argument of instrumentalization of anthropological knowledge for augmentation of the colonial project has value, he contends that scholars should not conflate cause and effect or ascribing intention as well as system play, congeries of activities and conjunctions of outcomes, which though related and at times coordinated were usually diffused, differentiated and contradictory. It allows spaces for construction of thinking and intellectual engagement, which while it could not displace the episteme certainly allowed new ways of its reconstruction. So, she is invoking Dirks again to caution that to assume a unidirectional, instrumental direction in which colonialism used anthropologist to create knowledge for its sake could be to an oversimplified version.

Because there are very interesting elaborations about how some of the western anthropologists did not toe the line with anthropological project, colonial project, Verrier Elwin, for example, or even Geddes, for example, a host of other anthropologists did not act as if they were the, their only purpose was to toe the line or was to serve the colonial masters. They had a, they had quite a lot more room or freedom or they had quite a lot of space for negotiating within that, within the larger framework and then coming up with quite a lot of novel forms of arguments that did not suit the, in the sort of colonial enterprise. So, she talks about how some of these essays by Carol Upadhyia and others, for example, among the tribal identity brought in new, new categories and how these new categories in turn had quite a lot of unintended consequences, which brought it, which took it in a completely different direction. Secondly, from the above, there is a need to assess how the study of sociology as against anthropology was organized during the colonial period. Did the sociologists borrow their language of assessing modern India from those who are fashioned by colonial anthropology? If so, what kind of sociology developed? Did Indian sociologists also engage with contemporary western sociological theories and did they adapt these to the Indian conditions? So, this is similarly, she is arguing that you need to look into how sociology as a discipline emerged, looking into how, whether sociology in India during that early period were influenced by the western ideas of a modern society and what specific ideas were brought in, what specific frameworks were brought in.

So, she wants to do a kind of a more nuanced analysis rather than simply conceding that

these two disciplines are not, they are one and the same in Indian society. So, then there are descriptions about how the general character of these papers and other thing. Manorama Savur excavates the political underpinning that framed the discipline of sociology and converted it into anthropology at Bombay. The story of Bombay starts with Patrick Geddes and his radical ideas of theory and methodologies regarding the study of contemporary society and thus on sociology. His orientation in sociology was questioned by mainly upper caste nationalists within the Senate who gave the responsibility of the department to G.

S. Ghurye, a Sanskritist and later a trained anthropologist. She suggests that the department under the leadership of Ghurye started defining the study of sociology in the Indological and Empiricist terms as a study of traditional India of caste, tribe, and race. Suver argues that the study of modern India at Bombay's department of sociology was inaugurated only after independence when A.R. Desai joined the department and started teaching modern India through an assessment of classes and later changed the curriculum into corporate this vision.

So, every department had this particular transition of starting off with a particular orientation of looking at it in the traditional society, in the traditional society and in the case of Bombay the argument is that a focus on the modern society happened much later. So, all these sections are specific elaborations of these points as elaborated in this book. There are arguments about Hegde's paper, then Sujatha Patel's paper, so I am not going into the individual papers. Now, she has another section on nation, nationalism and sociological tradition which is the second part of this essay which we will take it up in the coming class because these two things, one is the colonial context is something important for her and this nation, nationalism and sociological tradition is another important thing that she wants to look into. So, we will wind up the session now and we will meet in the coming class. Thank you.