

Indian Society: Sociological Perspectives
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Sociological Traditions in India II

Welcome back to the class. We are discussing Professor Sujatha Patel's introductory essay in the book *Doing Sociology in India, Genealogies, Locations and Practices*. This is an important volume, important contribution that very critically looks at the genesis and development of sociology. So, in the previous class, we were looking at how she argues that even though there is a consensus that sociology and anthropology in India are indistinguishable or they are used interchangeably, she argues that there is a need to disentangle this more looking into how colonial enterprise specifically shaped a discipline like anthropology and how say the ideas of modern nation-state and modern society influence the contours of sociology. So, we were discussing the first part of the introductory essay in the previous class. So, let us complete this essay in this present class.

So, the second part of this essay, she has titled as *Nations, Nationalism and Sociological Traditions*. So, in the context of creating a global cosmopolitan theory, social theorists have recently raised some seminal questions regarding the imprint of the idiom of nation-state, nation in classical and 20th century sociological thought. Much in the same way as the discussions on colonialism and anthropology proceeded, social theorists who have termed this imprint, *Methodological Nationalism* have deliberated the ways in which it has framed and organized sociological knowledge and carried it with the assumption which worked to structure sociological enquiry. Though sociology was structured through the prism of the nation, nation-state and nationalism, sociological theories ignored these intellectual moorings and universalized its language disregarding this history.

So, what they are actually talking about in this particular section is trying to understand some very interesting debates about how, say, society was conceived of in the era of modernity or in the modern era and then how globalization, for example, that brings in a pragmatic shift in that particular argument. In other words, there is an argument about *methodological nationalism* being the feature of a modern society and the need to shift that framework into *Methodological Cosmopolitanism*. So, I will just spend some 2 minutes to explain what it means. In *Methodological Nationalism*, which was, according

to these scholars, was the most prominent or dominant paradigm, it assumes that a society is confined within the boundaries of a nation-state. A nation-state is seen as the container within which the society functions.

So, when you talk about Indian society or when you talk about Indian economy for that matter, within the framework of Methodological Nationalism, you assume that all the economic, political and social relations and dynamics of this society is more or less confined within the nation-state, within the boundaries of the, geographical boundaries of the nation-state. The nation-state is seen as a very overarching container, overarching boundary within which the inner dynamics of the society takes place. So, with the dawn of globalization, scholars like, you know, Ulrich Beck, for example, he is a very important champion of that argument. He would argue that this era of Methodological Nationalism is over because nation-state has become less effective and the national boundaries have become porous. National boundaries have become porous, national boundaries have become flexible and many times they have become redundant because the digital communication, the digital networks do not really follow or respect the national boundaries.

So, there is a huge intense transmission of ideas, materials, knowledge system, news across the national boundaries. So, the sovereignty of the nation-state with respect in terms of protecting its boundary in a very hard manner that has been compromised. So, that is a major debate in anthropology of, sorry, in the globalization studies. So, Sujatha Patel is invoking those ideas and trying to see to what extent the sociological theories were confined or concerned with this kind of understanding of Methodological Nationalism. Or in other words, to what extent sociology was mindful of the kind of a larger relation between nation and nationalism.

Nation and nationalism and the society because they are not one and the same. They are not one and the same. There could be multiple nationalisms within a nation, especially a country like India, there are multiple nationalist aspirations of different regions. But we were able to maintain the national boundary of India intact to a large extent by various means of negotiating, sometimes violently repressing or sometimes conceding to certain demands or sometimes taking through the language of development. The nation-state was able to maintain its kind of a boundary.

So, that is the kind of question that she is analyzing here. In the most straightforward usage, Methodological Nationalism implies co-evilness between society and nation-state, something as I mentioned earlier. That is, it argues that the discussion of the modern society with sociology thus entails an implicit understanding of the nation. So, when you are talking about the society, you are also talking about the nation because you cannot

think about society outside the framework of nation-state. Or in other words, the nation-state, nation is treated as the natural and necessary representation of the modern society.

So, the nation is treated as the natural and necessary representation of the modern society. Methodological Nationalism is taken for granted belief that nation-state boundaries are natural boundaries within which societies are contained. Something that we just mentioned as a nation-state works as a kind of a container. Sociology, according to Beck, assumed that humanity is naturally divided into a limited number of nations, which on the side organize themselves as nation-states and on the outside set boundaries to distinguish themselves from other nation-state. This outside limitation and competition between nation-state present the most fundamental category of political organization.

Thus sociologist's vision of culture and politics, law, justice and history represents that of individual nation-state. That is how the conventional wisdom of a modern society emerged and Beck himself argues that in the era of globalization, this is an old story which needs to be changed. But again, we now know that the kind of earlier optimism that people had about globalization seems to be misplaced. The nation-state is not going to wither away, nation-state is not going to lose its significance, it is here to stay. So, did sociological traditions of post-independence India frame themselves in similar ways, as a kind of a co-evilness between society and nation.

The post-independent Indian state-initiated expansion of the system of higher education in order to redress the imbalances created by colonialism and to create pathways towards modernity. This policy drew its inspiration from the nationalist thought. No wonder most Indian academics were supporters of this program and actors and deliberators with the state in its higher education policies. It led to the institutionalization of a close functional relationship between Indian academia and higher education and by extension between project of knowledge creation and that of nationhood. We know that how, say, there was a huge focus on Indian education system, IITs were established and new university system was established.

So, it was all emerging from a vision to create a more vibrant and educated and wealthy nation. Thus, sociologists in India, unlike those in Europe and United States, were neither blind nor ignorant about the significance of the nation-state and nation, of the nation and nation-state. Rather, they were enthusiastic supporters of the project of higher education and the particular roles that the state demanded that they play with the higher education system as sociologists. For example, Srinivas and Panani declared, we are convinced that their social and social anthropology's growth was intimately influenced by nationalism. This agenda entailed a need to professionalize the discipline and organize it within the territory of the nation-state.

In this context, two strands of methodological nationalism mentioned above, that of territorialization and naturalization became in the new ways, biotically linked with each other to become an integrated part of the transitional social thinking in India. So, disciplines are closely associated with the official discourse and methods of understanding the relation between nation-state, between nation, nation-state and modernity. And so, the territorialization of the society with that of the nation and its naturalization became very important thing and sociology, according to Sujatha Patel, became a very active party to that. It self-consciously proclaimed a methodological nationalism as its project. Thus, this sociology was particularistic, unlike some of the colonial variants which posited a universal sociology, insofar as it constructed a sociology of India as an Indian sociology and equated Indian society with the territory controlled by Indian state.

So, this is a very important claim about how Indian sociology was emerged and how Indian sociology uncritically accepted or uncritically was bought into the larger narrative of nation-state that Indian society is nothing but the land mass and the people controlled within the geographic boundaries of Indian state that constitutes a natural society, that constitutes a kind of an organic society within the Indian nation-state. So, this uncritical acceptance of that is something that Professor Patel highlights. The late 1960s and 70s were critical years to understand these developments and the making of the discipline. These trends played significant role. First, the university became main and the only site of organizing the practice of discipline.

Of course, the universities were required and universities were possible only with the financial help from the state. Phenomenal expansion of higher education, so she talks about the very, very rapid rise in university departments and people and others. There was an attempt to standardize and make uniform condors of the knowledge governing the discipline wherein three institutions played a key role. UGC and then a second one was this Indian Council of Social Science Research and third one, the kind of its own group and there is no coincidence that the state demanded sociologists together with other social scientists develop and organize systematic knowledge about contemporary society as it responded to planned social change. Most sociologists affirmed a need to have a sociological language that can comprehend the uniqueness of Indian nation, its culture, its civilization.

Sociologists in India saw this project as which they analyzed one's own society, one's own indigenous own terms without colonial and now neocolonial tutelage. So, we will just come back to here. Let us see here. So, she is talking about how these major institutionalized structures of UGC and ICSSR came into picture and how Indian, and the

third one was the Indian Sociological Society as a professional body was formed and how it had the state patronage and other things. So, now this project allowed for the institutionalization of a particularistic problematic, an assessment of the changes occurring within India's characteristic institution, caste, kinship, family and religion.

This particularistic problematic had much in common with the notions of India embedded within the elite and mainstream nationalism. Thus, if colonial heritage was a key element that structured these efforts, the need to examine how modernity and modernization in the context of Indian building, in the context of nation building were organizing the changes occurring within the institutional family, caste, kinship and religion fueled its energy. So, what is the argument here? The argument here is that sociology almost bought in into the language of nationalism and nation state and wanted to serve the larger purpose of understanding the transformations of Indian society in the era of modernity. So, they wanted to, so the particularistic problematic that India sociology was concerned with or the most central theme of inquiry that Indian sociologists were concerned with was how the transition or transformation of traditional Indian institutions of caste, kinship, religion and family. And that was the agenda of the nation state and that was also supported and facilitated by the, by this, by this Indian, by the discipline of sociology.

On many alternatives that the discipline inherited from the early 20th century experience that was ultimately institutionalized as standard and uniform language to examine as a social change in modern India and was the perspective provided by M. S. Srinivas. Srinivas has an essay with the same title. Srinivas's perspective was extremely well placed to be incorporated as a standard variant.

It was modern in that it promoted field view, empirical investigations against the book view, Indology associated with colonialism. We will discuss these terms later. At the same time, it continued the earlier ethnographic approach of studying communities now as segmented groups of jatis and castes. Simultaneously, it was indigenous in so far as it introduced participant observation as an insider's perspective of doing sociology. Last, it was closely affiliated to the elite vision of society.

The key leadership role Srinivas and his colleagues at the department of sociology of Delhi University took in the various institutions mentioned above also legitimized the universalization of his sociological vision with other positions being pushed into the margins. So, this is a very important observation that she makes that how Srinivas put forward this argument about how Indian society modernizes. And in order to understand how Indian society modernizes, he popularized this particular practice of participant observation or a very in-depth analysis of a single village study through participant

observation and ethnographic work. So, that became a model for others to emulate. So, 1970s, 80s and even up to 90s, this became the most dominant model within sociology.

And she says, it became a master narrative and social anthropology of Srinivas's perspective was designed to represent the language of sociology. So, that is another very interesting shift that she identifies. Instead of simply saying, from the beginning, sociology and anthropology have been one and the same, she identifies the very specific junctures, very specific moments in which anthropological method came to define sociological practices. In what way did sociologists in India react to this process? By the late 70s and early 80s, it was clear to some sociologists that the discipline was caught into problems. For so many, for many this problem was related to the methodology being used, that of participant observation.

Sabbarwal was one of the first to criticize the sole reliance on participant observation to study social change in India. The latter does not follow, he does not allow, he argued. It is used to present a theoretically and methodologically challenged perspective to assess and examine the complex processes of conflict and consensus at work in India. The discipline needed the language that can study the complex macro interface between groups and processes, which often were in relationship of involution. So, the very important set of criticism emerged against this participant observation or a single village study was first voiced by Satish Sabbarwal, a very important sociologist and he questioned this very, very, very methodological framework of participant observation.

And there are other criticisms by T.K. Oommen and then, you know, Dhanagare and others. For Sabbarwal, the problem was also related to the ways, the way methods of participant observation was conceptualized and institutionalized across departments within the teaching and learning process, with non-trained teachers as interlocutors of the teaching process, increasing description rather than analysis dominated the teaching of this method. This pattern got inflated with the simultaneous expansion of departments. So, participant observation becomes a very easy, even to a large extent, even lazy way of doing things, a scholar goes out and then describes and then comes back and it many times it lacked the kind of rigour that is required, the kind of a rigorous conceptual framework was missing.

So, there are quite a lot of problems that these people identified. Thus, the expansion of universities bred its own contradictions such as above. The latter were reinforced due to disparity in accessing physical and human resources, differential structures of academic autonomy, these being dependent on universities legal character, that of it being a state or a central university. Thus, the central universities were better funded, more autonomous and had a national character. State universities needed to project a regional identity as

less funding and low staff strength.

This process became more complicated with further expansion of state universities and the growth of new state elite demanding that the state universities teach in the language spoken in the region. Unfortunately, there was little or no intellectual investment to create a vocabulary of social sciences in the regional languages. In these circumstances, this demand further impinged on the quality of learning process. So, she tells a very sorry state of the situation in the more recent time and maybe things are changing very fast nowadays. So, an evaluation of the current phase might be even more shocking after some time.

The way in which social sciences are losing its significance is something very shocking. But when she is talking about the late 80s and 90s, she says there was a huge expansion of higher education and disciplines and departments across the place. And there was a huge gap between the quality of these places. There are a few elite national universities emerge including say, JNU, then Delhi University, Hyderabad Central University, which had a kind of a national character, Central University emerged, which had a national character because you have people, students and faculty from across the country and which had a much higher standing. And local universities at a much lower level, more homogenous comprising of faculty and students only from that particular regional, you know, from that particular region and many times even forced to teach sociology in vernacular languages.

And unfortunately, there is no vocabulary or there is no material, there is no literature available. So, there is a huge chasm in terms of the quality between these institutions of national level, the elite or the center in university that occupy the center position and the universities occupy the kind of a periphery or the of use of kind of character. Increasingly, the sociologist ethnographic teacher within departments encouraged doctoral students to use insider descriptive perspectives to generate monographs of my village or my community. Over time, learning sociology became a soft experience. If sociology in India could boast some of the best in the field, it was also producing a large mass of professionally untrained students and this teachers' researchers.

In this volume, we discuss the narrative. So, this is a very critical take on, you know, maybe you can say it as a decline in the quality of the discipline. There have been quite a lot of discussions, seminars, debates about why the quality of sociology came down, practice of sociology came down or the huge disparity between the regional and central places. So, this is a take into that. So, that is the context in which, you know, let us see this paragraph as well, then we will continue. These counter-critical trends and avowed interest in create a theory of social change to assess modern India, while contrarily

standardizing a perspective that cannot methodologically grasp these very processes and avowed interest to create a theory of social change to assess modern India, while contrarily standardizing a perspective.

So, you do not allow multiple perspectives, you do not allow kind of larger macro perspectives to thrive, rather you use only one particular, you know, mainstream perspective, there is a participant observation to do that. Secondly, a stated obligation to create an endogenous theory and an inability to institutionalize a professional culture to aid this growth. There is an obligation to create an endogenous theory, a theory that comes from within and inability to institutionalize a professional culture that requires the request to provide the kind of intellectual stimuli to that genesis. And a commitment to the project of the nation state and the elite notions of nationalism, when nation was breaking into its many fragments, structured these distinct responses that were articulated among various departments of society. So, these factors, these three important factors according to, you know, Sujatha Patel really depicts the kind of challenges that a discipline like sociology faces.

And obviously, this is not only the challenges faced by sociology, but this is also true with a host of other social sciences, in terms of how the, it interfaces with the nation state and how it is brought into, it is brought into the larger project of nationalism, at the same time, you know, is for, is unable to understand various other manifestations or aspirations or dynamics within society. So, this latter part, the remaining part of the essay, I think we are not doing, because it is all, you know, very specific analysis about different universities, different departments. There is an essay on Center for the Study of Social Systems, that is, JNU department. There is an essay on Bombay School. There is an essay on, you know, on Karnataka by Professor Jayaram.

So, we are not going into those individual, you know, essays. So, these two essays combined, I feel, must have given you some insights about how sociology as a discipline emerged and what are the major kind of concerns, theoretical ideas and debates that kind of structure, the nature of sociology in, structure the genesis and the further development of sociology and anthropology in India. So, we are concluding this session and we will come up with the next session in the coming class. Thank you.