

Indian Society: Sociological Perspectives
Dr. Santhosh R
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
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Radhakamal Mukerjee

Welcome back to the class. We are continuing our discussion about the founding fathers of sociology and within that more specifically we have been discussing about the scholars who followed an Indological perspective. So, we have had elaborate discussions on Prof. Iravathi Karve. We also discussed Prof. G.S. Ghurye, extensively because these are the two people, sociologists who are considered to be people who really systematically followed what can be seen as a or what can be termed as an Indological perspective. The next person whom we are going to discuss is Prof. Radhakamal Mukherjee and it may not be very appropriate to say that he is somebody who really fits into that Indological tradition because of course you will come to see that he had a very strong desire to create a kind of social science both economics as well as sociology that is more akin to Indian value systems and Indian culture and Indian civilizational values.

But otherwise he does not really belong to that typical categories of what we can call as Indological scholars. So, his analysis, his sphere of engagement were much much broader than what was usually among the conventional sociologists who restricted themselves to the study of say Indian scriptures and Indian ancient texts and then try to understand that. He was trained as an economist as you would see and he was into policy studies, he was into a wide variety of topics which were not part of a systematic study of Indian society which falls under the larger framework of Indological approach. So, let us see what are the most some of the most important factors or important features or important arguments that we can make about Prof. Radhakamal Mukherjee.

So, we will be using this particular book or rather these two essays, one written by Manish K. Thakur and Prof. T. N. Madan.

These two essays are taken from this book, pioneers of sociology in India edited by Prof. Eswar. Modi published in 1930 and the first one is titled Radhakamal Mukherjee and his contemporaries founding fathers of Indian sociology that is written by T.N. Madan, very important scholar and the second essay is by Prof. Manish Thakur. Manish is a professor of sociology at IIM Calcutta. So, he has written a chapter in this book titled Radhakamal Mukherjee and the Quest for an Indian Sociology. So, most of what I am going to present

or the PPT is directly taken from these two essays.

So, he is known as one of the Lucknow Triumvirate along with Prof. D. P. Mukherjee and D.

N. Majumdar. They are seen as the most important thrimurthis who founded the Lucknow school which became very famous for its stellar contribution to the development of sociology later. So, he was a professor of economics. He maybe we can start with he was born in Berhampur in Bengal and Mukherjee secured a first class, first in economics and sociology from Calcutta University and then joined Lucknow University in 1921 as the founder head of the department of economics and sociology and then he joined the same department, same, no he joined the University of Lucknow and he became a professor of economics and then he also became a vice-counselor of Lucknow University and subsequently he founded an institute titled the JK Institute of Sociology and Human Relations at the same university and then continued as the lifelong director. Now, he was as I mentioned he was not a typical Indology scholar but rather he was very much into the realm of policy suggestions.

He was a part of National Planning Commission constituted by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru. So, he was very active in that kind of activities and he looked into issues and themes as divergent as the land problem, the working class, the town and the village life, ecology, food planning, institution planning, population control, economic history, migration, social psychology, marriage, family and sex, democracy and civic, morals, culture and arts, values, civilization, humanism, mysticism and spiritualism. So, these are the areas listed by Professor Manish because he has written extensively around 54 books and numerous articles. Voluminous body of scholarship has been produced by Professor Mukherjee along with quite a lot of public speeches and lectures. So, if you look into these categories it is very broad starting from questions related to spiritualism, mysticism, culture, values he has gone into some more kind of empirically oriented topics like as land problem, working class, towns and village life, ecology, food planning and population control, economic history.

So, the breadth of his scholarship or the areas of his scholarly engagement have been very very broad to say that. So, he realized now, he realized the danger of blind adoption of western industrial methods as a solution to India's basic problems and underlined the importance of promoting an Indian school of economics and sociology. So, this is one of his very important and fascinating set of arguments that we will come across very strongly when we read Radhakamal Mukherjee or even the commentaries on Radhakamal Mukherjee's written by others. He was deeply disturbed by the kind of a blind imposition, blind borrowing and imposition of western scholarship, western frameworks, western theories on Indian society and instead argued that India or even the eastern

societies, they really represent a very distinct set of cultural values, civilization ethos and social life which cannot be studied or which cannot be analyzed completely by the theories that emerge from the western context. And so, it is very interesting to see that a scholar of say 1920s and 30s making this argument in a very strong manner.

And the similar argument is now coming back in a of course in a very different form in the language of decolonializing social sciences, decoloniality and other things. So, it is very important that many of the arguments that we come across in Radhakamal Mukherjee's argument almost a century back are now again getting reverberated in the academic circles. So, he realized the danger of blind adoption of western industrial methods as a solution to India's basic problems and underline the importance of promoting an Indian school of economics and sociology. So, he believed that India really represents a very distinct and different cultural milieu in comparison with that of the west. The basic philosophies are different, the basic value systems are different, the basic historical continuity, civilizational continuity is different.

So, he almost we can say that he almost subscribe to the argument that the west really represented the materialism and the east or India really represented the spiritualism. This dichotomy is of course you can say that it is created by the oriental schools, it is created by the oriental scholars, but this particular idea had its imprint in the mind of Radhakamal Mukherjee as well. So, he believed in that kind of a distinction, and he argued that these two realms are to be seen differently and the social science frameworks or the methodologies that emerge from a kind of a Eurocentric context will be incapable of understanding and addressing India's problems. So, now we look upon, this is a quote from his book *Field and Farmers of Oudh* published in 1929. It is a direct quote from the book.

We look upon an Indian school of economics and sociology and to correct this divorce between the academy and the marketplace and to relate the social sciences to the needs and ideals of India life and labour. We have also to train our students in the technique and methods of economic and social investigation of the problems which press us from day to day and the country expects the departments of economics at the different universities give a lead in this matter. As we mentioned he was trained in economics and in the department there in Lucknow University was a combined department of sociology and economics and only much later when he was the vice-chancellor that the sociology department was established separately. So, he is talking about the need for a discipline like economics and sociology to cater to the specific demands of Indian situation. So, we look upon the Indian school of economics and sociology to correct this divorce between the academy and the marketplace to relate the social sciences to the needs and ideals of the Indian life and labour.

So, Indian life and labour he argued is distinct and different and that needs to be studied in its own merit. We also have to train our students in the technique and methods of economic and social investigation of problems which press us from day to day and the country and the country expects the department of economics and different universities to give a lead in this matter. At Lucknow he consolidated his conception of a bridge building between natural sciences like biology and social sciences, between economic, sociology and other human sciences, between theory building and fact finding, between social thought and social work. So, it is a very interesting kind of argument that they envisioned the whole task or mandate of the department. So, it was seen, he was very much against a very narrow perspective that promotes or that favours a singular disciplinary perspective.

And he was also kind of not happy with the kind of common understanding about a multidisciplinary perspective. Rather he had a kind of a more transdisciplinary perspective about social life. He would very strongly argue that the kind of divisions that we are talking about in terms of disciplines like sociology or biology or psychology or economics, they are all artificial constructs of social scientists and the social life of people is a combination of all these things. So, a true scholar, a true sociology department or economics department must have the kind of a much larger, broader, all-inclusive transdisciplinary perspective to make sense of the social life at hand. But sadly, we know that we have moved towards kind of extreme forms of specialization.

Now economics is moving in a particular direction, sociology is in another direction. So, that kind of a transdisciplinary perspective that Mukherjee envisioned had not really happened. So, he is even going one step further and saying that between economics, sociology, biology and human sciences, between theory building and fact finding, between social thought and social work. So, he published this book Principles of Comparative Economics at a very young age, I think when he was around 27, age and this book became very important. So, he has something very interesting to say about the prospects of economics.

The comparative method Mukherjee advocated was based on a critic of the seemingly logical and rational assumptions of the classical and neo-classical economics which marginalized cultural and social institutions and also in the case of India its recent colonial past. So, he had a fundamental problem with the assumptions of the classic and the neo-classical economics which looked at individuals as purely kind of a rational entities who enter into business transactions, who enter into economic transactions solely on the basis of their rationality or with a sole motive of profit maximization. So, he says that this unidirectional inquiry is quite limited because human actions, human behavior,

even economic behavior is wholly influenced by a host of cultural and social characteristics. So, which marginalized the cultural and social institutions and also in the case of India the recent colonial past. He emphasized specification against generalization and valorized the community which its values of sharing and solidarity above the self-oriented profit maximizing individual.

So, he believed that a country like India or even the whole region of Asia which he talks about Japanese, Chinese culture which has having a similar orientation towards that of Indian society. So, he says that these eastern countries are very different in their cultural ethos, they are very different in their communitarian character. He calls it as a communal organization and communal organization of society or communality of a rural society. So, this communal what he uses does not have the kind of a negative connotation that we use it today because when we say talk about communal or communalism it indicates something negative, it talks about hatred towards other religion or a sensitivity towards violence. But he is talking about a kind of a more communitarian kind of character of Indian society.

So, he emphasizes specification against generalization and valorized the community with its values of sharing and solidarity above the self-oriented profit maximizing individual. So, he argued that Indian society is characterized by the kind of collective society, collective life with its own values of sharing and a kind of communal and community solidarity rather than giving emphasize to the self-centered profit seeking rational individual. Thus, no choice the economic field can be appropriate or rational which is inconsistent with the human norms and values in political, familial, and other fields of man s institutional life. And again, without a theory of institutions, economics, economists are prone to assume a single framework of laws and customs within which individuals and groups rationally carry out their economic activities. So, he was a very important advocate of this institutional economics which looks into much larger kind of frameworks that influence individual actions and choices.

And another very important field where Professor Mukherjee contributed enormously was to the study of values and you know that in classical sociology values have been studied extensively. Karl Manheim has done significant work on that. So, here he has emphasized enormously, Prasanna Mukherjee enormously emphasized the centrality of values. So, sociology of values is another field in which he has some very fascinating to say. So, Mukherjee s last two major sociological works, *The Social Structure of Values* and *The Dynamics of Morals* published in 1951 are products of vast scholarship and idealistic empiricism that rejects the fact value dichotomy and humanism which is grounded in the bio-psychic unity of humankind but respects cultural differences.

So, he believed that every society has its own specific value systems and that needs to be studied and he rejects this fact value dichotomy. If you remember the kind of earlier debate that was characteristic of the formation of sociology that there was a positivist tendency to study the facts, you know, alone by, propounded by people like Comte and Durkheim and later with the coming of Max Weber there was, you know, emphasize about studying the social values of the people but studying those values in a value neutral manner. So, he rejects this kind of a value dichotomy, and he believed in a kind of humanism which is grounded in the bio-psychic unity of mankind but respect to cultural differences. The point of departure is the explicit declaration that the problem of social values is the core of social theory and the call to sociology to develop a central theory of norms and values as a basic unit in the description and explanation of social relationships and behavior. So, he emphasizes that by overlooking the central role of social norms and values, sociology will not be able to produce anything meaningfully.

So, in order to develop deeper insights about society, you need to really engage with the norms and values of that society and more interestingly he says, it is important note that Mukherjee's right of social values, that is not values which may be deemed to have descended from high above but values that arise from the patterns of social interaction which themselves are guided by value judgment. So, he is not talking about certain, you know, moral or ethical values that are deemed as official and kind of imposed from the top. Rather he says that every civilization, every country, every society, especially country like India which he calls as communal societies have values as reflected through their actions, as values as seen through their collective social life and these values needs to be studied in its own merit because these values are able to provide you with kind of a deeper insights about how people behave, how communities organize, how people carry out their own life and what are the ways in which a society with thousands of years of history is able to carry out its day-to-day activities. Now, his main contribution lie in questioning the wholesale import of Western institutions and values in the names of progress. So, we are coming back to the earlier discussion about his preoccupation with carving out a sociology and economics that is specifically tailor made or specifically sensitive to the Indian context.

So, he was very much against the wholesale import of Western institutions and values in the name of progress. He asked if the path of modernization necessarily entails substitution of the Eastern value systems and the institutions by the Western ones. You know, this is even now it is one of the most hotly debated topic in the current political climate. This is a central theme, this is a central point of discussion whether what do we do by values, to what extent Indian values need to be replaced, to what extent we can blindly follow by the Western values. Cannot Asian countries like India can fruitfully preserve and tap the potential of their communalistic institutions for evolving an

indigenous path of progress and development more suited to Asian conditions?

So, this is as we mentioned earlier, this was one of his central concerns. And you will see quite a lot of similarity between him and the arguments of for example Mahatma Gandhi about how he believed that the rural institutions and rural society they really represent the soul of Indian society. So, Gandhiji's vision about the progress of India was basically about the vision of developing Indian villages. So, he believed that the Indians sold the rest in the villages. So, similarly Mukherjee is also a firm believer in the communalistic institutions, the kind of a traditional large social institutions within Indian society.

It could be the caste communities, it could be the village communities, it could be the artisan communities. So, he believes that these larger communalistic institutions are something central to Indian society. And as an aside, we also need to keep in mind that Dr. Ambedkar was very much against, vehemently against about this particular understanding of development. He basically looked at rural institution, he looked at the Indian tradition as extremely exploitative discriminatory and he wanted to embrace a kind of full-fledged western model of development.

Mukherjee frequently refers to the institutional framework of the Indian village relating to a property structure in land and other village commons such as the irrigation channels, pastures and cremation grounds and the culture of mutual aid and reciprocity and the attendant communitarian forms of labour organizations. So, these are the very specific factors that he identified as characteristic of Indian society. There is an institutional framework through which a community used to govern their local resources including the common grazing land, the pastures, the river, the pond, the irrigation system. So, we have had thousands of years of experience in dealing with this kind of common property resources. So, this common property resource management is not a new thing.

Every civilization should have their own ways of doing that. But as a more developed civilization like in India, we have our own ways of doing that and also cultural and mutual aid and reciprocity and attendant communitarian form of labour organization which was very much structured by caste system and then he would be, Radhakamal Mukherjee must be seeing that kind of an organization as a very important resource for the future development of Indian society. Much of Mukherjee's writings reveal his reputation of westerners' effort to interpret the Indian reality in the evolutionary reductionist matrix. Mukherjee thought Indian social institutions to be unique. He found the sociological categories of the west inadequate for the interpretation of the Indian reality.

In fact, he was one of the first few social scientists of eminence who attempted to build an independent general theory of society on par with the western theories of his time. So, this is again the point that we are talking about. So, his argument that the Indian society, it does not really fit in the kind of a you know general theory or a kind of a theory that is propounded by the western scholars which mostly reflected their ethnocentric, Eurocentric understandings about what is progress, what is history, what is the kind of a transformational civilization and so on. So, he was one of the very first few social scientists of eminence who attempted to build an independent general theory of society on par with that of the western theorists of his time. In order to remove the artificial walls erected between disciplines, Mukherjee posited the transdisciplinary approach for an unequivocal and comprehensive appraisal of social reality.

As per his integrated approach, discipline specific boundaries becomes redundant as a unitary base for social science, as a unitary base for social science is firmly established for all specializations in the relevant to contribute equally importantly. So, this is the same point that we discussed earlier. He looked at human society as a comprehensive whole and he argued that the kind of a specializations that we are imputing to this human society, human life is an artificial creation of our own and as scholars we should have or we should develop kind of a broader frameworks which are transdisciplinary, not even interdisciplinary but transdisciplinary which cuts across the biological, the social, the psychological and the economic dimensions of social life into a kind of a complete whole. So, Mukherjee's critic of western modernity and the quest for an Indian social science, the ambivalence given the colonial origin and Indian of Indian social science. So, this is again some comments that Manish talks about that on the one hand, Mukherjee was a product of his time 1910, 1920, 1930. This is the time when he becomes active in the academic circle and this is the time when there is a kind of a major surge happening especially in Bengal, his home state about Indian nationalism. There is a very anti-colonial movement taking shape and Professor Mukherjee was a part of that. So, that is the time which is characterized by very intense and lively discussions and debates about the unique cultural and civilizational character of Indian society. So, what does Indian civilization mean and what are its strength that it offers to resist a colonial regime.

So, those discussions are something very important. So, he was as a nationalist, he was extremely critical of a kind of a one-sided imposition of western values and other things on Indian society. But at the same time, he was speaking the language of social science and social science by its definition is a product of colonial modernity. The modern social science, the modern economics, modern political science, all these social sciences are inherently western because they emerge in the west and from there, they circulate it to India. So, they are a product of colonial modernity. So, it was, so there are ambivalences, there are contradictions in Professor Mukherjee's stand because on the one hand he wants

social sciences to be reflecting the true Indian ethos and to avoid its western influence.

But paradoxically or ironically the very social sciences that he claims to represent is a product of or that has been a product of western rationality, western modernity. So, we see the paradox of the national self-awareness on the one hand and the dependence upon the western traditional social sciences on the other as a central feature of Indian social scientist contribution including Mukherjee s. So, Mukherjee also was not free from this kind of a tension. So, he was also not free from this kind of a tension because the essential language of social science is western, and I do not think that you will be able to escape from it anytime in that sense a possibility of creating an Indian social science devoid of western influence will be almost impossible. So, we should not forget that it was colonial mediation that helped create in Indian minds the idea of a traditional India.

Therefore, to read the Indian minds of colonial times calls for an acknowledgement of the historically generated cultural ambivalence. The colonized Indian mind was neither resigned to uncritical acquaintances of western modernity nor to its disproportionate valorization at the expense of the traditional society. This is the argument of Manish. So, it is very important to keep in mind that what is our tradition.

So, what is our tradition is a very interesting question. How do we get access to our tradition? How do we get access to our tradition? How do we construct a tradition in order to follow that? And it is impossible to get access to this tradition without the mediation of colonial context because our understanding of what is our tradition is irrevocably constructed through the mediation of colonial modernity. Or in other words, the colonial modernity or the colonial rule has defined our understanding of what is our tradition, and we cannot really escape that. So, you cannot simply cut and then remove these 150 or 200 years of colonial rule and then imagine to have an unmediated access to Indian tradition. So, that is a very important argument that we should not forget that the colonial mediation that helped create an Indian mind the idea of traditional India. So, this idea of a traditional India as a repository of Indian tradition itself was a colonial product.

It was a colonial product. Therefore, to read the Indian mind of the colonial times called for an acknowledgement of the historically generated cultural ambivalences. The colonial Indian mind was neither resigned to uncritical acquaintance of the colonial of the western modernity nor to its disproportionate valorization at the expense of traditional society. So, it is a general observation about how we Indians or for that matter almost any post-colonial society has a very ambivalent tradition with ambivalent encounter with modernity and tradition. As part of his attempted critic of western modernity Mukherjee laid emphasize on the uniqueness of Indian value systems, the centrifugal communalist non-hedonistic character of Indian culture and polity.

This is again something similar to what we discussed earlier. He was a very strong believer in the distinct character of Indian society. So, laid emphasize on the uniqueness of Indian value system, the centrifugal communalist non-hedonistic character of Indian culture and polity. It again as I mentioned earlier it falls perfectly under the typical stereotype as India being communal, India being communitarian and the west being individualistic, India being spiritual, west being materialistic. So, it perfectly falls into that. Towards this end he worked tirelessly to make Indian sociology absorb social philosophy.

He comes out with a clear-cut rejection of the western conceptions of man and social order including the Marxist idea of class conflict and communism for which he offers alternative concepts of the sangh or the collectivity. He was a very strong critic of Marx. He criticized Marxism for its centrality, it provides to economic activity and its valorization of conflict, its valorization of social conflict and violence and he argued instead of that he argued that the sangh is something important, the collectivity is something important. According to Mukherjee sangh is characterized by a non-hedonism and sustained by a spiritual tradition rather than being based on a materialistic conception of man and society. So, very very important argument and there are organizations who are working with this, there are political dispensations, there are ideologies which really subscribe to this particular idea and then try to envision a different future for India.

By rejecting the unity of the imperialist positivist method of sociology and bringing in the indigenous notion of dharma, sangha and transcendental values, Mukherjee has rendered a yeoman service to the continuing Indian challenges to the western ideological hegemony and cultural domination. This is again a conclusion by Manish. So, he believes that while Mukherjee may not have succeeded in prescribing a set of frameworks to understand that he really represents one of the earliest attempts from one of the renowned social scientists or social artists who was uncomfortable with or who was critical of the wholesale acceptance of western values and western frameworks to study Indian society. And he had a genuine interest to look into Indian own cultural systems, so based on dharma, sangha and transcendental values. So, he believed that these unique set of values and frameworks will help in making the story of India distinct and different.

So, he wanted to chart a different trajectory for Indian society in comparison with the west and he believed that India had the cultural repository, the cultural history, the cultural tradition to enable that and he believed that the role of social scientist is basically to understand these value systems and develop frameworks and theoretical frameworks and conceptual frameworks, the methodological tools which are sensitive to

this kind of a distinct cultural, social and traditional features of Indian society. So, in that sense, he rendered a yeoman service to the country in the challenge of the western ideological hegemony and cultural dominance. So, this is a discussion on Radhakamal Mukherjee. As I mentioned earlier, he has written extensively a huge body of knowledge. So, it is not possible to compress everything together, but I hope you must have got some basic idea about his position, his contribution, his vision about Indian society and other things.

So, we will stop here and we will meet for the next class later. Thank you.