

Indian Society: Sociological Perspectives

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Week-12

Lecture-57

Decolonialism in Sociology II

Welcome back everyone. In the last class we have been giving a background of the decolonial sociological school. So we discussed two kinds of decolonial sociological school that Sujata Patel has identified. So now, in this class, we will go into details on both schools within the decolonial traditions. The first is the indigenous sociologies. So Patel actually builds her idea of indigenous sociologies based on the works of two important indigenous sociologists.

The first is D. P. Mukerji who was one of the earliest and is also known as the father of Indian Sociology more or less along with G.S Ghurye and all and who actually lived largely during the British colonial period and also in the immediate years of the independent nation and other is Akinzola Akiwowo who is an African sociologist who was a professor of Sociology in University of Isha in Nigeria and who was fundamental in the production or the formation of indigenous Sociology in the African context.

So here what is common in both D. P. Mukerji's and Akiwowo's Sociology is the idea of Sociology as a culturally specific discipline. It represents theories that capture particular experiences and practices of various communities and is thus particularistic. This is a keyword in understanding Indigenous Sociology.

The idea is that there is no universal Sociology possible. They resist the idea that sociological theories have to be produced in Europe and then imported and applied in African and Asian contexts. Instead, they propose the idea of Sociology as a culturally

specific discipline so that sociological ideas of each context have to be produced within that context. These practices and experiences are related to specific values, and the Indigenous section of Social Sciences should thus be based on an understanding of this particular value. This is a fundamental premise of indigenous sociologies that we will be talking and is common to both Mukerji and Akiwowo.

So first we will talk about D. P. Mukerji. So D.

P. Mukerji was largely based at the University of Calcutta and later at the Aligarh Muslim University. He was also foundational to the formation of the All India Sociological Conference, one of the first organisations of Indian sociologists. He is a pioneer in Indian Sociology. So he is a very important character, a central figure in the project of building an indigenous or a nationalistic Social Science in the Indian context. So he attempted to create a sociological theory of modernity or Indian modernity based on Indian condition, circumstances and civilisational legacies.

Based on this idea, he argued that Indian modernity or how India has encountered or been engaged with the idea of modernity cannot be assessed in the social scientific language of conflict. We know that many of the early sociologist schools were largely interested in the idea of conflict, be it class conflict or conflict between religious communities. So this idea of conflict has been central to a European idea of modernity especially in the Marxist tradition. Then he actually attempted to argue that Indian modernity cannot be understood based on the idea of conflict or largely conflict theories that come from the West, but instead, it should be formulated as a theory based on cultural symbiosis, which he argued is the outstanding feature of India's long civilisational history. So this comes from a differential understanding of how the historical experience has been constituted in India and Europe while Europe has a very conflictual history which has so large scale violence which actually remade the European society from time to time.

In India, it was not the context. India has always had symbiosis in some form or another. It has an idea of civilisational affinity to all classes, all faiths, and all

sociological communities and therefore, the idea of conflict theories is not applicable to understanding the Indian experience larger. Rather, Indian Sociology should formulate an idea of cultural or social symbiosis based on our own civilisational history. So, this is one of the larger central tenets of his sociological formulation. In order to develop from these premises, he elaborated the principles of Indian cultural symbiosis through three Sanskrit concepts.

The first is the idea of Shantam, which translates to harmony that sustains the universe amidst all its incessant changes. So there is an idea of harmony, social cultural harmony that is central to the idea of cultural symbiosis which is a central framework through which he understood Indian modernity or Indian society. The second is Shivam, which refers to welfare being the principle of coordination with the social environment. So it is not conflict but large coordination with one's own social environment. And finally, the idea of Advaitam, the unity or synthesis, and these concepts are drawn from his understanding of Hindu scriptures.

So one could actually easily identify certain problematics here that all his ideas of Indian civilization are large, more or less synonymous with a certain idea of Hindu civilisation, But this is where he formulated his own sociological theories. And one needs to understand that he does not have any particular political affiliation with, let us say, a Hindu nationalist project, but this derived from his own affinity to produce an authentic Indian nationalistic Sociology, part of the larger Indigenous Social Science project. Now we will go to the second scholar, Akinsola Akiwowo. So we have a quote from one of his works in 1980 which actually lays out his central project.

He writes that Africans show that they are highly influenced by North American sociologists, for whom they show far greater respect than they demonstrate towards their own colleagues. Classical writers like Augustus Comte, Durkheim and Weber continue to be relevant whenever African Sociology seeks to clarify for others and for themselves their own ideal societies. Otherwise, the painful truth is that African sociologists are woefully ignorant of the excellent work being done by their colleagues both inside and outside their own countries. So this is the general discontent out of which Akiwowo built

his indigenous sociological theories that the sociologists in Africa have much more respect for sociological ideas and sociological thinkers who come from a very different context, who know nothing about African society and simultaneously they do not acknowledge or look at the valuable sociological knowledge produced from their own surroundings. So this is the fundamental discontent that Akiwowo has.

He initiated a debate on indigeneity in Africa or indigenous knowledge in Africa by affirming that Sociology can be constituted from tales, myths and proverbs of the people together with the laws of true African wisdom. So this is very important. What becomes the source of African Indigenous Sociology? For Akiwowo, the source of African Indigenous Sociology is the local tales, myths, proverbs, other literary productions and oral traditions that come from African tribal communities themselves and which, according to him, conceals the law of truth among African wisdom. He was at the Department of Sociology of the University of Nigeria. He and his colleagues attempted to assemble a sociological theory extracted from the poetry of the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria.

The Yoruba tribe is one of the largest tribal communities in Nigeria, and he tried to build a Sociology of the Yoruba tribe or social theory that comes on the Yoruba tribe based on critical understanding and engagement with a lot of poetry, which has largely been in the oral traditions. So he and his colleagues have published works after work and built a lot of sociological concepts that are completely derived from their engagement with various oral poetic traditions within the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria. One of the central concepts that he used is an example of how he built his sociological idea; it is the idea of *asuwada*, which asserts that though the unit of all social life is individual, an individual's corporeal self needs fellowship of other individuals. So this is the idea of *Asuwada*. This is very different from how the individual is conceptualised in the western Sociology and as a consequence community life based on a common good is *sui generis* to the existence of the individual within the Yoruba tribe.

There is no necessary conflict of interest between the individual and the community. This is one example of how sociology has been built. However, indigenous sociologies have not been without criticism. They did not sustain as very appealing in the Social

Science traditions even in the indigenous or local context. For example, Patel herself argues that these concepts cannot serve to create an objective, acceptable scientific theory.

So the idea is that to build an alternative Indigenous sociological theory should we do it at the cost of having an objective and acceptable scientific theory?. It should not be. Patel argues that the Sociology that indigenous sociologists like DP Mukerji or Akiwowo constructed does not stand the test of objectivity. Also, the Sociology that both Mukerji and Akiwowo produced does not account for the diverse social spheres within their own society. For example, the idea of Sociology that Akiwowo produced from the Yoruba tribe may not be sensible or may not be useful to understand the self-understanding of other communities within Nigeria.

Similarly, the sociological concept that DP Mukerji derived from largely Hindu Brahminical civilisational concepts may not be useful to understanding the social life of the large population outside such religious and cultural spheres. So it is not even useful to understand a large part of their own context. Patel also says it is important to ask how these sociologists have created the methods to examine the truth claims of these indigenous claims. So there is a methodological flaw.

So they take it as it is. There is a form of essentialism involved in it. And Paulin Hountondji a major African sociologist, says this indigenous knowledge of the kind that Akiwowo produced does not dialogue with the western thinking and science. So Hountondji says even the decolonial tradition has to be in constant dialogue with the kind of Sociology produced elsewhere, especially in the West. It needs not to derive from it uncritically but must be in dialogue.

Indigenous Sociology fails to do that, and they have not developed an understanding of science or elaborated ways to interpret its own assumptions. So, as I already said, one of the key strong points about science is that it can be used to interrogate its own assumptions. Therefore, it can always develop. It can also grow by being self-critical and the framework that Mukerji and Akiwowo produce does not have that strength because

they take it as it is. They take from a certain essential understanding of their own societies.

So they fail to advance the science of society, according to Pauline Hountondji.

There are other critiques that Patel advances that indigenous sociologies, given the national stance, retain the take for so understanding of what constitutes the official culture or philosophical discourse, agendas, loyalties and histories of their nations and communities, and therefore, they reduce Social Sciences to the boundaries of nation-state which we call as a methodological nationalism. They have suffered from a problem of methodological nationalism, which means for them, what constitutes society is a society that has been deemed inside the boundaries of a nation-state. For example, let us think about India. Let us think about someone who is studying about the Punjab society.

Earlier Punjab means the Punjab that was included in both Pakistan and India and they have a lot of shared common commonalities as a single geographical union but now it is part of two distinct nation states and therefore when we study Punjab from India it is part of the larger Indian Sociology and it has been taken as a separate nation-state with its own characteristic, and Pakistan's Punjab is entirely with difference in its own characteristics. Therefore, we fail to understand the commonalities between these two societies just because it was divided by national boundaries, which only came into being in 1947. Such political compulsions and nationalistic compulsions become a deterministic factor in our understanding of society itself. So, this is a problem of methodological nation-state. Nation-state becomes a unit of society, and this is a fundamental problem with Indigenous Sociology. Patel contends that indigenous sociologies represent racist ethnic patriarchal perceptions of the regions nation state, and they actually produce certain colonial or Western understandings of non-Western societies.

This actually plays out in the binaries of the universal versus particular, western versus non-western because there is no dialogue between both traditions. Patel then raises two issues concerning an alternative, a better decolonial Sociology that does not suffer from the pitfalls of indigenous Sociology. She says there are two important things to keep in mind. One is an institutional change because today, there are greater connections in the contemporary global knowledge economy, but that, in turn, depends on the hegemony of

the global north . For example, now there is a greater flow of academics from non-Western to Western societies and as well as Western to non-Western societies, but the West remains the centre of this cultural flow. This political, economic, and global cultural flow, especially after globalisation, needs to be kept in mind if you have to develop a decolonial critique in contemporary times. secondly is that the recent interventions have largely looked at how sociological knowledge or categories itself are being produced which she calls as an epistemic turn.

She says this epistemic turn alone produced a way out to decolonise Sociology, so that is an important point she asked before we delve into the second, a more revisionist and sophisticated understanding of decolonialism.

She calls this a neo-Marxist understanding, but that is not actually a self-descriptive understanding, and there are differences. She identified three specific schools within it first is a Latin American school and second comes from the work of the Subaltern studies school in the Indian context, and thirdly the work that African new African sociologist like Paulin Hountondji produces. So they are independent of each other, but nevertheless, they find different concepts and categories that advance the decolonisation project within Sociology. So, the first Latin American school is largely derived from the work of people like Anibal Quijano and Walter Mignolo, who discussed the idea of coloniality of power. The idea is that it looks at the epistemic linkages between coloniality and modernity so how the modernity of the non-western in this case Latin American context itself was informed by the certain colonial assumption that is very central to the idea and they also talked about the idea of Eurocentrism that how our modern Sociology in the self is automatically taken as European and the other a non-European. The global peripheries and how these two are connected intimately as binaries. For example certain ideas of evolutionism progress and other binaries dualities are constituents of our modern Social Science theories so in that way all the sociological theories automatically give privilege to the experience of the European people and the society and its economic organisation which is the capitalist market and this political organisation which is the liberal democratic and the European nation-state and legitimise these as a natural forms of economic and political existence.

So the question is that do all societies have to be essentially be nation state? As we know today, was it a natural process, or was it a very elaborated, very consciously created project associated with certain forms of power relations and exploitation processes like colonialism? So we need to think about whether India became a nation-state as we see today was it because of our own wish and the natural process or was a result of a complex history that involves the process of exploitation and inequalities and extraction, and so on? So this is an important insight that the Latin American school has put forward. Along with it Patel says an idea that Paulin Hountondji put forward which is an idea of extraversion is particularly important to understand the certain predicaments of contemporary continuing colonisation within global Sociology. Hountondji identify there is a clear division of labour between the centre and the metropole in which the centre is the European society and the periphery is a non-western society.

There is a clear division of labour and there is a fundamental problem of extraversion. Hountondji identifies a division of labour where the theory is being produced in the centre, and the empirical testing of the theory is done in the peripheries. So we know that a lot of people from the West have Centers for South Asian Studies, Centers for African Studies, and Centers for Latin American Studies and what they do essentially test the theories of certain sociological, political concepts that have been produced based on Western experiences and they uncritically apply it to the Western, non-western society. So this is, in more simplistic terms, the division of labour that Hountondji refers to, and here identifies there is a fundamental problem of being oriented to the source of authority outside the wrong society. So let us say if you are studying Indian society what is the source of authority? where does it come from? In most of our theories, most of the source of authority in our society comes from the West. People from Indian academics often go on sabbaticals in the global north, which gives them a lot of legitimacy for their academic credits in the Indian context. So, the source of authority of academic knowledge produced even in the global south is the global north.

So the global north is always the source of academic legitimacy, which Hountondji refers to as a problem of extraversion, and this essentially will lead to an uncritical application

of research specialisation topics and questions to one's own context. However certain new disciplines have emerged for example we know that discipline after disciplines journal after journals had been produced based on new specialisation but all of them are produced in the north and then being exported to the south and this will lead to an important problem that there will be an absence of knowledge of larger philosophical and scientific understanding of one's own society . How many of Indian sociologists are completely aware of a certain knowledge system with all its shortcomings and problems exceeded in Indian context? Very few . We are more familiar with the knowledge systems that have been produced in the West rather than our own society. Hountondji concludes that it ultimately promotes a sort of brain drain and an intellectual tourist circuit between the core and periphery and that's a very important point one needs to be self-critical about it. Here a lot of people in the premier institute in the global south, let's take IIT, all of them will go for conferences, workshops, sabbaticals and fellowships to the global north, which he calls either a form of brain drain or an intellectual tourist circuit .

Most of the Western societies Western thinkers or Western sociologists come and study the societies in the global south and they go back to the wrong society and produce theory from there . So, this global south becomes a mere context for extracting data, but always the theory is produced in the global north. Similarly, even those people who largely work in the global south have either aspire to go to the global north to produce theory or even go as part of sabbaticals or fellowships or in the form of conferences. So this global circuit or intellectual tourist circuit that Hountondji problematically calls is a very important point in understanding contemporary forms of knowledge production.

The second school that Patel talks about is the Subaltern Studies collective, in which she particularly focuses on Partha Chatterjee's idea of colonial difference.

So we talked about Subaltern Studies in detail in the previous classes. So I won't go into details. So there is a fundamental problem of colonial differences as Partha Chatterjee refers to is a paradox . Colonialism, according to Chatterjee, is producing a paradox that you have to self-improve using colonial cultural resources but then remain subordinate and suppliant to colonisation. So these colonial differences, according to Chatterjee and

Subaltern Studies, Have been reproduced in the social sciences, nationalistic social sciences, as well as western social sciences, including Sociology.

So this is a very important point. Similarly, the author herself, Sujata Patel, also put forward an idea of colonial modernity where it is not only about modernity experienced in the colony or the period of colonialism, but it is a way colonialism constituted ideas, ideologies and knowledge systems of the natives. So basically what Chatterjee and Patel say, Chatterjee's idea of colonial difference and Patel's idea of colonial modernity is about how certain colonialist assumptions continue to shape our own or the colonised idea about their own society, certain binaries, certain assumptions and how that continue to persist is what Patel refers as colonial modernity. The study of Sociology then, for example, let us take Patel's idea of Indian Sociology in its formative years, especially even the later years. The study of sociology was conducted to comprehend a society called traditional through three institutions. So she, in other works, actually surveys a few of the majors in early Indian sociologies, such as M.

N. Srinivas says most of the understanding of the society in India actually refers to traditional society, what they think as a traditional society, and within that, actually confined to three important social institutions such as the family, marriage, kinship and then the caste and then the belief and religiosity. So all of these were thought to be located geographically in village India. So, Sociology was a study of villages in India in the nationalistic indigenous sociological scheme, and the study of the modern in the form of the industrial and urban was given very little importance. So this is one of the problems of colonial modernity that continues to define or shape, let us say, Indian Sociology. So, as students of Indian Sociology, you need to think about this insight from your previous classes, and you will see how a lot of assumptions or a lot of focus of Indian Sociology, even today continues to be in these three social institutions, which are largely about rural or village India.

There has been the advancement of sociological knowledge about the urban, but this continues to be important, and this is what Patel says is a problem of colonial modernity. So, what we have discussed so far is the two kinds of decolonial schools that emerged within the global south. First is indigenous Sociology and it was actually concerned

about producing culturally specific sociological knowledge and we have seen enough critique of indigenous Sociology that come within the global south, and then we also see the next second school or more recent and refined school of decolonial critique. We discussed three different strands within the Latin American school actually put forward an idea of Eurocentricism and secondly the subaltern studies school, which was focused on colonial differences Sujata Patel herself talked about the problem of colonial modernity, and we also discussed Paulin Hountondji's idea of extraversion. So we see that these are not coherent, very internally connected, but very similar forms of sociological thinking, which is an assumption which would problematise the idea of problematising the continuing forms of colonialities in global social sciences knowledge paradigms. So given this how are decolonial thinking and Sociology can go ahead? Patel concludes her essay with a few points. The first is that we need to keep in mind that there are diverse intellectual decolonial critics. It is not a full-fledged single institution or a single body of thinking but there are multiple currents within the decolonial thinking we have talked about in last class and in today there is a lot of talk about the crisis of Sociology especially in the West which is largely about the problem of globalisation how globalisation as a process has drastically changed European society with migration with more ICT information and communication technique and the idea of risk there has been a very important valuable body of work on Sociology of risk produced by scholars such as Ulrich Beck and the reason and who argued that with the increasing possibility of risk the conventional sociological theories produced by Marx, Weber, Durkheim and so on are no more very relevant. So this is the understanding of the crisis of Sociology that the Western sociologist has, but then Patel says the decolonial critique poses a more fundamental question of the crisis of Sociology which is about the continuing coloniality of Sociology itself. We have talked about how the global force of knowledge production or how the sociological concept within the global is termed as global Sociology or universal Sociology is very Eurocentric. The decolonial critique poses a more fundamental question about the crisis of Sociology as a discipline itself, and then another important point is that the colonial critic points out it assumes or asserts that knowledge circulates through circuits and the circuits are established during colonialism.

So these circuits between the West and the non-West where the West is the hegemonic centre continue to be the circuit of knowledge production even in this post-globalisation world. Patel says it is very important. Decolonisation theories need to pose two kinds of critique to Sociology: one is an institutional critique of the power relation between the institutions in the global North and the global South, and the epistemic critique of how the ideas of Sociology are actually Eurocentric. The decolonial critique within Sociology is actually directed at both institutional and epistemic critique Sociology. The takeaway from the class is the idea is to give a broad introduction to decolonial thinking within Sociology and as you can clearly see decolonial thinking in Sociology is not a coherent body of thinking but actually comes from diverse regional and geographical and intellectual traditions that actually laid the problem of Contemporary global Sociology and this continuing power relations in the sociological knowledge production .

If you are interested in further here are some of the other works that actually talk about decolonial critique and Sociology the first is by Raewyn Connell, an Australian sociologist who produced very valuable work and also then attempted to put forward an alternative sociological canon where she talked the important valuable sociological work produced by sociologists in the global South, and she published it as a book called the Southern theory, and there is this very important work by Gurminder Bhambra and John Holmwood about colonialism and modern social theory it's a very self-critical work as being sociologists from the global North themselves they actually talk about how the modern social theory and its formative assumptions have been informed and influenced by the process of colonialism itself. There is a recently edited book by Dilip Menon, and this can be called a new attempt at reproducing certain valuable assumptions of indigenous Sociology where they try to put forward the theoretical concept from the global South, which is very similar to the project proposed by Akiwowo and Mukerji but in a more refined and self-critical matter.

So these are three important works. If you are interested, you can look at them, and you will understand the directions that Sociology takes, especially with the interventions of the decolonial critics. There are two websites. The first is Connected Sociology, which is managed by Gurminder Bhambra, and Global Social Theory, two websites that actually

put together many decolonial and other resources and schools in global sociological theory. I hope you got an overview of decolonial schools and thank you for listening.