

**Indian Society: Sociological Perspectives**

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**Lecture-59**

Globalization and Sociology: The Network Society of Manuel Castells

Welcome back to the class. We are in the next session looking into the implications of globalization on the discipline of Sociology, and this is a part of the discussion we have had in the last session as well. We were trying to examine some important scholars and their arguments about the recent changes that ought to happen or the necessity for Sociology to reorient itself in a globalizing world. In the last class, we discussed a part of an essay by the German scholar Ulrich Beck who argued that not only Sociology, every Social Science must move away from a methodological nationalist perspective to a cosmopolitan, methodological cosmopolitanism perspective where its theoretical and empirical orientations are capable enough to capture, to understand, to analyse the transnational reality. Transnationalism is a reality rather than confining itself to the borders of a nation-state. In a similar way we have another very important scholar, again a German scholar, Manuel Castells, who has written this essay Towards the Sociology of the Network Society, Castells is a very important sociologist who has written extensively on network society and his three-volume series of information society which became very popular in the academic field.

Castells also put forward very radical arguments about the need for Sociology to reinvent and reorient itself to change its epistemological and methodological orientations to understand the larger transformation due to globalization. The 21st century of the common era did not necessarily have to assure a new society but it did. People worldwide feel the winds of multi-dimensional social change without truly

understanding it, let alone feeling a grasp upon the process of change, hence the need for a new Sociology.

Both Beck and Castells firmly believe that globalization has brought in a new social reality. Beck calls it a transnational reality, whereas Castells calls it a network society. These assertions are maybe too far-fetched, maybe too radical, too sweeping but they made this argument because those far-fetched arguments, those broader arguments are required to provoke a kind of discussion and they are very clear in their argument that what the whole world is witnessing or at least the European, the first world or the western world is witnessing is a new society. Beck is also very categorically saying that it is a new society as emerged and hence there is a need for a new Sociology.

We are also living in a new society in which the new economy is only one component. He talks about why he believes that there is a new society, there are a couple of reasons. The first one is a new technological paradigm based on the deployment of new information technologies that include genetic engineering as the information technology of living matter. While new information technologies are not causal factors of social change, they are, in this principle, means of the actual manifestation of many current processes of social change, such as the emergence of new forms of production management, new communication media or the globalization of economy and culture. Please keep in mind he wrote this book almost 20-23 years back when globalization was not at its peak and many of the technologies that we see today have not emerged.

But Castells was able to foresee or predict the importance of information technology, and I do not need to elaborate on the potential that information technology has for the future of human kind. We are talking about chat GPT, artificial intelligence, the internet of Things, and a host of things that might transform human society in a very fundamental manner. He says one of the first reasons he believes that we are in a new society is the enormous power that information technology exerts on human society. The second dimension of social change is precisely globalization. Understood as the technological organization and institutional capacity of the core components of a given system.

For example, the economy works as a unit in real or chosen time on a planetary scale.

this is another very interesting definition for globalization you can organize any of your activities whether economic or social or any activity at a real or chosen time. Your distance, time zone and other thing doesnot matter here.

It feels like you are sharing the same room or you are living in the same physical place; you can coordinate activities on a planetary scale at a given time. There are a lot of fascinating theories about globalization based on the transformation of its temporal and spatial dimensions. I am not going into that, but there are very fascinating theorisations by Giddens, David Harvey, Castells, and Beck. A lot of people have theorised how space and time have undergone a significant transformation with the arrival of globalization. The third dimension is the enclosing of dominant cultural manifestation as an interactive electronic hypertext which becomes the common frame of reference for symbolic processing from all sources and images.

The internet will link individuals and groups among themselves and to the shared multimedia hypertext.

The fourth axis of change, largely a consequence of the global network of the economy, communication and knowledge and information, is the demise of the sovereign nation-state. Not that the current nation-state will disappear in their institutional existence, but their existence as a power apparatus is profoundly transformed as they are either bypassed or rearranged in networks of shared sovereignty formed by national governments, and supernational organisations.

He gives examples of NATO or the UN and and other things. But I would suggest to that this is a too far-fetched argument that many scholars are now very seriously rethinking about the assumption that nation-states will lose their significance in a globalized era. There is a growing scholarship that tells that what we are witnessing is a deglobalization where the nation-state continues to be robust; nation state continues to be the pivot around which the whole process of globalization revolves. This is something that we need to take more cautiously an assertion about, and he is especially using a very strong term, the demise of the sovereign nation-state. Though he says that it will disappear, he says that the power of nation-state will be very significantly curtailed.

We are yet to see that phenomenon, and in fact, what we are seeing is that many times, nation-states are reasserting their important role and, many times, initiating a deglobalization process. Last but not least, progress in scientific knowledge and the use of science to correct its one-sided development are redefining the relationship between culture and nature that characterised the industrial era. A deep ecological consciousness is permeating the human mind and affecting how we live, produce, consume and perceive ourselves. This is an overtly optimistic view that science is becoming more humane, science is becoming more concerned about the ecological consequences, the worry about Anthropocene. Castells seems to believe that scientific knowledge will take a more humanitarian turn and will strive towards creating this world a better place.

These are the four or five important factors which he says to establish the argument that we live in a new society. This new society was produced during the last quarter of the 20th century roughly from 1980s onwards through the interaction among three independent processes that happened to coincide in time. The revolution in information technology, the socio-economic restructuring of capitalism and statism, the different fate of these antagonistic modes of production and the cultural and social movements that emerged in the 1960s in the United States and Western Europe. These are the three processes that he identified as having propelled the process of globalization. One is information technology, IT, computers, the internet, and other things.

Secondly, the rise of neoliberalism or opening up of the economy that we adopted in India, we adopted that path after the 1990s, but many countries adopted it before. opening up of industry, opening up of the economy and the final point, he says, is a cultural revolution, about the cultural and social movement that emerged in the 1960s in the United States and Western Europe. Arguments about sexuality, gender, race, ethnicity, culture, the whole celebration of cultural differences and other things. He comes to the argument about what is this new society. He calls it a network society, the social structure of the information age.

This, again, is a very bold statement, heavily criticised for being too ambitious and too, too far-fetched in its imagination but still provocative and important. The new society is

made up of networks. Global financial markets are built on electronic networks that process financial transactions in real-time. How transnational financial transactions happen, and with a click of a button, you can, transfer billions of dollars from one country to another. we constantly hear about the flow of billions of rupees from one country to another, the foreign direct investment and the investors fleeing with their money, we hear about that quite often.

The internet is a network of computer networks. The electronic hypertext linking different media in global local connection comprises networks of communication, production studios, newsrooms, computerized information systems, mobile transformation units and increasingly interactive senders and receivers. He says we are living in a system made up of networks, whether financial, industrial, cultural or anything, and these networks have come to dominate our society. Electronic communication system gives networks the capacity to decentralize and adapt task execution while coordinating purpose and decision making. Therefore, flexibility can be achieved without sacrificing performance.

So he says that this network is not a new phenomenon in human society. Every society has some rudimentary forms of networks. You had networks of traders, of cities, of economic activities, but they were limited in their capacity, and they were kind of very rigid and inflexible. But with the advent of the internet and modern technology, the network system has become more efficient, adaptable and resilient. The prevalence of networks in organising social practices redefines social structures in our societies.

This is, again, a very important but sweeping far-fetched argument. He is saying that the social structure itself is transforming. By social structure, I mean the organisational arrangement of humans in relationships of production, consumption, experience and power as expressed in meaningful interaction framed by culture. Very interesting definition. I mean the organisational arrangement of humans in relation of production, consumption, experience and power as expressed in the meaningful interaction framed by culture.

He identifies culture as providing a larger framework within which the organisational arrangements take place. In the information age, these specific organisational arrangements are based on information networks powered by microelectronics-based information technologies and, in the near future, by biologically based information technologies. He says that the social organisation is replacing the very nature of the social structure, a social structure where microelectronics-based information technologies and biologically based information technologies are going to take their place. Under the conditions of this new emerging social structure, Sociology must address several conceptual and methodological issues in order to be equipped to analyse the core process of social organisations and social practices. This is the call, just like Ulrich Beck asking for Sociology to move or to dump its methodological nationalism and then embrace a methodological cosmopolitanism.

Manuel Castells is also arguing that Sociology must move away from its current rigid methodological and epistemological basis and then be ready to adapt to understand and analyse this new network of societies. Now, theorising social structure as an interactive information network. The 21st century Sociology will have to expand the network based perspective to the analysis of the end-day social structure in accordance with the current trends of social evolution. Transformation of spaces of places to spaces of flows. This is a part of a larger argument put forward by by Castells, I am not going into the details, but as I mentioned in the previous class, globalization theories basically revolve around the questions of the spatio-temporal transformational society.

In other words, how did human interaction undergo changes in the era of globalization? That is the whole question that Sociology of globalisation tries to understand. Now, as Sociology is a study about human interaction and in pre-modeled societies an interaction used to take place at a given time, at a given physical place, in a geographical place where people's interaction takes place. But ever since the advancement of modern technology, then interaction was made possible even with people who are not sharing the same physical place.

You are able to communicate with somebody using telephone, with somebody who is some say 1000 kilometers away or you are able to use other telecommunications. But globalization, according to these theorists, especially with the internet and transportation and other things, have taken this into a completely new level of interaction, you can coordinate interaction at a planetary scale, in a global level, at a real time, at a given time or at an intended time across the globe.

You can run your business, and you can do any social activity. This has many theoretical implications about the whole question of time and space. Different scholars have theorised it differently. For example, Anthony Giddens defined it as time space compression. David Hardaway defined it as time space in distanciation.

Castells argues that there is a transition from spaces of places to spaces of flows; he says that in spaces of places where the physical geographical material place was given importance, from there, we are moving to spaces of flows. The physical places become irrelevant. Whether you are here or you are in Nigeria or you are in the USA, or you are in Germany, these physical places become irrelevant because you are connected through information flows. And this flow is what he says is defining the nature of current global society. He theorised it as spaces of flow. Now, it is made of electronic circuits and information systems but also of territories. A physical place whose functional or symbolic meanings depend on its connection to a network rather than on its specific characteristics as localities. A particular place is no longer significant just because it is a locality. The particular place becomes important because it is a part of this larger network.

Because of this very fact, some parts of a global city can be part of globalization while certain another part of the same city can be completely cut off from that. It is something very connected with this whole idea about the digital divide. Certain people are part of this whole digital world while others are not.

If a particular city is connected to a global network, then it becomes part of a global society and it is integrated into that global flow. If it is not, then that very city is excluded, its territoriality, its locality have no significance. The space of flows is made of

bits and pieces of places connected by telecommunications, fast transportation and information systems and marked by symbols and space of intermediation, such as airports, international hotels, and business centres symbolised by delocalised architecture. The places where the elites live can see that this would be more or less similar in any global place where most of the economic activities take place; the global elite interact, and they all will have a similar character.

A social structure made up of a network is an interactive system that is constantly on the move. Social actors constituted as networks add and subtract components which bring with them into the acting network new values and interests defined in terms of their matrix in the changing social structure. So he is again pushing this argument that the social structure itself is undergoing change in the form of a network, and Sociology needs to adapt to that.

When you say that the social structure is changing, it is about social ontology, which requires a different epistemology and new methodology. He says that Sociology needs to reinvent its methods and methodology. On the one hand, we have an expanding field of the new mathematics of complexity based on notions such as fractals, emerging properties and the like. Most of these mathematical discoveries remain confined to formal exercises with a slight relationship to empirical research.

But they are tools ready to be used, transformed and perfected by able researchers with both knowledge of the tools and the substantive knowledge to make sense of their formal language. He says that there are a host of new methods and methodologies available, network analysis and then using large-scale data trying to understand how this network works and that needs to be incorporated into the sociological practices and not continue with the age-old methods of, say, participant observation, interviews, contacting some people and then collecting information, case studies and other things. On the one hand, the enhanced power of computers and the new flexible computer programming languages enabled us to precisely handle the complexity of interactive network structure. Computer-based system analysis of dynamic networks may constitute a fruitful approach through which observation and theory can be reconciled without excessive social



reductionism. He is calling for extensive use of computers, network analysis and a host of new methods and methodologies basically to capture this new social structure.

The practice of meta-analysis in full development in other sciences, particularly Economics, may become a standard tool of sociological research. using large data set, that is collected from resources, so that is not how Sociology is practiced especially in Europe. This is typical of American Sociology, which uses a more quantitative methodology. This would also require proper training and methodological guidance for sociologists to benefit from expanded possibilities of information without being overwhelmed by it. He argues that Sociology needs to reinvent its methodology and method, and only then will it be able to capture the larger transformations happening around you, especially under globalization.

These are the two essays I thought I would include in the last week of our NPTEL course because they represent some of the most recent debates in Social Sciences in general and in Sociology in particular. The questions about globalization and whether globalization brings a new reality to society?, whether globalization brings a new society? all these things are very complicated questions. With this, we are winding up this week, the fourth lecture and the formal component of the whole course titled Indian Society Sociological Perspectives. I will meet you with the final concluding session in the coming class. See you then. Thank you.