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D. Amarchand

SOCIOLOGY IN POST – INDEPENDENT INDIA - A SELF ASSESSMENT –

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Sociology in India since Independence with an assertive academic, professional resourcefulness and autonomy is without any high profile predilections. The landscape of sociology as an academic discipline in India, is not only a responsive knowledge construction endeavour but also a self conscious reflection on Indian society.

Young and senior scholars have assessed sociology teaching and research in various dimensions. There are debates on ‘contributions in Indian Sociology’, ‘Sociological Bulletin’, ‘Relevant Sociology’, ‘Sociological Sangam’ and the other scores of journals. There are also books, like ‘Indian Sociology – Reflections and Introspection, different volumes on ‘Emerging trends in Indian Sociology’, Social Conditioning of Indian Sociology’, Symposia and Seminars, Status and Trend reports by UGC and ICSSR. Review articles are the other academic endeavours. They represent the intellectual history of Indian sociology. They demonstrate the endeavour of the discipline towards the approaches and relevance. Themes, focus, sources, exogenisation and indigenisation, conceptual framework, ideas, institutions and social conditioning are the other aspects. Indeed the coverage is without any repetitive and rhetoric ideas.

Growth of sociology in India

Sociology in India had its institutional beginning in the pre-independence period i.e., within a specific political colonialism. There was a scope to delineate the sociological thought in historically constructed realities through the ancient and medieval periods of Indian society. Yet, the assessment of sociology is limited to the beginning of British colonialism through the vision of the colonial administrators, judicial institutions and independent intellectuals both within India and

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outside and missionaries. The system of thought and action has been in social and cultural perspectives. There were ethnographic accounts of local versions of the culture groups, communities, individuals, institutions, the intellectual premise of indological versions, and on oriental religion, ethics and rationality. These were the levels with which ideas of sociology teaching and research in India got formalised in Indian Universities in particular and among the academics in general. The postgraduate teaching began in the year 1914 in the University of Bombay followed by Calcutta in 1917, Lucknow University in 1921, Mysore in 1921, Pune in 1928 and later in Hyderabad. Sociology teaching and research had its distinctive hallmark of accomplishing the British social anthropological tradition and also of indological tradition with much of a field work thrust and with empirical research tradition also.

The location of sociology teaching was among the trans-disciplinary identities during the first half of this century. The courses in sociology have been taught along with the course in Social Philosophy, Economics, Politics, History and Psychology and at the same time retaining the Social Anthropological tradition. Besides the basic subject matter of sociology, the social issues which were perceived as problems in society were also taught. The same trend has been continued even during second half of this century. Later, sociology had expansion had diversification in 112 Universities, 77 specialized research institutes and in 789 social and voluntary – action agencies which incorporated Sociology as a cognitive discipline for teaching & research and for action endeavour.

The discipline had a quest for discovering enough about society to design the modes of planning by the state, voluntary and aid giving agencies. Although it is often said that the economic planning and development – services programs were increasingly looking toward sociology as a panacea, the discipline never lost its academic autonomy in being relevant to their use. The retention of its deep sociological / social anthropological tradition for combining the theory of empirical realities is the hallmark of this discipline. Social problems, village communities and peasant societies, family, kinship or industrial / organizational analysis of production process, welfare of labour, women, children and deprived / weaker sections were the substantive areas. Thus caste. Kinship, family, village, tribe, community, city, religion, ethnicity, region, gender were the premises among many to derive sociology knowledge.

Indian sociology towards rural development and change

In the ongoing teaching and research within the University and professional premises, sociological inputs were provided to the planners and for those in the governance of the programmes and policies of the state to redistribute the resources and growth with justice and equity. The legislative process in Indian parliament is an index of the end-use of this accumulated knowledge created by sociology and thereby the instruments of social change have been brought out by the state in the agrarian and village social structure. For example, legislation on land holding and tenure, industrial relations, marriage and family are a few among many. In relation to this, the debates had set in the early seventies on the nature and function of sociologists in transforming the society whether it should be reformative or contend itself in elucidating what was very much visible. The debate lacked in its emphasis on implementation of policies and evaluatory processes.

The debate was a real endeavour in translating knowledge into action. For example, the history of sociologists' endeavour in capturing the peasant society in India may be conceived that they have laboured more to provide methods and substance in this particular area of enquiry. Thus the society in rural India was set as a social laboratory for many. The extension work in the field of agriculture, health (unlike the process of political power and education) has drawn enough from this social analysis of rural society. The sugar farmers and dairy production, to name a few among many were yet other areas of enquiry, while the society, culture, power and institution - building and development processes have been other contributory areas. Sociology of rural society has thus substantiated itself in accumulating a knowledge on theoretical and practical vision of the transitional process of governance of the Rural Development Managers.

The field of sociology in Development Management has, for example, a task in three-fold perspectives :

- a) Reorienting the machinery of the organization.
- b) Diagnosing and encountering the social environment with which the organization for development encounters.
- c) To construct a social theory of development and to meet the needs of the individuals and groups in the community.

While this is an assessment of the discipline towards the dilemma of development, there is relevance for social action strategies.

Social action and pedagogy for development

On the other hand, social action for development particularly in mobilizing people for their own interest in adapting themselves and to create a modernizing effort is not without a concern of sociological research and teaching. Particularly, the post-modernist version, for example, Foucault's version of society on the question of how people govern themselves and others through the production of knowledge provides an impetus to sociologists. It is not only an epistemological question but also a critical agenda for development agents to look towards sociologists. The critical agenda of development through knowledge is not the simplistic question of extension principles. There is a need for critical scrutiny of sociology as knowledge science. It is substantiated through the research on forms of technology, institution-building, self-help groups, common property resource management which may be made not just to confine to the relationship per se but on the conceptualization of the relationship between knowledge for the people and its domination over the people.

Foucault's derivation of a point in his work on Archeology of Knowledge and the way in which he focussed as to see how knowledge generates power by constitution of people as subjects and then at the same time governing the subjects with the knowledge are the crucial views of knowing and understanding through formal, non-formal and community education. The invisible revolution in the instruments of functioning of the governance is more dominated by a theory of desire and wants, farfetched from the realities of the common man particularly, the people from "backyard" of the society whom we call deprived, weaker, poor and disadvantaged. These people of the backyard and their desire to have access to knowledge on development rests on the compulsion that they are not to be offered voice only but also a speaking position with which the pedagogy of development for social action has to strive for. This is where teaching and research in sociology has to strive for not limiting itself to the creation of knowledge but to go beyond to elucidate knowledge power of sociology and its relation with the people for development.

It appears that agents of change have underscored the integrative mechanism of human and social action. In a sense, variation and changes are seen as nothing but the variations in sociocultural attributes, by considering that these attributes are independent of human consciousness. Introducing to the world of philosophy of science particularly of the German scholarship in this regard, one could consider human reason as part of the historical process and cross-cultural variations. So, sociology in India should exhibit a scope for having a sophisticated distinctness among the facts, opinion, and the common content of knowledge to lead to concept formation on human and social action. This kind of scientific concept formation has to be the ultimate endeavour for a Pedagogy for Social Action in Development and Social Change.

Development, social change and modernization, social action and pedagogy for development on one hand affect the distributional and relational aspects of resources, in terms of hierarchical and differentiated levels of interaction. On the other, there is a scope to look into the process of functional continuity and discontinuity in terms of the old and new tradition of social and material aspects of the individual and group. As many of us are conditioned by the predominance of Euro-American literature on the science of society, it is but natural to veer away from the history under the powerful forces of colonialism emphasizing atemporal, static and consensual model of society on social change. Though there were Indian sociologists who considered the dynamic and conflictual nature of society, the literature of these dimensions had a subtler effect on using such knowledge by the agents of change and development.

Culture of Hierarchy

Taking this standpoint for sociology beyond fifty years of independence, the retrospect of sociology in the last fifty years may be summed up as the one of delivering the society in India as it appears to be. The literature on equality and inequality may be capsuled within a framework and be called culture of Hierarchy.

Accordingly, this is yet another dimension as to how the scholarship on culture of hierarchy with all its potential may demolish the static / textual prescription and reconstruct it as a dynamic proposition. The sociology teaching and research in India has responded effectively to translate the 'Culture of Hierarchy' into an action where the changing

character of caste system in India had been legitimized as a referral point for some legislative actions towards the new social order for growth with justice. There may be a skepticism on the part of many that 'sociologist' treatment of caste in India is more for a paper work. In reality, the testimony of the sociological knowledge on caste has culminated into a Mandal phenomenon with a judicial pronouncement. What more one could see in the contribution of Sociologists in capturing the knowledge on culture of hierarchy in order to demystify the existing provisions of affirmative action. The current concept of creamy-layer phenomenon in providing reservation for backward classes is an index of knowledge of culture of hierarchy.

A quest for new sociology with new social research

The academic pursuit of sociologists had a sense of inward and outward comprehension for a critical understanding of the methods in studying Indian society. They conceptualized the social transition of the society in different frameworks. Along with the British social anthropological tradition of understanding village and tribal communities, the sociology of early 1950s in India had also Marxist analysis of Indian society in general and peasant community in particular with the mode of production analysis both in the contemporary and historical sense. The contributors of Indian sociology have attempted to rectify the lacuna of over-emphasis of the philosophical tradition of labour and community and the transformative relationship between peasant and landlord more with an overlay of the state, market, economy and culture as debated by various post-classical thinkers or eurocentric tradition and also with narratology, post-modernism, post-structuralism and transformative culture studies.

The structural and functionalist traditions and of Marxists tradition in analysing the village and tribal communities had potential to discover society without compromising their tradition of methodological philosophy. A motivational element in this endeavour to construct the social reality of Indian society kept the classic tradition in sociology with a perfect professionalism of cognitive sociology to legitimize conflictual and consensual premises. This is a significant fact in sociology in India in terms of its contribution to the efforts in the field of policy formulation and planning. The discipline, in this way, had a distinct tradition of seeing itself in making relevance to others. Instead of seeing in making

itself relevant to the development agents; instead of concentrating to transform the discipline as a technical subject by arriving for model-building techniques in a non-intuitive manner, the analytical techniques used by sociologists of India reflected more of their self-conscious efforts to root in the tradition of indigeneous reality. The point of reference, in this context, was not without the tradition of European classical thinkers.

Also, new knowledge has been acquired to poststructuralist ecology, environment, and natural resources (like water for irrigation and drinking and human holocaust and social suffering). New branches of sociology appeared. Without being 'formal' in its disciplinary consciousness, it reflected its concern to every day life. The axioms that are used by sociologists in generating knowledge on Indian sociology are a combination of 'sociological positivism', 'Interpretative Understanding', 'Historicism' and 'Sociological Nominalism' where the passive and active levels of actor and observer got interpolated.

In yet another way, the status of sociology research with the methodological orientation unlike the princely disciplines like economics, is less formal in its methodology to an extent that sociology incorporates not the contradictions but diverseness of the various methodological predilections in constructing social reality. The changing character of knowledge legitimizes not only 'Contemporaneity and fresh knowledge', but also emphasizes the futility of the disciplinary boundary both in terms of substantive and methodological dimensions. There is a necessity to have a shift from the pure disciplinary centred to the thematic dimensions with multidisciplinary forms. Thus the inter-disciplinary focus of sociology is central to its self-definition and so, the research question is in increasing subordination of the disciplinary boundary. Accordingly disciplinary fencing is no longer a feasible proposition in sociology research.

Related to it, the debate on methodological issues include: (a) the distinction between factual and opinionated data, (b) individual and social factors, (c) empirical and normative frameworks and also their relationships, (d) rationality and objectivity, (e) voluntarism and determinism, (f) the methodological standpoints on the paradigm shift of causality, (g) the critique of modernity and post-modernity, (h) the construction of frameworks and models as derived from theoretical, conceptualizations, (i) the relationship between micro and macro

phenomenon in theory and thinking it at the problem level, (j) conduct of survey with its relationship to the socio-economic structure of the field. These are a few of the examples of the methodological frameworks relating to the way in which individuals and collectivities in the society are forced to think and act in the ways they do.

Ultimately, the society in its development is a field where a shift in paradigm on thinking through the regulation theory on postmodernism debates is crucial. To cite an example of the development of postmodern culture, it is often said that the global capitalism and postmodern culture shift the decision making process from the person most directly affected by them. It is not the fact we touch upon the issues related to the study of the social world empirically alone, but the fact is also to incorporate the observational skill on the social world to discover it in a critical manner for the purpose of generating new knowledge with an intellectual convergence of the methodological rigour. While these are the methodological bridges that are to be incorporated into training and research programs to maintain the continued level of abstract thinking among the sociologists, the multi-disciplinarity of the research programmes with the current thematic issues are :

(a) Environment and Ecology, (b) Natural Resource Management, (c) Gender and Society, (d) Science and Technology and also Science and Religion, (e) New Democracy and new forms of Power Relations, (f) Secularization and Religion, (g) Market forces and Society and Economy and Political Dimensions of Society, (h) New movements and Ethnic identities, (i) Religion and Space, (j) Weaker Sections and Social Orders, (k) Social Action and participatory Models.

Ultimately, the style and content of these programmes are on the feasibility of social research, while there is a scope for extending the programmes on the credibility of social research.

To sum up, the stand point on the self assessment of sociology is that contemporary sociology teaching and research has difficulty to proceed on some significant steps. It is to justify the credibility of social research purely on the basis of philosophy of science alone that essentialises what the Sociological research is for allegedly through the new ways of "causality" the shift in causality frameworks. Nor even does the theme get extrapolated through the crossing of the disciplinary fence.

research with the credibility level has to go beyond the translation of knowledge into the construction of social action more by the power of community and less by the power of the state. This is the assessment of the task of sociologists for the futuristic endeavour.

The above contextual examples are only a sample of sociological universe of post-independent India. To go further about sociology purely as an academic discipline, it appears that the less formalized characterisation of Indian sociology is sensitive to be a liberative potential in creating a system of thought. But at the same time there is also a point of departure where the debate should not only be in terms of the indigenouness of sociology locating it for new and diversified fields of sociology or into the tradition of methodological philosophy of the construction of social realities. It is also to be debated up on the question of differentiating from the classical tradition of sociology to professionalising the contents of sociology in order to fit the profession into the world of work of the various social sectors. Thus the insistence of a sterile positivism is no longer the order of the day. But a tradition could also be incorporated in professionalising sociology. For example, water is increasingly studied similarly gender. There is a scope for synthesizing classical and professional tradition. Thus the discussion of the disease of totalising the method and the substance in Indian sociology may be made increasingly less prevalent. The unit ideas as was stipulated by Nisbet as a task of the discipline may be held in Indian sociology in essentialising it with the substance and context both in the classical and professional tradition.

A critical assessment of all these endeavours reveal that the discipline is not without crisis. It is in enhancing the quality of teaching and research in an even way in all the institutions. So, the issue lies in strengthening the teaching and research in sociology for a quality academic content. There is a distinct polarization in terms of institutional inequalities with a characterization of 'backyard' and 'frontyard' institutions and teachers of sociology. It is said that it is easy to qualify oneself for a sociology degree but it is difficult to be a quality teacher and researcher in sociology. Further, the tradition of text books for the Indian audience is a challenge while the knowledge industry in sociology in India has produced veritable material without a text book culture.

Thus, sociology in post-independent India may be assessed as the one with quality content and inequalities in institutional and teacher profile.