

RELEVANCE OF THE MARXIST APPROACH TO THE STUDY OF INDIAN SOCIETY*

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The Fifteenth All India Sociological Conference is being held at a very crucial period in the history of independent India.

It is being held on the threshold of a new decade, the eighties of this remarkable century, a decade which is likely to be crucial not merely for the Indian society, and the third world countries, but also for the entire humanity, a decade which is likely to be a period of gigantic disillusionments, titanic turmoils, stormy struggles, and according to some, a decade of cyclonic social explosions.

During the last three decades, the Indian society has experienced a crucial transformation in its various domains of social existence. The post-war partition, the communal holocaust, the unparalleled migrations of Hindus and Muslims, the elimination of Princely States, the formation of the Indian Union, the framing of the Constitution of India, and the active participation of the State in undertaking the task of overcoming backwardness, through Industrial Policy Resolutions and a series of Five-Year Plans based on the postulates of mixed-economy indicative capitalist planning, have brought out significant changes in the Indian society, its economy, polity, education, class and caste configuration as well as its social and cultural spheres. The broad contours of these changes are becoming clear exhibiting alarming trends with the passage of decades, causing grave concern about the nature of this transformation. Sensitive minds have started categorising the three decades of planning successively as "Decade of Hope", "Decade of Despair"

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and "Decade of Discontent". Some of the scholars wedded to modernizing theories as formulated by ideologues of advanced capitalist countries of the West, have started prognosticating "Break-down of Modernization" in the Third World countries including India. In fact, futurologists, who sometime back were working out 'detailed forecasts' about the configuration of various aspects of human society and their national sections, have started becoming concerned about the possibility of social explosions during the coming decade, which may upset all their calculations about the profile they have worked out about A.D. 2000 and onwards.

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One of the major events, relevant to our profession, that took place during the last thirty years is a relatively massive growth of higher education in the form of large-scale expansion of university and other specialised institutional complexes. More than hundred universities, with a few thousand colleges attached to them, dozens of specialised research and other institutions, have emerged with social sciences gaining considerable respectability. Trained human power in social sciences, in the form of sizable body of teachers, researchers and students has emerged. It can be counted in terms of a few lakhs. Knowledge generators and knowledge transmitters are operating on a big scale on the national scene. Even in sociology and social anthropology there is a sizable growth of this trained human power, whose number will run into thousands. Funds for research have also been made available on a fairly big scale compared to that during the British period. The publications such as Survey Reports of Indian Council of Social Science Research, other institutions and individuals recording and reviewing the researches done in sociology, social anthropology, social demography, social work and other related fields reveal massive output of researches, carried out during the last thirty years. Researches cover numerous fields and diverse themes. Caste, family, scheduled tribes, scheduled castes, election, education, village communities, land reforms, urbanisation, industrial relations, demography, health, family-planning, position of women, and a host of other themes have been covered as listed and analysed in great detail in some of the reports and survey documents. The list of micro-studies, either of specific survey type

or involving intense field work, adopting sophisticated tools of data collection and involving complex statistical techniques of correlations would run into thousands, revealing vast proliferation of such studies in different domains of Indian social reality. During the last thirty years, as stressed by a number of eminent scholars, the pursuers of the discipline, have acquired greater technical skills in data generation, fair amount of sophistication and precision in observing and recording the data, and skills in processing and analysis of data generated. Recent publications such as the "Experiences and Encounters" or "Field Workers and the Field" reveal the anguishing experiences of the researchers conducting micro-studies in terms of field work difficulties, and value conflicts involved in field and other researches. They also reveal poignantly the technical, financial, and organisational hurdles and pressures involved in conducting these micro-studies by individual or team of researchers. They thus indicate the growing awareness about methodological issues involved in collecting data in such micro-surveys and field studies.

It can be said with a sense of assurance that the institutional framework, in the form of universities and other research centres which has emerged after Independence, has acquired the shape of gigantic knowledge factory, engaged in large-scale manufacture of knowledge products comprised of micro-surveys and micro-field reports.

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Of late, it is increasingly being realized that there is something basically disturbing about the entire enterprise of knowledge production and dissemination in social sciences. The quality of, the objective behind, the function performed and interests served by the massive products churned out by social science knowledge industry, exhibit very undesirable features. It is also being felt that a proper appraisal of the social function of this emerging knowledge has become urgent.

Some of the practitioners of this discipline have realized the need to examine at a deeper level, whether the knowledge generated by them through researches and transmitted through teaching and publications, helps to grasp the real nature of the transformation that is being brought about in the Indian society and to locate the

central tendencies of transformation that is taking place in it. It is also felt necessary to examine whether the knowledge generated helps to unravel objectively and precisely the impact of this transformation on various classes and sections of population. Some concerned social scientists have developed genuine anxiety about the efficacy of the knowledge generated by sociologists and other scientists. Does this knowledge help one to clearly discern the essential pattern of configuration of the society which is being created by the rulers of India, through the basic normative postulates codified in the Constitution and the property premises accepted in the strategy of development embodied in the Policy Resolutions for different fields and in the Plans? Some of the sensitive scholars have even started questioning the basic objective of the entire educational system, which generates certain type of knowledge-products in India. Is the educational system, the main industry involved in knowledge generation and knowledge transmission, not a device of pedagogy of the oppressor, instead of consciousness raising pedagogy of the oppressed?

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We will summarize the assessment made by sociologists and social anthropologists about the 'quality,' direction, relevance, and significance of the knowledge generated upto now. The chief ingredients of the feeling of unease expressed about the state of our discipline are culled from the writings of various scholars, the presidential addresses during the last two All India Sociological Conferences, and from the special numbers of certain journals including the October issue of *Seminar* entitled "Studying Our Society". We will enumerate the major limitations pointed out in these writings, in phrases almost taken bodily from the writings of the scholars.

1 Growing feeling of unease about the very direction and purpose of this pursuit.

2 "Many of the cherished assumptions that informed and inspired the discipline, now leave the practitioners cold and unconvinced."

3 Theoretical models and conceptual frames of reference coveted upto now appear of doubtful validity.

4 Several methods of research to comprehend social reality of India found inappropriate and of doubtful value to unravel the true trend of transformation.

5 Sociological teaching and research cast in colonial mould even after three decades of Independence. This sets limits to its range, constricts its vision, blunts its purpose and saps its creativity. The discipline finds itself in the tragic situation because it has opted to function within a framework of dependency, as a satellite system rather than autonomous.

6 Lack of awareness of Indian sociological tradition.

7 Sociology torn from Indology and history.

8 Over-scientific and consequently dehumanized tone of much of contemporary sociology.

9 Sociology upto now has been a science not imbued with social concern "a discipline without human meaning and purpose".

10 Sociologists "unresponsive to the advent of freedom in significant manner—showing unmistakable symptoms of captive mind, imitating Western pattern under the guise of cultivating "international science" without any sense of guilt or even qualms of conscience.

11 Sociology in India, largely a discipline of borrowed concepts and methods derived from high prestige centres of learning in the affluent West, especially in the U.S.A. and U.K. resulting into chasing the high prestige models and plunged into quick sands of pseudo — intellection.

12 Uncritical acceptance of foreign models and techniques without assessing their relevance for or suitability to Indian conditions leading to distortion of perspective and stunted growth of Indian sociology.

13 Imitating the Western models and keeping in view the type of work that enjoys popularity and prestige elsewhere rather than what country needs. • 1) This determined the priorities of research.

2 Significant part of the work is addressed *not* to the people, or even professional colleagues in India, but to peers and mentors abroad.

14 Involved in hardening the boundaries of discipline, carving out its own empire, developing restrictive segmental perspective, and developing an allergy towards insights and postulates of other dis-

ciplines. Similarly involved in fruitless debates over artificial distinction between pure and applied research.

15 Engaged through a series of logical acrobatics, tortuous statistical procedures, and mystifying model building, and arriving at convoluted generalizations that often turn out to be statements of obvious, their pseudo-profound terminology notwithstanding.

16 Consciously cultivating only a few styles of sociology, and investing far too much effort in the pursuit of the trite and the trivial.

17 The mask of profound scholarship often hiding puerile and vacuous ideas, only offering terminological satisfaction with no operational guidelines.

18 Sociologists have to shed their Narcissism and misdirected quest.

19 Sociologists have not still related themselves to the people and their problems and are still reveling in counter-productive intellectualism.

20 Our sociology does not address itself to the living concerns of today and tomorrow. It is not identifying critical problems, pose right questions and device appropriate procedures of investigation. As a result they are not able to contribute meaningfully towards resolving many dilemmas of development.

21 Indian sociology has yet to establish its credibility with people and policy makers.

22 Adoption of value-free stance and posture of neutrality, but still consciously or unconsciously accepting uncritically the values adopted by policy makers about the "desired type of society"

23 Indian society is subjected to a conscious transformation and change in a specific direction by policy makers. The social scientists pursue their researches of this changing social reality on the basis of accepting ahistoric, static, synchronic, structural-functional model based on an equilibrium assumption. Sociology has been more at home in the equilibrium system and stability models.

24 The discipline as it is practised is ill-prepared for meaningful handling of the ferment within the Third World and convulsion that it is experiencing.

25 The discipline generally confines its concerns to small-scale units and segments as autonomous systems, torn of its context of the larger society.

26 Adopting a value free posture, it is shaky in determining the criteria of relevance of research, avoiding undertaking of analytical handling of gut issues, developing a tendency to skirt around them and get distracted towards activities that have limited scientific value and of peripheral interest.

27 In action strategies, the discipline supports the tendency which is more towards the maintenance of status quo through minor adjustments and modifications here and there.

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The list though not exhaustive is formidable enough to cause grave anxiety about the state of discipline, atleast among those who are practitioners of this discipline. It demands a thorough examination of the causes which have led to such a state of affairs in the profession that has proliferated so extensively during the last thirty years.

It should also be noted that unease about sociological research and teaching indicated above is voiced ironically by the very sociologists and social anthropologists who have played crucial role in shaping the very approaches for teaching and research in sociology, and have been largely responsible in expounding the paradigms that have shaped sociological studies, which have resulted in the production of knowledge products described earlier. The unease is basically voiced by the very scholars who have acted as influential entrepreneurs, who have played important role in establishing the institutional enterprises called sociology departments, research centres, and institutions, which were infused with the very paradigms that resulted in the present type of studies. Further, the discontent is voiced against

only some elements of the accepted paradigms. The scholars do not break away from the major assumptions underlying the paradigms which dominate sociology after the second World War. The conservative and liberal paradigms systematized by Talcott Parsons and Robert Meton in the U.S.A. and parallelly crystalized by Radcliffe Brown and others in anthropology in U.K. still underlie the practice of sociological discipline refined further by Dahrendorf, Rex and some other scholars. The critics themselves, by and large, still operate on the basis of the same framework of approach against which they voice discontent. They do not go deeper and examine the real reasons as to why the paradigms which they pursued have resulted either in the debacle that has taken place in sociological enterprise or has been playing a supportive function for the rulers of this country..

I would also like to draw attention to some features of the description of limitations as formulated by these scholars.

The limitations are presented in phraseology which takes a very nebulous form such as "colonial framework", "western models", "lacking Indianness", "lack of social concern", "Super-scienticism", "sterile intellection", "not establishing credibility with people and policy makers", "generally confining its concern to small-scale units and segments as autonomous system torn of its context of larger society", "not addressing itself to living concerns of today and tomorrow", "not identifying critical problems", "pose light questions", "value-free posture", "in action strategies", "the discipline supports tendency which maintain status quo through minor adjustments and modifications here and there" etc.. There is no clear spelling out of what all these mean. Further, there is no deeper discussion of whether the maladies described here are rooted in the dominant "style of sociology" which is being overwhelmingly pursued in the country and based on specific paradigms mentioned earlier.

I have drawn attention to these aspects of the problems for two reasons:

(1) The dominant approaches which shaped sociological studies have been basically non-Marxist. The practitioners and advocates of dominant approaches have always adopted an attitude wherein the potential of Marxist approach to understand the Indian reality has been bypassed, underrated or summarily dismissed *prima facie*

by castigating it as dogmatic, value biased and, therefore, lacking objectivity and value neutrality.

(2) In spite of recognizing the sorry state of affairs to which sociology has been reduced, there is a furious endeavour, excepting by a few scholars, to seek other sociological approaches which would somehow or other bypass the Marxist approach, such as phenomenological, ethno-methodological or other subjectivist, idealist, culturological approaches, which are taking these scholars further from the relevant sociological inquiries on crucial issues which the Indian society is experiencing, namely > its immense poverty, growing inequality and other aspects of its backwardness.

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The basic tasks facing the sociologists in our country are therefore: 1) To search for a relevant approach which will uplift the sociological studies from the morass in which they are bogged down.

(ii) To discover or evolve an approach which will pose relevant questions with regard to the Indian society as it is existing and transforming today. (iii) To evolve an approach which can discover the specific structural features of the Indian society, by properly comprehending the nature and type of society which is in the process of being transformed in certain direction, and help us to grasp the central tendency of transformation with its full implications in terms of removing backwardness and eliminating poverty and inequality.

(iv) To evolve a relevant approach which will help us to assess the impact of measures adopted, the policies pursued, the classes relied upon by the Indian State, which is the most active agency of transformation of the Indian society by adopting a policy of Indicative Planning based on mixed-economy postulates for development proclaimed to overcome backwardness of the Indian society. (v) To adopt an approach which will examine the transformation within different sub-domains of the Indian society, treating them not as autonomous isolates, unconnected, but as part of totality of Indian social system experiencing changes in the context of the needs of transformation that is being brought about in the society as a whole.

It means that social scientists shall have to get out of the clutches of the social science as it is practised today, which is characterized very aptly by C. Wright Mills as a social science of narrow focus,

the trivial detail, the abstracted almighty, unimportant fact, a social science having little or no concern with the pivotal events and historic acceleration characteristics of our immediate times . . . the social science which studies "the details of small-scale milieu" knowing little history and "studying at the most short run trends".

Is there an approach in social science which can fulfil these functions so essential to understand the social transformation that is taking place in India? Is there an alternative paradigm, model of inquiry, conceptual structure, a framework which would help in understanding the Indian society, by raising appropriate questions, appropriate evidence to answer the questions, and which would elaborate appropriate methods and use adequate techniques to undertake research to correctly comprehend the transformation of the Indian reality?

As practitioners of science all of us are aware that "for a scientific discipline to progress, it is necessary to do a great deal of work on the basis of a specific paradigm. A paradigm specifies many things that are needed to do scientific work. It specifies basic assumptions, about nature of the subject matter to be studied, and the basic concepts to be used in studying it. It specifies the range of phenomena to be considered, the central problem to be studied, and specific theories composed of hypotheses and laws about the phenomena. It also specifies the research methods to be used in providing hypotheses and the basic values that guide inquiry. Of all these things the basic assumptions and concepts are most central since they tend to shape everything else."

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It is my submission that the paradigm evolved by Marx, if adopted consciously, even as a heuristic device, would provide this alternative approach for conducting fruitful and relevant researches about the Indian society. On the basis of a few studies adopting this approach, including my own, I can emphasize that the adoption of the Marxist paradigm is the most relevant framework that can help in comprehending properly the transformation that is taking place in the Indian society and its various sub-systems. The Marxist approach helps one to raise relevant questions, to conduct the

researches in the right direction, enables one to formulate adequate hypotheses, assists one to evolve proper concepts, adopt and combine appropriate research techniques, and can help one to locate the central tendencies of transformation with its major implications. It can also help to explain the reasons why academic establishments evolved to subserve certain functions in capitalist societies both of the First and the Third World countries adopt an attitude of basic reluctance to accept Marxist paradigms and permit studies on that basis as a small struggling current and that too under certain historic conjunctures.

It will be appreciated that it is not possible for me to unfold here, the basic ontological, epistemological, and other underlying assumptions, constituting the Marxist paradigm. Nor is it possible to elaborate on categories of concepts, range of phenomena considered significant for studying specific domain, the crucial hypotheses projected in different spheres, propositions about certain specific correlations, the distinction and also connection between essence and appearance, embodied in the Marxist paradigm. Nor is it possible to explain about formulation of certain law-like propositions applicable across ages with regard to the human species as a distinctive entity, which has evolved on the planet earth, retaining some basic essential ingredients, distinguishing it from other species; nor sociological generalizations, applicable to all class societies, and specific laws applicable only to capitalist societies and still more, other law-like statements pertaining to sub-domains belonging to particular socio-economic formation. It is also not possible to discuss the insights provided for understanding the mechanism of transformation, embodied in the Marxist paradigm.

I wish the social science practitioners in India, break through the atmosphere of allergy towards this profound and influential approach and create climate to study the growing body of literature articulating various aspects of Marxist paradigm. This will also be necessary if meaningful and relevant researches are to be carried out in India.

I will highlight here certain crucial aspects of the Marxist approach, which will prove relevant for explaining the type of transformation that is taking place in the Indian society.

The Marxist approach to understand any society and changes therein, distinguishes itself by emphasizing the need to initiate any investigation of social phenomenon in the context of the basic, and primary, almost life giving, activity carried on by human beings viz. production through instruments of production, to extract and fabricate products from the nature so essential for the survival and persistence of human species. Marx himself has formulated the basic significance of this activity in the following words: "Men can be distinguished from animals by consciousness, by religion, or by anything one likes. **They themselves begin to distinguish themselves from animals, as soon as they begin to produce their means of subsistence.** In producing their means of subsistence men indirectly produce their actual material life. The way in which men produce their means of subsistence depends in the first place on the nature of the existing means which they have to reproduce. The mode of production should not be regarded simply as the reproduction of physical existence of individuals. It is already a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite way of expressing their life, a definite mode of life. As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, with what they produce, and with how much they produce it. What individuals are, therefore, depends on the material condition of their production". Further "This conception of history, therefore, rests on exposition of real processes of production, starting out from the simple material production of life, and on the comprehension of the form of intercourse connected with and created by this mode of production i.e. of Civil Society and its various stages as the basis of all history."

"The whole previous conception of history has either completely neglected this real basis of history or has considered it a secondary matter without any connection with the course of history. . . We must begin by stating the presupposition of all human existence and therefore, of all history, namely, that men must be in a position to live in order to be able to make history. But life involves before everything else, eating and drinking, a habitation, clothing and many other things. The first historical act is, therefore, the production of material life itself. This is indeed a historical act, a fundamental condition of all history, which today as thousands of years ago, must be accomplished every day, and every hour to sustain human

life". And Marx emphasizes: "Therefore, the first requirement is to observe this basic fact in all its significance and all its implications and to give its proper importance."

The Marxist approach demands from every one, endeavouring to understand social reality, to be clear about the nature of means of production, the techno-economic division of labour involved in operating the instruments of production, and social relations of production or what are more precisely characterized as property relations. **Marxist approach considers property relations as crucial because they shape the purpose, nature, control, direction, and objectives underlying the production. And further property relations determine the norms about who shall get how much and on what grounds.** As rightly pointed out by Robin Blackburn, what defines the specificity of any society is its property system. Marxist approach to understand post-independent Indian society will focus on the specific type of property relations which existed on the eve of independence and which are being elaborated, by the State, as the active agent of transformation both in terms of elaborating legal-normative notions as well in terms of working out actual policies pursued for development and transformation of Indian society into a prosperous, developed one. The Marxist approach adopting the criteria of taking property relations to define the nature of society, will help the Indian scholars to designate the type of society, the class character of the State and the specificness of the path of development with all the implications.

I would like to draw attention to a deep prejudicial attitude among scholars to the Marxist approach. It is commonly believed that Marxism is a form of naive economic determinism, or that it treats economic factor as the sole factor determining every aspect of human life. Marx, as we have seen even in his preliminary formulation, is not trying to reduce everything in economic terms. In fact, he was engaged in pointing out crucial importance of the basic activity, namely, the activity of producing things, for survival and persistence of mankind. He was rather attempting to uncover the inter-relationship between this basic activity, characterised as "economic" activity, and other activities, and forms of organizations commonly described as "non-economic" in the totality of social existence by pointing out how social relations of production i.e. property relations which shape

the vital activity needed for very survival, persistence and development of human species, should be viewed as axial for understanding any society and the changes that take place within it. Marx also pointed out that different subformations within a society would be understood adequately if seen in the context of the historical level of means of production and the nature of property relations which shape and provide the resource availability and resource allocation for different institutions constituting that society. As Paul Sweczy has aptly put "Historical Materialism is above all a method of approaching social questions not as a set of formulas. The kernel of this approach is examination of the contradiction between the forces of production and relations of production".

The Marxist approach has conceived social science in a comprehensive manner, and is not inhibited by the boundary lines of academic disciplines. It also does not study various aspects of specific social formation, torn of the total context, and autonomously, but examines them in the context and specifically related to and basically shaped by the totality of specific society. In the Marxist approach, history is "the shank" of all well conducted studies of man and society. The Marxist approach also demands that specific society, should be studied, as a historically changing system, comprized of contradictory forces, some of which sustain and others which change that society. It views specific society as emerging, developing, subsequently declining and ultimately either emerging into a qualitatively new higher type of society or disintegrating. The Marxist approach thus endeavours to locate, within a specific society, the forces which preserve and forces which prompt it to change, i.e., the forces driving it to take a leap into a new or a higher form of social organization, which would unleash the productive power of mankind to a next higher level.

In short, the Marxist approach gives central importance to property structure in analysing any society. It provides "historical location or specification of all social phenomenon". The Marxist approach develops a matrix for concrete studies of a particular phenomenon of a specific type of society in the context of all pervading property relations. The Marxist approach "recognizes the dialectics of evolutionary as well as revolutionary changes, of the occurrence of breaks in historical continuity in the transition from one socioeconomic formation to another". The Marxist approach, in contrast to other sociological approaches exhibits one distinguishing

feature. By and large, modern sociology has ignored property relation or has assigned it a secondary place, in analysing the total social system. In fact sociology almost prides in appearing as a science of non-property aspect of social life. All other sociological approaches avoid making "mode of production of material life" as one of the fundamental categories. The Marxist approach adopts "mode of production of material life" as one of the fundamental categories.

During the last thirty years, Indian society is actively being reshaped to overcome backwardness, poverty, inequality to be transformed into a "prosperous", "developed" and "culturally" advanced modern society. The Constitution of independent India, provides the major outlines of economic, political, social and cultural norms and values which would underline the framework of emerging social order. The State has undertaken the responsibility of initiating various measures — economic, political, administrative, educational, social and cultural — to augment resources, to distribute resources, to apportion resources to various classes, groups and organizations and also to elaborate varieties of institutions and create new ones to bring about this transition. It has laid down certain major policy decisions; has declared to rely upon certain classes to be the active agents of augmenting resources, and has provided them all types of incentives, inducements, subsidies, facilities, as well as created a state sector comprised of various elements, which is to function to suit the needs of these classes for augmenting resources. It has unleashed a number of currents, in the course of pursuing this path of development, which have during the last thirty years convulsed the entire social fabric, and have given rise to grave doubts about the capacity of the path pursued, to realize the objective of making India prosperous and developed.

The scrutiny of differently oriented massive information about the course of development that has taken place during the last thirty years has revealed certain major trends.

1. India has remained one of the poorest countries in the world both in terms of GNP and per capita income, even after thirty years of development.

2. India's population has remained poor and continues to suffer the most acute inequality. The inequalities of wealth and income distribution are increasing. The same is true of social and educational

opportunities. In the context of the caste system inequalities have tended to assume sharper, more weird, and anguishing forms.

3. The rate of economic growth has remained low and has proved in the sixties and seventies that even this rate has experienced jerks and at times even some retrogression.

4. As revealed by several studies, even according to the most conservative estimate, approximately 40 per cent of the population live below poverty line at 1961 price level. These studies also reveal that developmental process, as viewed in the total context, has been aggravating the problem of poverty.

5. Accumulating evidence points to concentration of income in the upper circles. The growth of inequality is reflected also in the trend of asset concentration. This seems to be true of ownership of land or other assets in rural India, as well as of capital, income, or ownership of houses and other durable goods.

6. As studies relating to monopolies clearly reveal, concentration of assets, resources and income is growing at a very rapid rate even among the capitalist groups.

7. Small-scale industries with higher capital investment and using power are expanding at the cost of handicraft industries of the rural artisan classes.

8. Concentration of landholding and other assets in the hands of a tiny minority of landlords and rich farmers, corresponded by pauperization and proletarianization at the bottom, has emerged as a distinct trend after independence.

9. Unemployment has increased at a very rapid rate. Volume of unemployment can easily be placed in the range of eighteen to twenty million. In the context of market and money economy, such a dimension of unemployment reveals an alarming growth of inequality and misery.

10. Studies assessing the condition of women, the scheduled castes and scheduled tribes reveal further deterioration of economic conditions and growing social oppression of the overwhelming majority of these groups.

11. Educational opportunities are so created as to be accessible to those who have resources to buy them. This tends to accentuate social inequality in the country.

12. Studies on urbanization reveal that the evolving urban socio-cultural pattern enables a small minority of affluent section to claim a lion's share of urban amenities at the cost of the bulk of the population.

13. Studies reveal that the State, with the growing discontent and assertion of the masses is increasingly retrenching its welfare functions, expanding its repressive functions and is resorting to measures which curb the civil liberties and democratic rights at an accelerating tempo.

These developments clearly reveal that the State has assumed property norms of capitalist society as the axis of developmental strategy. Sociologists wedded to non-Marxist approaches have not explicitly defined the path of development pursued by the State as capitalist path and the State of India as capitalist State. If the scholarly sociological fraternity had adopted the Marxist approach which inaugurates any enquiry about any society by examining the underlying nature of the property relations it could have given them the clue about these central tendencies that have emerged in India during the last thirty years as almost a logical consequence of the capitalist path of development pursued by the State.

I pose a question before the social scientists who have assembled here. Can these emerging central tendencies be explained in proper causal form without adopting Marxist approach, which distinguishes itself from others, by posing gut questions, namely the questions about the nature of property and class relations which provide the axis of specific society, and which is accepted as the framework within which India's development has been undertaken? Can this pattern of development be explained, unless it is grasped that the State has assumed only certain classes, as approved and chief ones to operate as main agents for augmentation of wealth and overall development? And can this be explained except by adopting the Marxist approach? Can the central trend of development which huris vast mass of toiling people in the fathomless abyss of pauperization, proletarianization, unemployment, underemployment and even lumpen existence be

understood except by locating this trend as caused by the State pursuing capitalist path of development in poor ex-colonial Indian society? Without recognizing that the path of development is capitalist path of development can one explain non-inclusion of enormous amount of use values produced by women during their domestic work in the national income of the country? Marx has given the explanation of this phenomenon in the opening sentence of the epochmaking *Das Kapital*. "Wealth of societies in which capitalist mode of production prevails appears as an immense collection of commodities". Is the very fact that use values produced by women in their homes are not included as wealth because they are not commodities, in contemporary India, a positive proof that the path pursued is capitalist path of development and the society which is emerging is a capitalist society? Similarly can the expansion, diversification and even transformation of market into a bizarre, weird octopus-like network comprized of ration, fair, open, black, super black categories during the last thirty years be understood except by acknowledging that the path pursued by the State is capitalist path of development?

It is unfortunate that overwhelming sections of the practitioners of our discipline, pursuing non-Marxist approach have never defined clearly the nature of path of development pursued by the State in India. Nor have they undertaken studies attempting to explain this vital phenomena of the Indian society.

The Marxist approach considers that focusing on the type of property relations prevailing in the Indian society as crucial-axial element for properly understanding the nature of transformation that has been taking place in the country. This approach does not demand crude reducing of every phenomena to economic factor; it also does not deny the autonomy, or prevalence of distinct institutional and normative features peculiar to a particular society. For instance it does not deny the necessity of understanding the peculiar institution like caste system, religious, linguistic or tribal groups or even specific cultural traditions peculiar to the Indian society. The Marxist approach in fact endeavours to understand their role and the nature of their transformation in the larger context of the type of society which is being evolved, and understand them in the matrix of underlying over-all property relations and norms implicit therein which pervasively influence the entire social economic formation. It is my submission that adoption

of the Marxist approach will also help to study the industrial relations, not merely as management-labour relations, but as capital-labour relations, and also in the context of the State wedded to capitalist path of development, shaping these relations. Similarly the Marxist approach will help to understand the dynamics of rural, urban, educational and other developments, better as it will assist the exploration of these phenomena in the larger context of the social framework which is being created by the State shaping the development on capitalist path of development. The Marxist approach also will help to understand why institutions generating higher knowledge—products, sponsored, financed and basically shaped by the State, pursuing a path of capitalist development will not basically allow the paradigms and approaches to study, which may expose the myth spread about State as welfare neutral State and reveal it as basically a capitalist State.

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The Conference is being held, as indicated earlier on the threshold of a very explosive decade, wherein the Indian society will unfold gigantic convulsions and titanic struggles, which will affect not merely the discipline of social science, but also the life of practitioners of this discipline, in their role as researchers, teachers, students and citizens. At this juncture I am reminded of a significant observation made by Don Martindale about origin and function of sociology as a discipline. "Sociology was born as a conservative answer to socialism. . . . Only conservative ideology was able to establish the discipline. The linkage between science and reformist social attitudes (e.g. Scientific Socialism) was served. In renouncing political activism, sociology became respectable into the ivy-covered halls of Universities. It was received as a scientific justification of existing Social order . . . as an area of study for stable young men (rather than as a breeding ground for wild-eyed radicals)."

Is this observation not equally true for sociology as a discipline in India today? Will the dominant gestalt of the academic establishment permit actively the growth and blossoming of an approach, which does not renounce political activism, and which is relevant but critical of existing social order? Even if the academic establishment permits it to a limited extent, will the State, which is becoming a hard State towards those who oppose its path of development, tolerate for a long time this critical approach?

Practitioners of social science will have to face a serious intellectual and ethical dilemma to seek security and respectability by evolving justification for the path pursued by the rulers in the country, or develop courage, and readiness for consequences involved in adopting an approach, which would generate and disseminate knowledge, relevant to those who suffer and have intensified their struggles against the forces led actively by the State wedded to capitalist path of development, to counteract the consequences of the path, and to create conditions for pursuing an alternate non-capitalist path of development which would unleash the productive potentials of vast working population and ensure equitable distribution.