

Political Sociology in India

Yogendra Singh (1979, pp. 291–314), in his analysis of Indian sociology from 1952 to 1977, mentions four periods of its trajectory: (a) 1952–1960 (philosophical), (b) 1960–1965 (culturological), (c) 1965–970 (structural) and (d) 1970–1977 (dialectical-historical). This shows that Indian sociologists use conceptual scheme rather than constructing meta-theories or general theories, though there are some exceptions of those who have been guided by theories of Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Parsons, and also by the ideas of Habermas, Foucault, Derrida, etc. Singh pleads for a synthesis of structural and cultural dimensions in the making of Indian sociology. In general, there is a good deal of theorising about Indian sociology, but there is hardly any theorisation of one's own ideas and researches.

Sociology in India is now a century-old discipline. In the making of sociology in India, besides the contributions of its founding fathers, namely, Radhakamal Mukherjee, G. S. Ghurye and Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji, innumerable scholars have also contributed to its growth and development. Contribution of Professor Bela Dutt Gupta is quite distinct as she tried to relate sociological thinking and empirical research in the 19th century, with special reference to Bengal. Gupta's seminal work reflects her commitment to a semblance of empiricism and historical probing.

Gupta mentions that philosophic and religious orientation of Indian intellectuals have hindered empirically-based development of sociology in India. Literature on sociology is either pale and imitation of Western empirical sociology or rooted in Indian philosophical assumptions. Edward Shils (1961, cited in Gupta, 1972) also observes that there is 'adaptive' and 'routinised' lacking creativity in India mainly due to colonial legacy (cited from Gupta, 1972, pp. XII).

Bela Dutt Gupta exposes some of these misconceptions about sociology in India. She argues that the local history and indigenous development of sociology in India and more specifically in West Bengal have not been properly studied. Social and religious prejudices did not stand in the way of accepting natural science models and methods. Sociology in India began around the middle of the 19th century and it had a secular basis, and its origin was in the specific problems of Indian people. Gupta observes that the allegation of Indian sociology being 'adaptive', 'routinised' and 'tradition-bound' is unfounded and erroneous. She writes,

It shows a lack of knowledge and understanding too, of the local history, and of the indigenous developments of institutions. It is not true that there was any built-in reluctance or resistance among intellectuals in India in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to make natural science as the paradigm of human knowledge. (ibid., p. 14)

No doubt, colonialism impacted intellectual climate and temperament in the 19th and the first-half of the 20th centuries. This is not to say that there has not been influence of the Western sociology after Independence.

Bela Dutt Gupta thus argues that sociology is not a post-1947 phenomenon thriving in 'borrowed plumes'. She talks of 'a sociology of sociology', as also advocated by Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1979a). In response to the demeaning observations about Indian sociology by some Western scholars, Gupta reacted that 'philosophical thought about society as a whole and an attempt to carry out secular solution of social problems characterised the early precursors of sociology in India' (ibid., p. 83). The main aspects of Indian society in the 19th century were social welfare, social policy and social action. Formal sociology as a discipline for teaching and research began in the 1920s.

The question is: How theoretically and methodologically sociology has come up as a scientific discipline? Our main concern is with the inputs of knowledge in the making of sociology in the 20th century, and the aspects that would be added to the existing stock of knowledge in the 21st century. The founding fathers laid down the foundation of sociology in India in the first half of the 20th century. G. S. Ghurye combined diffusionist perspective with indological orientation. Radhakamal Mukherjee found the Western social science model and the Marxist approach inadequate as he thought of a general theory of relativity, combining the particularistic as well as universalistic criteria relevant for understanding the Indian social reality. Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji advocated an Indianised version of Marxist model for the study of Indian tradition. The main questions that emerged were as follows:

- Whether the study of values was more relevant than that of social relations?
- What would be the approach for studying Indian society?
- Whether an indigenous approach would be more useful than an external one?