

SOCIAL SCIENCE GAZETTEER*Vol 19 (2)(1) July – December 2024**December 2024: pp 179 – 195**Article History*

Received: DD – MM – YYYY

Revised: DD – MM – YYYY

Accepted: DD – MM – YYYY

Indian Tradition and Social Change**D P Mukerji**

There are others who are better and better known sociologists and more devoted to their field of study than I am. Sociology was not my first love, nor have I been its constant lover. I had come to it because, being interested in developing my personality through knowledge, I realized that none of the social or the natural sciences I had to study in my earlier days, could give me, at one and the same time, the synoptic view, the large vision and the understanding of the milieu of knowledge which were necessary for the fulfillment of my being. It has all been a personal affair, not a matter of sociology for the sake of sociology.

Not only that: soon after I began to think for myself it was also borne in upon me that I was an Indian, that I could not but be an Indian, that I could develop my personality only by understanding Indian culture. And Indian culture I found to be essential social. I also felt that the Indian history I knew was merely political history, that the Indian economics and politics I studied were detached from the context of Indian institutions, and further, that the Western metaphysics in which I became interested in the process of my social studies, did not suit my modes of thinking, feeling and being. My mind worked in this way: India might or might not have had history in the Western sense of the term; of politics, again in that sense, India had had little experience - she was becoming political only recently; her economics had been 'unproductive' and 'subsistential'; and her metaphysics, again in the Western sense, was poor. Positively, my conviction grew that India had had society, and very little else. In fact, she had too much of it.

Her history, her economics and even her philosophy, I realized, had always centred in social groups, and at best, in socialized persons. Yet, this elementary fact was missing from the books I read. The scholars were competent in their own fields, but because of the indifference to that solar fact of Indian culture, viz., its rootedness in the social realities which made up Indian's social system of action, their work appeared to be narrow, circumscribed, fragmented and partial in outlook and treatment. I could not appreciate this type of closed scholarship, its unrealism and its complacency. At the same time, their profession was mine, and with my limited talents, I could not do anything about it.

Sociology showed me the way out. This does not mean that for me sociology is the final science. Perhaps, someday I shall realize that sociology too is not enough for me unless it is differently oriented. Please pardon me for this personal note. My main purpose is to tell you frankly that I am not a sociologist as sociologist would like me to be. So, I guess that deep below my acceptability to the conveners of the conference flows the common feeling that knowing is more important than knowledge, that living comprehends knowing, that for an Indian, this business of living, despite India's increasing involvement in the world, is primarily Indian living which, in its turn, is essentially social living, that is, living in groups through stages of growth, until one is to be so socialized that freedom will have become co-terminus with existence and institutions turned into agencies of growth.

This autobiographical beginning lays down certain basic postulates of sociology as I have been growing to understand it, and naturally, as I would like to see it develop in India. Sociology has a floor and a ceiling, like any other science; but its specialty consists in its floor being the ground-floor of all types of social disciplines, and its ceiling remaining open to the sky. Neglect of the social base often leads to arid abstractions, as in recent economics. On the other hand, much of empirical research in anthropology and in psychology has been rendered futile because their fields have so far been kept covered. Yet, within this mansion of sociology the different social disciplines live.

In so far as they live on the same floor, they are bound to come into conflict with each other in the name of autonomy. To pursue the analogy, they seek to divide the house and close the door against each other. But a stage comes when exclusiveness ceases to pay. Such a stage seems to have been reached by nearly all the social sciences.

So, the restless spirits among the social scientists are trying to discover inter-relations, and the bolder ones among them are building up systems. Much heart-searching is going on among them today to attain some form of unity in diversity. I do not mean that the barriers have been demolished, or that the unity has been established. But the dissatisfaction is divine. This development in the social sciences is illustrated by the search for: (a) some basic, neutral and lowest common multiple concepts, *e.g.*, human group, status, mobility, solidarity or cohesion, sympathy, conflict, co-operation, community, etc. in sociology; propensity, welfare, preference, indifference in economics; power and again welfare in politics; (b) some common methodological principles derived from modern refinements of logic; (c) re-orientations and ways of inter-relations, or cross-breeding; and (d) a philosophical approach. Each type of search has its own merits and demerits, and it is the duty of a trained mind to avoid the pitfalls associated with the method adopted. The popularity of a method is often dependent on academic fashion.

The philosophical approach is at present out of court. The large sale of Toynbee's works is indicative of religious frustration rather than of mounting philosophical temper. In certain American Universities, and also under the auspices of the UNESCO, a genuine effort is being made towards discovering the inter-relations of the social sciences. Even there, the logical approach as such is not much cultivated, because it is generally considered to be futile. It seems that the debate between the logic of the natural and the logic of the social sciences continues without coming to any conclusion which could be useful either for research or policy. The effort is thus mainly directed towards bringing the experiences and techniques of different social disciplines to bear upon relatively small, concrete, specific problems. Recently,

the Indian Government, through its Education Ministry, has drawn our attention to this aspect of the matter.

There are numerous difficulties in the way of making the effort a success at once. All social disciplines are not of the same level; experts are not always used to teamwork and each discipline is apt to build vested interests round a department inside a Faculty. Requisite personnel who can rise above specialist interests are also rare. But, in my opinion, the real difficulty comes from the growing indifference to theory. When I say theory, I do not mean 'an isolated proposition, summarizing observed uniformities of relationships between two or more variables', howsoever useful and precise the establishment of such a proposition may be; I mean by theory another type of generalization which logically hangs together, from which 'statements of invariance' can be derived, and into which the type of isolated propositions mentioned above can be logically fitted. Most modern sociologists are averse to such theory and are content with isolated propositions mentioned above can be logically fitted. Most modern sociologists are averse to such theory and are content with isolated propositions between two or more variables. In this they find the statistical apparatus very handy. The exceptions, like Max Weber, von Wise, Karl Mannheim, Becker, T. Parsons, and Merton, are not content with isolated propositions. One could, of course, dismiss them as Teutonic.

But I must confess that an Indian sociologist finds 'theory' congenial to his temperament and traditions. I also suspect that in the course of its flight from 'philosophy', which is almost always used pejoratively these days, scientific social research has been hopelessly dispersed. As an Indian, I find it impossible to discover any life-meaning in the jungle of the so-called empirical social research monographs. While statistics seeks to give some sort of precision in trends, precision becomes non-significant in the absence of any theory and direction. In India, the danger arising out of the aversion from 'philosophy' is much less than in Europe or the U.S.A., though I am not sure how long it will remain so under the high-powered pressure of modern academic fashion. Therefore, I would like to think that if Indian sociologists

really tried, they could materially contribute to this vexed question of inter-relationships of the social sciences.

Indian sociologists would not be true to their temperament, in feeling apologetic for their pre-disposition to theory, or philosophy, as it is loosely called. If they are sure of their ground, which is offered by social traditions in the main, and if they still retain the traditional gift of logic and theory, they may soon be doing things to which the restless and the bold spirits among the Western sociologists are aspiring today. In the social disciplines at least, the knowledge of traditions shows the way even to break them with the least social cost, if that is necessary or inevitable. We Indians have the advantage of being pre-scientific in our thought, just as we have that of backwardness in our economy. We need not traverse the whole path of Western evolution, step by step, of knowledge and economy. It is uneconomical to reject theory in the name of science and then come back to it when science has failed to produce a synoptic view and generate understanding.

The first task for us, therefore, is to study the social traditions to which we have been born and in which we have had our being. This task includes the study of the changes in traditions by internal and external pressures. The latter are mostly economic, and we know what they are. But the way in which the economic pressures work is not that of a mechanical force moving dead matter. Traditions have great powers of resistance and absorption. Unless the economic force is extraordinarily strong, and it is that strong only when the modes of production are altered and traditions survive by adjustments. The capacity for adjustment is the measure of the vitality of traditions. One can have a full measure of this vitality only by immediate experience. Thus, it is that I give top priority to the understanding (in Dilthey's sense) of traditions even for the study of their changes. In other words, the study of Indian traditions, which, in my view, is the first and immediate duty of the Indian sociologist, should precede the socialistic interpretations of changes in the Indian traditions in terms of economic forces.

It has been held that participation, not to speak of life-long participation, is the enemy of 'scientific detachment'. I know how our scholars are taken in by that mysterious phrase. *Nishkama* (detachment) will not do for them, oh no! But weighing the two in the balance, viz., the advantage of insight that comes from participation and that of being in the swing and being internationally recognized as scholars in accordance with a supposedly common standard of 'scientific' technique, I find it tilting on behalf of insight. In any case, participation by long conditioning, which is the first requisite of understanding, should make it less possible to pass on the most jejune and vapid generalizations about Indian problems with which we are being familiarized today in the name of scientific research. I do not in the least suggest that foreign scholars should be barred from studying Indian problems, but I am only referring to the greater ease of insight and understanding that can be secured by the sociologist when he is saturated in his own traditions. His capacity to judge is a matter of acquired discipline, but in the matter of understanding, empathy precedes sympathy.

Thus, it is, that it is not enough for the Indian sociologist to be a sociologist. He must be an Indian first, that is, he is to share in the folkways, mores, customs and traditions, for the purpose of understanding his social system and what lies beneath it and beyond it. He should be steeped in Indian lore, both high and low. For the high ones, *Sanskrit* is essential, and for the low ones the local dialects. Anthropologists and ethnologists try to pick up the latter, and sometimes succeed in doing so. Yet the spirit is often missing and the letters alone abide. I do not think that many social scientists operating on Indian problems today know *Sanskrit*; and none care for *Persian* or *Arabic*. This state of affairs is deplorable. Unless sociological training in India is grounded on *Sanskrit*, or any such language in which the traditions have been embodied as symbols, social research in India will be a pale imitation of what others are doing. It pains me to observe how our Indian scholars succumb to the lure of modern 'scientific' techniques imported from outside as a part of 'technical aid' and 'know how', without resistance and dignity. In the intellectual

transactions which are taking place, it seems that we have no terms to offer, no ground to stand upon.

You will pardon me if I unfold my mind a little more on this vital matter. I am not equating sociology with the cultural anthropology of the modern man. So long as the generalized relationship between culture and social structure is not more clearly understood, that equation does not hold. With Parsons I maintain that 'a "system of culture" is a different order of abstraction from a "social system" though it is to a large degree 'abstraction from the same concrete phenomena'. My interest is merely to bring to the urgent notice of fellow sociologists only two major points: (a) the common concrete phenomena of which both the social system and the culture are 'abstractions', is the subject - matter of sociology; and (b) in so far as Indian society is concerned, that common concrete phenomena had best be studied through group-action and group-traditions.

This is not the occasion for an elaborate thesis. I can only offer a few hints of the way my mind has been moving towards that conclusion. I have a feeling that the frame of reference, which is the first requisite of a theory, is *not* the 'actor-situation' as Parsons would have it, for the simple reason that the unit of the Indian social system is *not* 'the individual as actor, as an entity which has the basic characteristics of striving towards the attainment of "goals", of "reacting" emotionally or affectively toward objects and events and of to a greater or less degree, cognitively knowing or understanding his situation, his goals and himself.'

Action for the Indian is not individualistic in that sense; it is 'inherently structured on a normative, teleological,' but not on a 'voluntaristic system of co-ordinates of axes', with the result that the failure to attain it does not lead to 'frustration'. The Indian has no such fear of loneliness. We too have our axes in *purushartha*, but the operational system seldom permits any 'voluntarism' on the ground of individual desires. The individual, if such a term is permissible in the Indian context, no doubt, desires, except probably when he is a Buddhist monk; but not even when he has renounced the world for

sanyasa, or when he is solely dedicated to *moksha* or *salvation*, does he act in protest against the system of action traditionally prescribed for the attainment of his desires. But the common Indian 'Individual's pattern of desires is more or less rigidly fixed by his socio-cultural group-pattern and he hardly deviates from it except under severe economic duress.

Protestants there have been many in our history, but very few of them have abjured the wider group-traditions. Every saint has sought to prove that he is in the line of great masters – *purvasuri*, *acharya*. This accounts for the curious fact that each one of the thousand and one sects has dissented only to come back to the fold within about three generations, contributing its own special technique of normative, teleological, goal-seeking patterns of behaviour to the broad, general stream of the Indian design. In this sense, India's religion is the traditional way of living; so is her culture. Hence her social system is basically a normative orientation of group, sect, or caste-action, but not of 'voluntaristic' individual action. So, there is no escape from traditions if you are an Indian, and additionally, an Indian sociologist. I make little difference between the Hindu and the Muslim, the Christian and the Buddhist in this matter.

Of course, 'voluntarism' is coming up, particularly among the middle classes in the cities, towns and their fringes. But they form an interesting special study for the Indian sociologist. They are vocally important, but if you watch their behaviour closely, you will find that their anti-traditional individualism is also developing a tradition of its own, a tradition of revolt which tends to become a little boring. In my view, the real reason why we have not done more than what we have done through planning - and we have done none too badly - is the yet unresolved conflict between the traditions which are the principle of *dhriti*, that is, *dharma*, that which holds, maintains and continues, and the new traditions which the urban middle classes have been trying to build up in the last hundred years or so. Bureaucracy is not the villain of the piece.

The sociologist would look at it from the point of view of the growth of traditions through conflict. Be that as it may, the absence of voluntaristic action has done Indian society one good at least. Excluding the middle classes, if you will, the absence of frustration that leads to all manners of psychoses, is a remarkable phenomenon of Indian life. The poise of the Indian peasant and the head of the family is there for all to see. Perhaps it is not the low 'level of aspirations', as the psychologist would call it, but the point is that level is still being governed by traditions which set the level of culture and values for most Indians. This should not be missed in our urge for uplifting the level of wants.

One point I want to make here in passing. It will be said that if the group is still the unit of action, aspiration and orientation, normative, affective and cognitive alike, then the Indian social life is the life of bees and beavers, regimented, totalitarian, in fact, almost communistic. I almost accept that argument. We are a very regimented people, but the beauty of it is that barring a stratum of people who repeat 'individual values', 'freedom', 'cultural freedom', like parrots or who have become morbid by their very 'un-Indianness' the majority of us do not feel regimented. In fact, quite a number of honest and true men have felt free, and they are not fellow travellers either. They are men like Sri Aurobindo, Ramana Maharshi, Ramakrishna, Dayanand, not to go further back. And not all Indian women either - and it is they who count most - feel, as an eminent politician had put it, 'oppressed, suppressed, repressed and depressed'.

Our conception of freedom is different, because our conception of man is *purusha* and not the individual, or *vyakti*. I wonder how many times the word *vyakti* occurs in our religious texts, or in the sayings of the saints. This, however, would be a small point if the whole paraphernalia of modern communications were not trained on us to make us belong to a 'free' society of individuals each exercising his right of choice despite advertisements, press-chains, chain stores, and empty purse too, which, you must admit, does not leave much scope for 'consumer's sovereignty'.

The Indian sociologist thus, I am afraid, will have to accept the group as his unit and reject the individual. He should however launch on his career with open eyes. If science deals with facts and with nothing else, then he cannot be a 'scientist'; if, similarly, history is the study of facts and hardly anything else, then he cannot be a historian of social change either. In other words, he will have to brave the brave new scientific world and be unpopular. Tradition, which will be his central theme, is not a fact; it is a forgotten fact. As it has been aptly said, 'In fact it is generally when the tradition is no longer a description of an actual fact and when it has become somewhat evanescent as a rule of conduct that it most clearly justifies its name and performs its real functions'. Strictly speaking, the study of traditions need not be unscientific, at least, in the modern sense of science, which has trade and traffic with quite a number of 'somewhat evanescent' things. In the mid-passage of this century, it is a little out of date to dismiss that rather vague world of fact and values, norms and symbols, as outside the pale of closely logical scrutiny, which, after all, is all that matters.

About the study of traditions being non-historical, it should be enough to remember that tradition comes from the root 'tradere', which means to transmit. The Sanskrit equivalent of tradition is either *parampara* that is succession or *aitihya*, which has the same root as *itihasa*, or history. Traditions are supposed to have emanated from a source, which may be scriptures, sages (*apta vakaya*), mythical heroes with or without names. Whatever may be the source, the 'historicity' of traditions is recognized by most people. They are quoted, recalled, esteemed; in fact, their age-long succession becomes an assurance of value which has already accrued in the process of its instrumental mental functioning as a constituent of social cohesion or social solidarity.

In Roman law, 'traders' also signifies safekeeping and deposit of something precious; and so, it involves a confidence-worthy person whose normal and legal duty is to preserve the precious thing intact. The Sanskrit equivalents of each term used above will at once occur to us all. The persons are either the Brahmins, or the *sampradaya*, which is the corporate custodian; the succession is by birth, or

initiation; the preciousness is of the order of sacredness; and the methods of keeping the traditions intact are correct speech, or pronunciation of sacred texts; psychological fixations to maintain the social structure and *vice - versa*, mainly by the caste system with the custodians on top.

In short, the chain of traditions, *sampradaya parampara*, has been the true historicity of the Indian social system so far. Through the normative system thus evolved has the continuity of the Indian social system been maintained for so long. Both sound and sight have been harnessed for this work of tradition-conservation. The role of sound is best manifest in *Om*, and *nama japa*, while that of sight is in the images, or *devarupa*. The two are combined in the idea that the sage is the seer of *mantram*, which is to be repeated for one's own hearing the imparted only to the initiate. In India, the highest value has been paid to rectitude, which is correct pronunciation, correct technique, correct initiation, correct conduct and correct meditation. The overtone of the word it is rectitude. No wonder that the style of writing and the style of behaviour are both called *riti*.

One easy conclusion from the above is likely to be the idea that tradition is nothing but the act of conserving, hence conservative. But that conclusion will be wrong, as I have hinted before. Traditions do change. I am excluding the external factors of change in this address. Among the endogenous ones also, I am not taking into account the class-relations, for two reasons: (a) in our society class-conflict has so long been smoothed and covered by caste-traditions and the new class-relations have not yet sharply emerged; and (b) we are more or less ignorant of the socio-economic history of India. (Here lies a fertile field of study in the inter-relations of social sciences.)

In India, a full account of the subtle methods of the internal, non-economic changes would thus be the immediate occupation of dynamic sociology. I guess that it would probably be an object lesson to those who are legitimately proud of having produced revolutions by consent and without much bloodshed, by the democratic procedure of Parliamentary Government. So far as I have been able to find out, three

principles of change are recognized in our traditions: *sruti*, *smriti* and *anubhava*. It is *anubhava* or personal experience, which is the revolutionary principle. Certain *Upanishads* are almost entirely based on it. But the matter did not end there.

Personal experience was no doubt the root, but it soon flowered into collective experience. The entire history of collective dissent throughout the Middle Ages down to modern times proclaims the supremacy of generalized *anubhava* as the principle of change. If we care to know the origins of the numerous sects, *panths*, we find that their saint founders started with their own experience, had little or no account with rituals, temples and priests, spoke in dialects, and not in Sanskrit, to the lower classes and castes, gave an equal status to the women, and preached the doctrine of love, *prem* and *sahaj*, spontaneity, which came like a tidal wave flooding the soil and leaving a rich deposit on the banks of time and tradition. The high traditions were predominantly intellectual and centred in *smriti* and *sruti* where the principle of change was supplied by dialectical exegesis. We find more or less the same process among the Indian Muslims. The *Sufis* among them have always laid great stress on love and experience. I think the reason, in the Western sense, has not been the highest category with us. *Nyaya*, or dialectical skill, was no doubt exercised with extraordinary subtlety, but it will not be far from right to say that discursive reason, *buddhi-vichar*, has been historically superior to *anubhava*, experience, or love, *prem*, as an agency of change of traditions.

Rationality has not had much chance in our social system except through philosophical speculation and the rules of exegesis. Interpretations have sometimes sabotaged traditions, but in almost every case the interpreters seem to have fought shy of the implications of their deeds. Even *Sankara*, whose philosophy dismisses life and the social system once and for all, puts it within the ambit of Vedic traditions. So, when the high and the low intellectual traditions, to use Turner's phrase, had a chance of coming into conflict, they were comprehended and brought together within some abstract modes of thought and feeling. Here the well-established elite group reasserted

its power and all the revolutionary experimental urges were sucked into its orbit of influence. Tradition was victorious once again.

Indian social action has so far proceeded in that fashion. It has given latitude to rebel within the limits of the 'Constitution'. An excellent example of squaring tradition with experimental ardour indeed! The result has been a caste-society, a society that has prevented the formation of classes and burked all forms of class-consciousness without the religion of 'free enterprise'. You may like it or dislike it, but there it is. My information is that in most Indian elections class-consciousness is often submerged by caste feeling.

I have so far followed Turner's simple classification of traditions into high and low. But one could, on the basis of the argument carried thus far, come close to what Gurvitch has called the 'depth analysis' of social reality. This analysis starts from the surface, goes down the various levels of traditions and traditional lore to the deepest level of spiritual values and their collective, immediate and integral experience, involving spiritual and sense data alike. Even on the surface of human geography and demographic patterns, traditions have a role to play in the transfiguration of physical adjustments and biological urges. In India, for example, things like city planning and family planning are so bound up with traditions that the architect and the social reformer can ignore them only at the peril of their pet schemes. Lower down are the organized and the unorganized superstructures operating through rituals, *achar*, *kriya*, which consolidate collective behaviour and give it style.

Here, usually, the dynamic element of traditions stops for most Indians. But if the social symbols, which are really and truly 'presences', hiding and seeking, revealing by concealing and concealing by revealing both the spiritual and the social reality, render these rituals active - and in my experience they do it for many Indians - then the dynamics may proceed. Now begins the creative aspect of symbols. Symbols are neither signs, nor expressions, nor appearances of certain things. They are the things themselves. Symbols have no syntax; they have no subject, object, predicate or preposition. Of

course, there are symbols and symbols, some of them social and others not so social.

'Social symbols are inadequate expressions of the spiritual realm adopted to concrete social situations, to typical social structures, and to definite collective mentalities, in which different aspects or the spirit realize themselves and by which it is grasped. Social symbols are thus simultaneously conditioned by social reality and the spirit, which realizes itself therein: they vary in function to this spirit. That is why symbols are at one and the same time products and producers of social reality and why they are the principal object of the sociology of the human spirit.'

Most of you, like me, will react sharply against this kind of mystical jargon and say that sociology came out of this mumbo-jumbo long ago. And you will be right. But we will be very wrong if we miss the meaning of it in our dislike of the terms. That meaning is simple: the study of sociology is principally the study of traditions; the study of traditions, in the ultimate analysis, involves that of symbols which, under certain conditions and on particular levels, are explosively creative and dynamic; and, therefore, the values and norms retain and enrich their noetic connection with specific social structures and concrete historical situations. All this is very relevant to Indian conditions.

In my view, the genuine relation of the social sciences to each other is ultimately established through the understanding of the different levels and layers of the way the person works in, through and out of society. Gurvitch, as you know, calls it depth sociology on the lines of depth psychology. An Indian, who thinks of *patal*, down below, would like to give it another name. Whatever that name is, the descent to the deeps and the ascent to the heights are relative activities. The point is this: sociology should *ultimately* show the way out of the social system by analysing the processes of transformation. And, I think, the Indian society and the Indian sociology (all our *shastras* are sociological) both do it excellently, but in the limited sphere of non-economic, endogenous group-action.

As a corollary, I may state that as different philosophical systems of India mark the different stages of the spiritual growth of people, so the different social disciplines appear to the Indian person as rings of the tree of life, which for him, has its roots up above, with no Ygdrasil to burrow from below. Sciences have begun to disagree since Western society began to disintegrate. The Indian society, too, is changing, but without much disintegration. (Our middle classes were never really integrated. They had begun to disintegrate soon after the First World War. But what the world forces could not do our Finance Ministers have been doing. So, the middle classes are only a special problem, a case). This is an advantage for the Indian sociologist. So, naturally, Indian sociology, for yet some more time to come, cannot but be interpretative with greater dependence upon the method of insight that comes from active participation in the Indian system of social action than was permitted by 19th century science. Investigation will always be there, but it will have to be investigation into the spirit of things observed, that is to say, symbols. Other investigations are necessary, but subsidiary.

If this address were to be delivered a few years ago my emphasis on the need of the study of traditions would have been much less sharp. Meanwhile, I have seen how our progressive groups have failed in the field of intellect, and hence also in economic and political action, chiefly on account of their ignorance of and unrootedness in India's social reality. Besides, the study of traditions by dependent people could degenerate into an argument for traditionalism *via* the need for self-respect and national vanity. For a free young people, who are apt to get groggy with the fumes of progress, however, a study of their own traditions may be a guarantee of steady and balanced growth. Revolution is often a leap but after every leap one must stand steady and sane. And there is plenty of room for sanity in this mad world.

Even if one chooses to take sanity on the stride, is it not true that the deeper down you go to the roots the more radical you become? That saying of Marx is good enough for me in this context. And if Marx is considered backdatish along with Marxism, I shall go further back on history to be up-to-date with

Cato, whose approval was for all lost causes. But is the cause of spirit, which functions in the context of traditions, really a lost cause? Is the method of insight an altogether decadent, futile method? Is interpretation useless in modern human knowledge? I do not quite know. If it is not, then Indian sociologists should take courage in both hands and openly say that the study of the Indian social system, in so far as it has been functioning till now, requires a different approach to sociology because of its special traditions, its special symbols and its special patterns of culture and social actions. The impact of economic and technological changes on Indian traditions, cultures and symbols, follows thereafter. In my view, the thing changing is more real and objective than change *per se*.

***Presidential Address given at the First Indian Sociological Conference held in April 1955 at Dehra Dun under the Auspices of Agra University.**

Acknowledgement:

Three versions of the Presidential Address of Professor D P Mukerji to the First Conference of Indian Sociological Conference may be found: First, the copies of the Address distributed at the time of the Conference at Dehra Dun in 1955; second version, with some editing by the author himself may be found in Diversities – essays in Economics, Sociology and other Social Problems, 1958, People's Publishing house, New Delhi, pp. 228-241; the third version with heavy editing under the caption 'Indian Sociology and Tradition', collected

in Sociology, Social Research and Social Problems in India, edited by Dr. R.N. Saksena, 1961, Asia Publishing House. I have taken the liberty of retaining certain paragraphs which were edited by both, Professor D P Mukerji and Professor R N Saksena.

Professor Rajeshwar Prasad

In Edited Booklet Seminar Proceedings distributed during 'Professor D N Majumdar Centenary Seminar' on 'Anthropology: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow' organised by Indian Social Science Association (ISSA) from September 13 – 14, 2003 at Agra in collaboration with Ethnographic and Folk Culture Society (professional organisation founded by Professor Majumdar) and Uttar Pradesh Sociological Conference.

Article History

Received: DD – MM – YYYY

Revised: DD – MM – YYYY

Accepted: DD – MM – YYYY

Sociology, Social Research and Social Problems In India

R N Saksena

Sociology is a new science to be introduced in India. It is a much younger science than in the West, where it had its birth at the turn of the (20th) century. In the West during the last forty or fifty years, in fact since sociology gained recognition as a science of society, it has taken long strides in emerging as a body of more systematic social theory “in which theory that had formerly been largely speculative in character was drawn into closer relationship with empirical studies This was accompanied by the restatement of propositions, often deduced from sound theory and expressed as hypotheses and then tested by observations”.¹ Thus, Western sociologists are keeping more to ‘hard facts’.

The same impact can be felt in India. But the developments have not been so spectacular. For, Indian sociologists have inherited a different social philosophy, which is not only ancient but goes far beyond even the known history of many civilizations. It is also unique in considering the relation of man not simply as a relation to other human beings but to all life. In the Hindu social system, the whole *Cosmos* is believed to be dominated by one Supreme Being, which is identifiable with Self. But a distinction is drawn between the *Cosmic Self* and the *Psychic Self*. The Cosmic self is the Supreme Reality, the *Unity* which lies behind all multiplicity, known as *Brahma*. But the Psychic Self, the manifestation of one’s own self, is *Atman*. It is the ‘subject which persists throughout the changes. It is the simple truth that nothing can