

**NOTES**

1. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1958.
2. Winch, *op. cit.*, p. 8
3. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953.
4. Winch, *op. cit.*, p. 32.
5. If Wittgenstein does not say that judgments of right and wrong are based on judgments of reality, he also nowhere lends support to the view that they are based on rules.
6. Winch rejects the investigation of social uniformities a la Mill on the ground that it presupposes the notion of a rule. But if rules and a mode of life are inextricably bound up with each other, investigation of the uniformities of a mode of life seems to be the only way of discovering rules, if there be a way at all.
7. Wittgenstein, *op. cit.*, 219 (p.85e).

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## **On V.K.R.V. Rao and Social Science or Social Science**

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Before I met him I knew of Professor V.K.R.V. Rao as *the* expert on National Income Accounting in India and the builder of the Delhi School of Economics. I met him for the first time in 1951 when I went to see my respected senior friend Professor Maurice Dobb of Cambridge at Delhi School of Economics and was introduced by him to Professor Rao. That meeting, however, was merely “social”.

I met Professor Rao more intimately at Planning Commission which, in early 1960s, had set-up the Indian Committee for Social Science Research with Professor Rao as its Chairman, and I was one of the committee members. As is expected of me, I had some altercations with Professor Rao during the sittings of the Committee, but I appreciated his steering of the Committee as on Social Science Research, and *not* on researches in Social Sciences.

The Committee gave birth to ICSSR- the Indian Council for Social Science Research; but, to what extent, it treated the social science specializations as social divisions of labour for the unitary disciplines of Social Science remains, as yet, a moot question. To a certain extent ICSSR has sponsored inter-disciplinary research in social science but, to date, it has not treated the social science as a unitary discipline.

Professor Rao, in the meantime, had sponsored through Delhi School of Economics a Department of Sociology under the auspices of Delhi University; but the Department remains aseptic to even interdisciplinary research in social sciences. Professor Rao was

somewhat more successful in that direction through the Institute of Economic Growth, which was the second institute he built, and which housed economics, sociology, demography, economic history, and so on.

However, Professor Rao perhaps proceeded more explicitly toward building a social science discipline when he built another Institute, in Bangalore, and entitled it as the Institute of Social and Economic Change. Doubtless, he did not clearly indicate the concept of unitary social science, and whether or not the concept has been pursued by the Institute has yet to be seen.

Meanwhile, in India, the concept of unitary social science was perhaps first mooted by Professor D P Mukerji in early 1950s, when he exhorted the social scientists to not only break the walls between the specializations in the mansion of social science but also to keep the ceiling of the mansion open to the sky. In late 1950s, Professor Radhakamal Mukherjee clearly addressed the social scientists to gather under the rubric of *trans-disciplinary* approach in place of holding on to disciplinary segregation.

Another pioneer, Professor P. C., Mahalanobis, assumed a wider perspective and mooted in the fifties the notion of unified (not unitary) science specializations from the viewpoint of applying the philosophy, logic and method of statistics as the key technology for sciencing all phenomena. He persuaded me to relinquish my professorship at Humboldt University in Berlin, return to Indian Statistical Institute in 1957, and initiate sociological research. I formed Sociological Research Unit, in contravention with the then prevailing custom in ISI to conduct various research activities under the label of respective “departments”. Professor Mahalanobis encouraged the concept of “Unit”, and the previous departments (and those which later established to pursue scientific activities) were christened as units.

Whether or not this was a step toward adopting the concept of unified specializations in science, in due course however Social Science Division was created, as was created the Mathematics and Statistics Division, etc. But, as in ISI, so elsewhere in the realm of social science

any such attempt has been more formal than functional. The pull of gravity is, yet, stronger in the so-called social science disciplines for teaching and research than surmounting it by enforcing the concept of unitary social science. As an example, I may note that in a recent publication, the abbreviation ICSSR has been spelt out as the Indian Council for Social Science Research!

Yet, the inexorable life process and the consequent growth of knowledge are shaking the once usefully constructed boundaries of specialization along with the accumulation of knowledge. Now, in physical science, the boundaries among physics, chemistry, etc., are becoming blurred and even coming closer to life science, earth science, and so on. The boundaries among economics, political science, sociology, psychology, demography, anthropology, etc., are also being obliterated.

This upheaval in the realm of social science became particularly noticeable in the West from the 1940s. In place of defining economics as the study of relation of humans with goods and services (vide L. Robins), it began to be defined as the study of relation *among* humans with respect to goods and services (vide P.M. Sweezy). In more and more universities, the department of Politics was renamed the department of Political Science; and, irrespective of this change in nomenclature, the subject matter of this branch of social science knowledge was no more confined to Realpolitik but spread over the devolution or usurpation of power between the elite and the masses in society. In place of upholding the “holistic” tradition of anthropology, Physical Anthropology was becoming a wing of specialization in the field of human biology; Prehistory became components of archaeology, history, etc.; and Social Anthropology merged with Sociology which, in its turn, was not aseptic to economy and polity. And, in this whirlwind of changes in social science, the actuaries lost their hold on Demography, which became specializations of economy, polity, and culture; and so became the fate of psychology which was no more distinguished as mere analytical or social psychology.

This transformation in the realm of social science centred around viewing the concept of rationality differently. It was no longer regarded as an *innate* quality to maximise the relation between end and means, but as a culturally conditioned and politically influenced attribute for *optimising* the relation between end and means. Culture, in its turn, was not conceived as just an exclusive attribute of *finesse*; but as the inevitable and mundane valorisation of capital in human achievement and perception in all spheres of life, accumulated from the past to the present – from ancestors to one’s contemporary existence. Therefore, that a symbiotic (and just not a systematized) relationship among culture, economy, and polity – with all their ramifications – that governs the appraisal of social reality is becoming a topical realisation, especially from the 1960s.

Bearing this course of development in social science in mind, I had mooted the procedure to unite the social science specializations, in order to crystallize the grammar of social science, in the book entitled, *Classification in Social Research*. The book, published in the USA in early 1980s, has been exhausted in the USA and Europe; but to my knowledge, not a single copy has reached India. At the close of 1980s, I published in India the book entitled *Systemic Sociology*, in which I argued for sociology to form the basis of social science knowledge, and also its top, by means of a symbiotic appraisal of its major axii of culture, economy, and polity. A sociologist in India reviewed the book as abstruse; others, perhaps, did not take any notice of it.

Even so, I find in the present century that some sociologists are pursuing a symbiotic approach of culture, economy and polity, in order to unfold the reality of the contextual situations in South Asia, Africa, etc. I hope that they will be the harbinger of developing a unitary social science. In that perspective, I also find that in the late nineties, Immanuel Wallerstein has given a clarion call to “open the social science”. More attention may be paid to Immanuel’s exhortation in the days to come, and the attempts of the noted young social scientists may be more incisive and have a spread effect.

Thus, ultimately, the call of the pioneers to develop a unitary Social Science may bear results: the pioneers, among whom V.K.R.V. Rao was perhaps the last representative. Presently, however, without being too pessimistic and looking forward to the future generation of social scientists, I cannot help making the painful comment, in so far as the main line social scientists are concerned, the adage is still appropriate: *Delli Door ast* (Delhi is far off).

This may be because the unitary concept of social science will not be durably established unless we distinguish between the respective levels of analysis and the systematized level of comprehension. Just as understanding a living organism like the human being we analyse severally its alimentary, respiratory, circulatory, muscular, nervous, and all such interlocking systems, but posit the level of comprehension at the ensemble of their formations and functions, so must it be with the appraisal of social reality. The levels of analysis will be at the social science specializations, respectively, but the level of comprehension must be at their totality which, with respect to any place, time, and people bound configuration of human society, is manifest by (1) its culture playing the role of gravity to denote the society in being; (2) its economy denoting the force of change for the society becoming; and (3) its polity denoting the push and/or pull to change society or try to revert it to its *status quo ante*.

I wish there will be some discussions among social scientists on this issue.

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Lecture delivered on the occasion of receiving from the Indian Social Science Association the *V.K.R.V. Rao Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award – 2004* at a function organised by the Department of Sociology and held at the Calcutta University, Kolkata. Professor Rajeshwar Prasad, President, Indian Social Science Association, presented the Award to Professor Mukherjee.

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