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## Discovering Critical Indian Sociology

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**Abstract:** *The present article is a modest attempt to establish the importance of 'Critical Indian Sociology'. Author Views that Critical Indian Sociology has not been given any place in almost all the universities of India. Social Sciences in India are by and large 'Pro – establishment' which cannot connect knowledge and action in the interest of commoners. In this article a brief indication is given about those ancient Indian classics, philosophies and personalities related to ancient, medieval and modern India which can be termed as insights for Critical Indian Sociology. Critical Indian Sociology can make students of sociology as destroyer of orthodoxies author believes. Author, again and again states that marginalised presence of Critical Indian Sociology is One of the Causes of formation of authoritarianism in democratic India.*

**Keywords:** Critical Indian Sociology, Authoritarianism, imagination, non-imagination, hierarchies, inequalities

Critical Indian Sociology refers to that branch of knowledge of scientific-ideological nature by which students of Social Sciences in general and Sociology in particular analyse and examine those (Indian) social realities which have led to paradoxical frames of reference in the 'life-worlds' of people. Critical Sociology, in fact, everywhere is associated with (i) searching alternatives (ii) searching social thoughts and (iii) searching theories of dissent and dissonance. These thought and theories encourage students of systems of various knowledge to place significance of 'Radicalism', 'Humanism' and 'Transformations' so that alternatives associated with the

'Egalitarian-Secular-Just' Society could find place in the structures of diverse conscience. Critical Sociology in any society can emerge and develop if Sociologists in classroom as well as in public domain have courage to appear with the values of freedom of expression and fearlessness. What the author of this paper has found on the basis of nearly forty years of teaching experience that academicians in the classrooms and in public domain argue on the basis of caste, class, religion, gender, patriarchy, ethnicity, tribe, minorities, races and region centric identities in which polarization of multiple nature appears as a 'message'. This structure of arguments is supportive to those formal and informal systems which constitute the lifeworld of dominant groups having politico – cultural - supremacy on the one hand and control over resources on the other. As a result, Critical (Indian) Sociology does not reach to the academicians, students and their parents and other sections of society, particularly people-at-margin.

One more argument can also be placed in this context. Critical Sociology, by its nature, is a trans-disciplinary sub-Sociology. Students of Sociology (both teachers and students) do not construct their arguments by using science, philosophy, humanities, literature, imaginations, mythologies, etc. as a result they are failed to enter into the world of '*dialectics of knowledge*' and '*alternatives to the existing knowledge*'. In other words, '*falsification in Social Sciences*' is almost absent. As a result, Sociology as a discipline in various academic campuses in India (particularly in Hindi belt) is continuously producing description of orthodoxies, consensual narratives and status-quoism based interpretation of social systems. Is Sociologist a personality with lack of confidence? thus needs critical analysis. The Sociologists and other academicians who have taken counter - stands in their theories and ideas are not given appropriate place in the campuses thus majority of students are not able to '*imagine*' Society. In fact, status-quoism based interpretations in author's views can be termed as 'micro academic authoritarianism' - a world in which one is not allowed to enter with dissent voice. Sociology with the idea of structural functionalism is dominant in the syllabus. Descriptive

pedagogy with the element of consensus is generally accepted in classroom interaction and preference to careerism with dynamics of opportunism are those factors which make critical sociology marginalised and give rise to that consciousness in which alternative to social structures and social systems have no place.

## II

Critical Sociology as one of the sub-sociologies, as author has already pointed out, is only marginally present due to neo – liberal economy. Knowledge about Frankfurt School is not an important component in the content structure of Sociology. The writings of C. Wright Mills, Peter Berger, Alvin W Gouldner, Karl Marx and social scientists associated with the School of Marxism are some of those examples which are not given what we can call, 'desired attention'. The author of this article was shocked when in one of the universities in Rajasthan, he raised one question related to the writings of George Orwell and nobody was there to reply. The ideas of Fascism, Totalitarianism and Freedom, the cardinal elements of socio-political life, cannot be understood properly without going through the works of Orwell in my opinion.

Inequalities and hierarchies are not debated upon in class - room interaction. As a result, the deep rootedness of structural violence is not part of understanding of majority of students. Probably Sociologists of India have forgotten a statement of Anthony Giddens which in my opinion is one of the intellectual roots of Critical Sociology. Giddens states, "If Renaissance Europe gave rise to a concern with history, it was industrial revolution which provided the conditions for the emergence of Sociology. It could be said that the French Revolution of 1789 was the catalyst between these two enormously complex sets of events' (Anthony Giddens, 1985, page XI). Sociologically it can be argued that both the 'imaginative critique' and 'non-imaginative critique' are part of everybody's personality because each personality possesses so many 'worlds' inside. Sometimes they enter into the spheres of contradictions which give rise to criticism, but yes, these criticism(s) may be of progressive and orthodoxy nature - Criticism of orthodoxy nature faces further

criticism in the field of Critical Sociology. These 'inside worlds' can also be accepted as multiple identities which a person possesses. Out of these multiple identities, which identity or which set of identities is most important is decided by the State or by dominant institutions of formal and informal nature. These informal and formal institutions determine vulnerability to violence, atrocities and exclusion on the one hand and extend (unconditional) support to those sections of society which control economic, financial, political, cultural and social power and its sub-categories. This narrative reminds the author of this article about eleventh theses of Feuerbach stated by Karl Marx which expresses, 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to Change it' (Peter Kivisto, 2003 page 15) which is the philosophy of Critical Sociology. It can also be said that freedom as value shapes Critical Sociology globally without which human happiness cannot be attained. In present context it can be accepted that ideas of left scholars gave momentum to Critical Sociology, in return, Critical Sociology is one of the intellectual and actional sites where idea of socialism with various variations is constituted.

Critical Sociology in this sense places importance of Louis Althusser, Antonio Gramsci, Judith Butler, Ulrich Beck, Jean Baudrillard, Zygmunt Bauman, Eric Hobsbawm, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. Critical Sociology on the basis of various thoughts indicates the possibilities of alternatives to existing exploitative orders. These indications are unfortunately responsible for the decline of Social Sciences because academic institutions by and large support the knowledge systems associated with pro-establishment systems. In this context of global nature, we can understand that why in Indian Social Sciences, the ignorance of first world war, Russian Revolution, Second World War, India's struggle against colonial masters, communal violences, polarised politics, regional disparities, progressive literary activities, the economy of oppressive institutions and corporate Capitalism exist. This ignorance gives rise to non-critical Social Sciences. With this perception we will try to identify those ancient roots and contemporary ideas and movements by which

Indian Sociology of Critical nature takes the shape as a cause which may lead to enlightenment ideas for social transformations.

### III

Critical Indian Sociology like other branches of knowledge can be related with religio-philosophic insights having sense of criticism about the then 'established order'. This established order was formed by the Aryans. Aryans, according to T. K. Oommen established Hinduism as a religion, Sanskrit as a language and a new social Order and Colour (Varna) based stratification system (T. K. Oommen 1998 page 229). This established order continuously interacted with those social categories who were dominated by tool making beings and were involved in various work-activities. These social categories of people comprised of Pre-Aryan population. It was an interaction between two cultures also. These interactions, hierarchies and dialectics of cultures can be understood through Vedas, Upanishads, system based on Varna and several activities directed by magic and religion. Examples of Oppressive hierarchies as sets of ideas can be found in Manu Smriti, Narada Smriti etc. These ideas and systems contributed to the formation of '*the various Karmakandas*' by which oppressive hierarchies could get legitimacy. In this context it would be interesting to study Various schools of philosophy which came into existence during the period of seventh to second Century B.C. Some of the Schools of philosophy are *Samskhaya*, *Nayaya*, *Lokayata*, *Yoga*, *Jainism*, *Buddhism*, *Mimamsa* and *Vedanta*. The insights which can be accepted as roots for Critical Indian Sociology can be derived from the classification of 'Aastic' philosophy and 'Naastik' philosophy. The established order faced an important challenge from Lokayata, Buddhism and Jainism. Sociologists, on the basis of these development in ancient India and later on in medieval India argue that Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism because of different direction of ideas and actions can be identified as 'Protestant Religions' - a challenge to the established Order based on several forms of orthodoxies.

Because of the space of article, it is very difficult to give examples of those debates and dialogue which appear as insights for Critical Indian Sociology. But it can be said that Critical Indian Sociology which does not stress on classical Indian texts will be lost. Probably this is one of

the reasons for undermining Critical Indian Sociology. The contradictions within Indian philosophy are not taught and discussed with a critical outlook. In classroom interactions, which author of this article has observed in various universities and Colleges of India, there is no understanding of the concept "*Vakovakya*' (वाक्यवाक्य) which means debate in the form of questions and answers. This Concept was ignored in Upanishadic era because 'confidentiality of knowledge' was needed for the hegemony (D. P. Chattopadhyaya, 1984: Page 4) D. P. Chattopadhyaya further states that in true and Systematic sense, '*Nayayasutra*' is the first text about Indian logic (Page 5). These frames of arguments come close to Hegelian dialectics which in fact, is one of the supports for theorising the process of social transformation.

Similarly in Indian Social Sciences we find almost neglect of ideas of D.D. Kosambi. His analysis of the 'Bhagavad Gita' produces various dimensions of 'Social and Economic Aspects' of that period (R. S. Sharma and Vivekanand Jha (ed) 1984 page 39). Similarly Indian Sociology has not given importance to the work of Rahul Sankrityayan. His ideas on History of Buddhism and cultural importance of Sanskrit literature preserved in Tibet need inclusion when dynamics of Indian Culture System in ancient phase is studied. Historically we know that Buddhism reached China through Central Asia in 56 AD. Korea, Japan and Tibet were also deeply influenced by Buddhism. The ideas of Buddhism make it the ideology of 'Renaissance'. In this context Indian Sociology can also talk about the contributions of monastery of Nalanda, Udantapuri and Vikramsila. The causes of the decline of Buddhism in India also need sociological perspective-based analysis. In this direction we can study an important book about Selected essays written by Rahul Sankrityayan (Rahul Sankrityayan, 1984, PPH, New Delhi). From the viewpoint of Critical Indian Sociology, it can be stated that Buddhism played significant roles outside India for encouraging the value of religious tolerance. It can also be argued that by sociological observance of Vedas, Jainism and Buddhism, one can construct the complex concept of Person/Man who continuously experience 'the conflicts within' and undergo the process of transformation because evolutionary process of man,

Sociologically, is multidimensional. These issues of multidimensionality cannot be understood without examining ancient Indian philosophy, the systems of religion and philosophy during medieval India, the philosophies associated with South India and other parts of India, the relationship between Hinduism and Islam, impact of Sufism, Bhakti Movement particularly the ideas of Tulsi, Ramanuj, Dadu, Kaber, Raidas and ideas associated with Sikhism. What has happened during medieval India is depiction of enlightenment values which opposed religious dogmas and caste hierarchies. In fact, philosophical roots to democracy, equality, justice and rationalities which reject orthodoxies are products of that dynamics which constitute the cultural roots of medieval India. It is also necessary to examine socio-cultural and anti-colonial movements and systems of ideas of contradictory nature which appears in modern India. Views of Karl Marx on First war of India's independence, which occurred in 1857, views and actions of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vivekanand, Ramkrishna, Mahadev Govind Ranade, Narayan Guru, Dayanand Saraswati, Sir Sayad Ahmed Khan, Independence movement led by Congress, ideas of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Rajni Palm Dutt, Dada Bhai Naoroji, Bhagat Singh, Subhash Chand Bose, P. C. Joshi, Ravindra Nath Tagore and B. R. Ambedkar need sociological expositions so that Critical Indian Sociology could be structured in a meaningful way.

The Indian Sociological thought of modern India becomes one-sided if freedom movement, ideological confrontation, political economy and its colonial character and Constitution related debates are not given meaningful attention. Unfortunately, Colonial Indian Sociology and post-colonial Indian Sociology have not paid desirable attention on above mentioned aspects. The literature of colonial and post-colonial era is not studied or discussed in classrooms' interaction because these social phenomena are not part of content structure of Social Sciences in general and Sociology in particular. As a result, Indian Sociology in author's opinion lacks humanised character and possibilities of searching alternatives. The author has mentioned only a few names of scholars-activists. It is the responsibility of Social

Scientists to search names and movements from different parts of India in order to construct the 'Idea of India' with diverse sociological perspectives.

#### IV

Indian Sociology in no way can endorse the 'end of ideology' thesis due to dominance of neo-liberal economy and rampant consumerism. Corporate capitalism and globalization have given rise to wealth and income inequality. The author has been reminded with the views of Professor Rajeshwar Prasad and Professor B. D. Soni who during author's student years examined how capitalism perpetuates inequalities and provides logic to anti-egalitarian institutions. These logical structures in my life were further strengthened by Professor A. R. Desai, Professor D. N. Dhanagare and my friends who participated in various movements, particularly the left movement. But one question continuously arises in my mind, why in mainstream Indian Sociology we find the (almost) absence of Critical Indian Sociology. 'Public intellectualism' has declined sharply despite of this fact that 'democratic-secular' institutions are now over-powered by "authoritarian-Orthodox' institutions. Sociologists belonging to Indian Sociology do not speak on global, national and local issues. In other words, *Indian Sociology is 'pro-establishment'*. The socio-cultural and politico-economic phenomena of controversial nature are not addressed in academic discussions. It makes Indian Sociology 'Status quoist'. Robert S Lynd's questions of 'Knowledge for whom' and 'Knowledge for what' are still not answered by a large number of Indian Sociologists. But still author believes that Critical Indian Sociology is not born, it is made, or it will be made. The works of A. R. Desai, D.N. Dhanagare, Aijaz Ahmed, Prabhat Patnaik, Utsa Patnaik, Irfan Habib, Romila Thapar, Nandini Sundar, Nivedita Menon, Chanchal Chauhan, M.M.P. Singh, Neerja Singh, Malini Bhattacharya, Arundhati Roy, Amartya Sen, Jean Dreze, Ghanshyam Shah, Sukhdev Thorat and Anand Kumar, Sujata Patel and others are of trans-disciplinary nature whose sets of ideas are very close to Critical Indian Sociology.

At global level we can identify the views of Noam Chomsky and Michael Burawoy in relation to critical sociology, The crisis taking place at global and national levels are challenging Social Sciences particularly Sociology. Indian Society and its socio- cultural system are experiencing the 'age of unfreedom" which can be questioned by Critical Indian Sociology. Religion, caste formations and families are also unfree institutions because of hegemony operated by patriarch upper class. The presence of this institutional structure on the one hand and 'consumerist modernity' on the other hand is enough for the necessary presence of Critical Sociology in Indian Campuses.

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