

Revision Notes
Chapter 10
Indian Sociologists

EVOLUTION OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN INDIA.

- Indian sociology emerged as a separate discipline because the Indian society and social structure was completely different from that experienced by western European societies.
 - Indian sociology was formally introduced as a discipline at university level for the first time in 1919 at the University of Bombay.
 - In the 1920's, two other universities, those at Calcutta and Lucknow, also began programmes of teaching and research in sociology and anthropology.
 - Today, every major university has a department of sociology, social anthropology or anthropology, and often more than one of these disciplines is represented.
 - At the beginning stage, it wasn't clear as to what should be the subject matter of Indian sociology.
 - The need for the subject raised many questions in the Indian context:
1. Western sociology emerged as an attempt to make sense of modernity but the waves of modernity that Indian society was experiencing was entirely different as it was closely entwined with colonial subjugation. Hence, understanding modernity in the Indian context was entirely different than the western societies.
 2. Social anthropology in the west developed out of curiosity to know about the primitive cultures but India was an ancient and advanced civilisation already which also had parallel existence of primitive societies within it. Hence, it was felt that different theoretical perspectives are needed to understand the functioning of Indian social structure.

THE SPECIFICITY OF THE DISCIPLINE OF SOCIOLOGY IN INDAIN CONTEXT RAISED MANY QUESTIONS.

1. First of all, if western sociology emerged as an attempt to make sense of modernity, what



would its role be in a country like India? India too, was of course experiencing the changes brought about by modernity but with an important difference, it was a colony. The first experience of modernity in India was closely intertwined with the experience of colonial subjugation.

2. Secondly, if social anthropology in the west arose out of the curiosity felt by European society about primitive cultures, what role could it have in India which was an ancient and advanced civilisation, but which also had 'primitive' societies within it?
3. Finally, what useful role could sociology have in a sovereign, independent India, a nation about to begin its adventure with planned development and democracy?

The pioneers of Indian sociology not only had to find their own answers to questions like these, they also had to formulate new questions for themselves. It was only through the experience of 'doing' sociology in an Indian context that the questions took shape, they were not available readymade.

Pioneers of Indian sociology

- L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer and Sarat Chandra Roy were true pioneers of Indian sociology in the sense that they began practicing a discipline that didn't yet exist in India (in early 1900s).
- Moreover, there was no institutions to promote the discipline yet their works were recognised and appreciated amongst well know anthropologists internationally.

L.K. Ananthkrishna Iyer

- He was the first self-taught anthropologist who was the first Indian to carry out an Ethnographic survey of the state of Cochin.
- His work was much appreciated by British anthropologists and administrators.
- He was later appointed as a reader at the University of Calcutta, where he helped set up the first department of post-graduate anthropology.

Sarat Chandra Roy

- He was an accidental anthropologists and pioneer of the discipline.
- He got interested in interpretation of tribal customs and laws as a by- product of his professional need due to practicing law.



- He did intensive fieldwork among various tribal communities.
- He was recognised for his monographs and research articles based on fieldwork and became famous amongst anthropologists in India and Britain.

Early Indian sociologist

G. S. Ghurye

- G. S. Ghurye majorly worked on caste and race in India. His other works included themes like tribes, kinship, family and marriage, culture, civilisation and the historic role of cities, religions and the sociology of conflict and integration.
- His works were influenced by various schools of thoughts such as that of diffusionism, orientalist on Hindu religion and thoughts, nationalism and cultural aspects of Hindu identity.

G. S. Ghurye on caste system

Ghurye emphasised on six main features to help explain the functioning of caste systems:

1. Caste is an institution based on segmental division
2. Caste society is based on hierarchical division
3. The institution of caste necessarily involves restrictions on social interaction
4. Caste also involves differential rights and duties for different castes
5. Caste restricts the choice of occupation
6. Caste involves strict restrictions on marriage

D. P. Mukherjee

- D.P.'s work was mainly emphasised on the crucial role of a social system for society.
- According to him, to study about Indian society means it was necessary to study and know the social traditions of India.
- Understanding the tradition was necessary to understand the social system of a society. T
- his study of traditions not only include its past but also its sensitivity to change and



hence, it's a living tradition.

D.P.'s argument on Indian culture and society as different from the western society:

Indian culture is not individualistic in the western sense because in Indian society individual's behaviour pattern is rigidly fixed by his socio-cultural group pattern. Indian social system is oriented towards group, sect, caste, etc.

Traditions come from the same roots and transmitted to the next generation. Traditions are strongly rooted in the past and are kept alive through repeated recalling and retelling of stories and myths. Link to the past does not mean that tradition doesn't allow changes. It just indicates that a process of adaptation to change through internal and external sources is present in every society.

In western societies, internal source of change will be a change in the economy. However, in case of India most sources of change is derived from non-economic resources, for instance values and customs.

A.R. Desai

- A R Desai is one of the rare Indian sociologists who was directly involved in politics as a formal member of political parties.
- He has been a life-long Marxist follower who was associated with various kinds of non-mainstream Marxist political groups.
- His best work was the social background of Indian nationalism. Various other themes that Desai worked on are Peasant movements, Rural sociology, Modernisation and urban issues, Political sociology, Forms of the state and human rights, etc.
- Desai offered a Marxist analysis of Indian nationalism where he gave prominence to economic processes and divisions of the specific conditions of British colonialism.
- According to Desai, India's nationalism is the result of the material conditions created by the British colonialism.
- The Britishers developed new economic relations by introducing industrialization and modernization.
- Desai thinks that when traditions are linked with economic relations, the change in the latter would eventually change the traditions.
- It is in this context that he thinks that caste will disintegrate with the creation of new



social and material conditions, such as industries, economic growth, education, etc.

Desai on welfare state

- Modern capitalist state was one of the most significant themes of interest to A R Desai.
- Using a Marxist approach, he provided a detailed critique of the notion of welfare state and pointed out many of its shortcomings.

Features that describes a welfare state.

- A welfare state is a positive state. This means that, unlike the 'laissez faire' of classical liberal political theory, the welfare state does not seek to do only the minimum necessary to maintain law and order.
- The welfare state is a democratic state. Democracy was considered an essential condition for the emergence of the welfare state.
- A welfare state follows a 'mixed economy' means an economy where both private capitalist enterprises and state or publicly owned enterprises co-exist. A welfare state does not seek to eliminate the capitalist market, nor does it prevent public investment in industry and other fields.

Test criteria suggested by Desai against which the performance of the welfare state can be measured

1. Does the welfare state ensure freedom from poverty, social discrimination and provide security for all citizens?
2. Does the welfare state remove inequalities of income?
3. Does the welfare state transform the economy to use the capitalist profit to the benefits of meeting the real needs of the community?
4. Does the welfare state ensure stable development free from economic booms and depressions?
5. Does it provide employment for all?

The notion of the welfare state is a myth



- Using the test criteria identified for welfare state, Desai examines the performance of those states that are most often described as welfare states, such as Britain, the USA and much of Europe, and finds their claims to be greatly exaggerated.
- Thus, most modern capitalist states, even in the most developed countries, fail to provide minimum levels of economic and social security to all their citizens.
- They are unable to reduce economic inequality and often seem to encourage it.
- The so-called welfare states have also been unsuccessful at enabling stable development free from market fluctuations.
- The presence of excess economic capacity and high levels of unemployment are yet another failure.
- Based on these arguments, Desai concludes that the notion of the welfare state is something of a myth.

M N Srinivas

- M N Srinivas is popularly known as the sociologist of the post-independence era. Major influence on his work was the outcome of his association with the British social anthropology discipline.
- He successfully established Indian sociology on the world map and was instrumental in making village studies the dominant field in Indian sociology.
- Other major themes he worked on are caste, modernisation and process of social change.
- Srinivas's village studies were based on two broad types of writings:
 1. i) Ethnographic accounts of fieldwork done in villages
 2. ii) Historical and conceptual discussions about Indian villages as a unit of social analysis
 - Srinivas believed that the village was a relevant social entity.
 - Srinivas also criticised the British administrator anthropologists who had put forward a picture of the Indian village as unchanging, self-sufficient, "little republics".
 - Using historical and sociological evidence, Srinivas showed that the village had, in fact, experienced considerable change.
 - He emphasised the usefulness of the village as a concept. However, some sociologists like Louis Dumont argued against village studies as they thought that social



institutions like castes were more important than something like a village due to the reason that villages may live or die, and people may move from one village to another, but their social institutions, like caste or religion, follow them and go with them wherever they go.

- Dumont believed that it would be misleading to give much importance to the village as a category.

Advantages of village studies as a site of research

- It provided an opportunity to illustrate the importance of ethnographic research methods.
- It offered eye-witness accounts of the rapid social change that was taking place in the Indian countryside as the newly independent nation began a programme of planned development.
- These vivid descriptions of village India were greatly appreciated at the time as urban Indians as well as policy makers were able to form impressions of what was going on in the heartland of India.
- Village studies thus provided a new role for a discipline like sociology in the context of an independent nation.
- The study of village is also relevant to the study of a modernised India.

