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Sociology of India, Sociology in India, Indian Sociology[1]

Abstract: As a scholarly discipline, Indian sociology draws upon British and American social anthropology and sociology but analyses and interprets a completely different than Western type of culture and social structure. Colonial past and post-colonial development remain very significant points of reference of Indian social sciences. Polish scholars are also interested in Indian social structure and culture.

Keywords: "colonial" social anthropology and sociology, sociology in sovereign India, Indian Sociological Society, main topics of Indian sociology.

Indian natural and social scientists play an increasingly significant role in the field of research and education. Bearing in mind the traditional Western visions of the world, we must be aware of the global transformations. It is true that modern universities emerged as the Western-style research and education institutions; science, in the contemporary sense of the term, is a relatively recent enterprise originating in the Western world; sociology and social anthropology (the latter is very relevant here) emerged in Western Europe. All the universities, modern science and sociology and social anthropology, under the influence of colonialism, imperialism and globalization, have since expanded and become a significant part of the global culture. Not only are economic and political processes and institutions constantly shifting, but also cultural and scholarly centers. What was believed to belong to the peripheries and/or semi-peripheries is no longer at the "margins." Moreover, with the increase in domestic and international migrations, many people raised and educated in one culture, work (not necessarily permanently) in another and thus contribute to the "universal" culture. The "margins" have ceased to be only the mines of interesting (sometimes "exotic") empirical data elaborated by social scientists in the metropolitan areas. The interest in the non-Western, non-metropolitan social sciences and their achievements seems to be growing in today's sociological community (see, e.g., Connell 2007; Burawoy et al., [eds.] 2010; Patel [ed.] 2010). Our engagement is not only with the Western style "sociology of India," but also with "sociology as such" being developed in India and with the attempts to build "Indian sociology," in the sense of systematic research of structural and cultural issues based on conceptual models of society closer to Indian

than to Western experiences and philosophies, based on India's own, indigenous perspectives (see, e.g., Mukharjee 1989; Modi 2010; Patel 2010). Sociology[2] as practiced in India is very important for international sociology. We not only learn *about* the Indian sub-continent, but also learn *from* it. What is important in "Southern sociology" is not necessarily the discovering of alternative "founding fathers" of the same social sciences but rather the fact that "peripheral" societies can "produce social thought about the modern world which has as much intellectual power as metropolitan social thought, and more political relevance" (Connell 2007: viii, xii).

The teaching of "sociology" (actually, at that time as social anthropology) started in India in 1919, at the University of Bombay (today's Mumbai), but was preceded by systematic empirical research devoted to satisfy the colonial government's needs to classify, categorize and document the life of people under its rule. During the pre-independence period[3], the most important topics of social research were the caste system, tribal communities, family, marriage and kinship, rural and urban communities. The colonial administration had been aware of the inadequate and often inaccurate commonsense understanding of local customs, traditions and misjudgements about different institutional arrangements. Selection of research topics was based at that time on Western values and normative principles of Christianity, was ideologically biased and according to today's Indian scholars, it exaggerated segmentary cleavages in Indian society. In 1947, sociology and/or social anthropology was taught at three universities: Bombay, Calcutta and Lucknow, as well as in smaller colleges in Poona, Mysore and Hyderabad. In the early years, most units of sociology and social anthropology were located within departments of Economics. The expansion of Indian social anthropology and sociology began in 1952. At the end of the 1970s, fifty universities and colleges offered MA programmes in sociology. By 2000, sociology was taught in almost one hundred (out of about two hundred) Indian institutions of higher education. More than ten thousand teachers conduct sociology lectures at all levels of education (including high schools) in India today (Patel 2010: 280; Modi 2010: 316–318). The Jawaharlal Nehru University of New Delhi is a very strong centre of sociological research and teaching. Four out of eight of our Indian authors come from this institution.

According to Sujata Patel, sociology in India faces, since the last decades, at least two distinct challenges. The first relates to the growth of the higher education system

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[2] Contribution of Indian scholars, living in India, in Europe and in the US, to such very relevant disciplines like today's modern and postmodern social and cultural anthropology (see, e.g., Appadurai 1996, 2006), feminist studies or subaltern and postcolonial studies (see, e.g., Bhabha 1994; Loomba 1998) will not be directly addressed here (see also Connell 2007: 166–191), but will be touched upon.

[3] The British Raj, or the British rule in the Indian subcontinent, lasted formally between 1858 and 1947. In 1947, the British Indian Empire was partitioned into two very large sovereign dominion states: the Union of India (since 1950—the constitutional Republic of India) and the Dominion of Pakistan (as well as much smaller Burma). According to the 2011 census, India has a population of more than 1.2 billion people. Indian Constitution recognizes 212 tribal groups which together constitute about 7.5% of the total population (I will return to the issue of tribal communities). Officially, the caste system was abolished. Hindi is the official language of the government, but English is extensively used in many public spheres as the "subsidiary official language." Hinduism, with more than 800 million believers, is the largest religion in India. The country is divided into 28 states and 7 union territories.

and the demands of the regional (in states and territories) elites to establish local colleges and universities. In these institutions instruction is provided in local languages, but very often without the support of textbooks published in these languages. Infrastructure is usually poor in these institutions. Moreover, sociology practice often represents regional interests, mostly those of local elites. New generations of students, coming from previously excluded and uneducated communities are faced with sociology teachers unprepared for new students' needs. According to Patel, sociology came about in these local colleges to acquire the status of a non-professional and commonsensical subject of low prestige. The second challenge is actually a variation or consequence of the former. Social movements of different kinds, representing excluded and discriminated against groups (landless people, peasants, working class, slum dwellers, middle and lower castes, tribal communities, religious groups and women being examples) emerged and became strong. Social inequalities have grown in the country. The poverty level reached 40% of the total population and the number of urban poor is increasing rapidly due to migration form villages. Since the 1980s, some sociologists have made efforts to integrate the formerly unheard voices into the discipline, often engaging with other intellectual currents such as subaltern studies, postcolonial studies, and feminist studies. Simultaneously, older areas of mainstream sociology have become reconstituted and new specializations have developed (Patel 2010: 288–289; Modi 2010: 319–321).

In December of 1951, with the initiative of G.S. Ghurye, head of the Department of Sociology in Bombay, the Indian Sociological Society (ISS) was formally registered. Ghurye served as its President until 1966. In 1952, the Society started its biannual periodical, *Sociological Bulletin* (since 2004—three issues a year). It publishes a biannual *Newsletter* as well. Regional sociological associations publish their own periodicals. Since 1955, the All India Sociological Conference (AISC) was established, concentrating on workshops and seminars, which were organized in various parts of the country. In 1967, AISC merged with the ISS. M. N. Srinivas was elected the new President. Today, Ishwar Modi from the India International Institute of Social Sciences (in Jaipur) is the President of the ISS. When we look at the titles of the research committees of the ISS, we could put the topics of articles in this issue of the *Polish Sociological Review* (PSR) into a perspective of current interests of Indian sociologists, as well as in the ways of Indian categorization of the social: 1. Theory, concepts and methodology; 2. Family, kinship and marriage; 3. Economy, polity and society; 4. Migration and diasporic studies; 5. Education and society; 6. Religion and religious communities; 7. Rural, peasant and tribal communities; 8. Social stratification, professions and social mobility; 9. Dalits and backward classes; 10. Gender studies; 11. Sociology and environment; 12. Population, health and society; 13. Science, technology and society; 14. Culture and communication; 15. Social change and development; 16. Urban and industrial studies; 17. Social movements; 18. Sociology of crime and deviance; 19. Age and social structure; 20. Leisure and tourism; 21. Social problems and marginalised groups; 22. Military sociology, armed forces and conflict resolution (see: *Indian Sociological Society*). Ishwar Modi is of the opinion that, comparing the structure of the ISS with the structure of the International Sociological Association (ISA), some of

the specialized research areas missing in his country are: future research, language and society, sociology of sports, sociology of work, sociology of youth, sociology of arts, biography and society, sociology of disasters, sociology of childhood, sociology of global-local relations, and sociology of the body. On the other hand, according to this scholar, areas such as backward and marginalized groups, tribal communities, which face the problems of poverty, inequality and injustice, are studied very successfully in India. He believes that the fast growth of the NGO sector is highly contributing to the development of applied and action sociology (Modi 2010: 324).

When looking at the history of social sciences (social anthropology and sociology) in India, Sujata Patel discusses two important phases. What was significant in the first phase was the role played by the discourse of colonial modernity in defining the disciplines' identities and the propagation of the use of social anthropology's theories and methods to reproduce the upper caste and class colonial discourse of sociability. During this stage, we can observe the challenge to traditional anthropology from the emerging indigenous sociology rooted in "Indian values." It is interesting that at that time anybody who studied the "East" or "South" was defined as an anthropologist while those studying the "West" were labelled sociologists. Patel distinguishes between the Ghuriye's Bombay-based practice of sociology identified as social anthropology, reflecting concepts and categories having been framed in Europe, and the Lucknow's "genuine" sociological perspective, oriented to the present and future, and not to the past. Lucknow's sociology was to be focused on social practice, like social work and social policy, or political intervention. It recognized that India was overburdened with poverty and backwardness and that on the other hand, these facts were determined by colonial exploitation. What I would like to stress here, due to the content of this issue of the PSR, is the difference between "castes" and "tribes," as conceptualized by the Ghuriye's school.

Castes were defined in the context of Hinduism as groups who cultivated land, had better technology and a high civilization attribute, while tribes were defined in contrast to castes as those who practiced primitive technology, lived in inferior jungles and were animistic in religious practices. In the process, caste and tribe were hierarchically placed and made out to be far more pervasive, totalizing and uniform as concepts than ever before and defined in terms of religious order, which it was not always so. These perceptions consolidated and hegemonised an upper caste view of sociabilities in India. (Patel 2010: 282)

The second phase, according to Patel, was dominated first by M. N. Srinivas and later by A. R. Desai. Srinivas based his sociology on the British functionalist social anthropology. In his opinion, the defining attribute of Indian society was its caste system. Focusing first on the villages, he stressed the integration of this system. Later, he moved to the analysis of the general social change of the whole society and the adaptation of the caste system to the overall economic and political transformations of the homogenised Indian nation. Modernity and modernization were not, as such, a topic of his analysis. He also neglected the analysis of colonialism as a force and process of societal and cultural destruction. His sociology, says Patel, did not provide Indians with concepts and hypotheses needed in order to allow the understanding of contemporary processes of change and conflict in society. Opposition to Srinivas' sociology came from a Marxist, A. R. Desai. He underlined not the homogeneity of the

Indian nation but its inequalities, power and property relations and the perspective of the excluded, who engaged in new social movements (Patel 2010: 283–287). The more contemporary challenges to sociology in India were already discussed in this text.

Indian scholars are very active in the international arena. T. K. Oommen served as the President of the ISA during the 1990–1994 term, and D. P. Mukerji and Sujata Patel served as Vice-Presidents in 1959–1962 and 2002–2006 respectively; nine Indian scholars were members of the ISA's Executive Committee until 1997 (see Platt 1998). With regards to its own annual conferences, the ISS regularly organizes a North-South dialogue between Indian and foreign sociologists. Particularly close relations link Indian with Brazilian and South African social scientists (Modi 2010: 323).

At the end of this introduction, I would like to address some of the themes elaborated in this issue of the *Polish Sociological Review*. Naturally, this collection of Indian contributions is a very small and therefore limited sample of short texts on selected aspects of modernizing Indian society. In my opinion, however, this selection addresses the crucial issues. Two Polish articles were authored by well-known scholars in the field of orientalism (not necessarily in the Edward Said [1978] sense of the term) who also had served as Polish ambassadors to India. Self-reflection of modernizing Indian society during and after the painful colonial period is a topic in one and the concept of the *Yati*, as a very problematic equivalent of the modern Western concept of nation, is an issue debated in the second. India consists of numerous castes, tribes, ethnic and religious groups, and an umbrella concept helping to understand what keeps this variety together seems to be of the utmost importance. The Indian-authored articles deal with what have been the crucial problems of the authors' highly diversified society. I would divide these eight articles into the following categories. One is the colonial legacy and decolonisation in the field of broadly understood culture. The second is modernization of the country, including various contradictions and aspects of the complicated and painful process. The third is the modern public domain, including the state organisation, democratic process as well as the civil society. The fourth is the problem of ethnic, in a very broad sense, composition of India—in particular the transformations of the Indian caste system.

There are topics which could not have been covered in this issue of the PSR and are in my opinion very important for our understanding of today's Indian society. One of them is the fast growing, probably the largest in the world, educated and modern middle class (see, e.g., Fernandes 2006; Sen 2005, 2006).

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