
POLITICAL NEEDS

Initially, the British were interested in the life of the people only to the extent such knowledge served to help them in their trade. After they assumed political power, however, they faced different problems. They had to stabilise and maintain their power. It is true that their ultimate reliance was on the force of arms, but the day-to-day administration could not be tarried on merely on that basis. Their political wisdom and expediency led them to find easier and less expensive methods, though their superiority on the battle-field was proved in 1857. It is significant that in the proclamation of 1858 Queen Victoria declared that the Hindus and Muslims would be governed by their own laws and that the British would not interfere with the religious susceptibilities of Indians. In the same year a college for Indian studies was established at Calcutta. In this way, they were led to the study of the views and the ways of life of the two Indian communities, the Hindus and the Muslims, their laws, customs, manners, and institutions—as a political necessity.

Direct observation and written records were the two sources available to them for such study. What they directly observed is available in the reports of British administrators and others. These reports differ considerably from those based on modern field-research for many reasons. They did contain many facts but those British observers and recorders were not trained as modern field-workers are. They made up for some of their shortcomings by their zeal, interest, perseverance, care and vigilance in gathering information about a strange people’s thoughts and ways. And the insight and understanding shown by these recorders is at times astonishingly acute and penetrating. It is true that they were selective in the collection of data and that the accuracy of their observation was limited in many respects, judged by present standards and requirements. It is not intended to defend that deficiency, but it must be borne in mind that such reports even in England and other European countries suffered in those days from similar defects. If judiciously used, they can still be quite useful.

These reports were not just records, however. They were interpretations. And their selection of facts can be understood in the light of the interpretation they gave to them. It was this, the interpretation, to winch the Western and the Indian scholars devoted considerable attention.

INDOLOGICAL STUDIES

The written records of the past formed the other sources available to the British for understanding Indian society. These records were in the varnachars and in the ancient languages of the land, Sanskrit and Prakrit. British and other European scholars took to the study of these languages and these sources. Their studies were not confined to any one particular aspect of life from the definite point of view of a science. They could be called Indological studies concerned with Indian civilization and culture. One result of these studies was the growth of interest in Indoiranian philosophy. We are not concerned with that here, but with the other result, namely, the translation of Sanskrit works into English and other European languages and the interpretation of these by Europeans. Among the books that were translated early a large number were on Srauta, Grihya and Dharma law. These became the subject of social studies. That a large number of the books that were translated were on rituals, rites, customs, laws and institutions was not an accident. It was a response to the political needs of the rulers.

From direct observation of Indian life, the British concluded that India was primitive and uncivilised, and that their mission was to civilise Indians. This view also affected their interpretation of the written sources, and according to one trend of interpretation, the whole of India’s past was considered to be primitive. As a reaction to this the other interpretation that gathered among European scholars was that India’s past would not suffer by comparison with Europe’s past; that it could not be dismissed as primitive and dial, in fact, it was rather glorious.

We can draw three very distinct conclusions from the foregoing: (i) social studies grew as a part of Indological studies; (ii) they were predominantly evaluatory; (iii) they were not divorced from practical problems. Social studies, therefore, developed as an instrument of conflict between the two ways and views of life.

Indians were politically subjugated but they did not surrender without resistance. Armed resistance fizzled out, only to reappear in another form. In 1885, the Indian National Congress was established with a view to creating among Indians an active response to British rule. But soon there arose in India the demand for responsible government. Within a short period of about 50 years, there was a shift in the Indo-British political relationship from one of acquiescence to one of resistance. What changes in other aspects of life in India were responsible for this shift is a fascinating field of study for the sociologist and would be quite relevant to our purpose also, but we cannot enter into that here. It may be noted only that these trends in Indo-British relations were also reflected in the interpretations presented in Indological studies by Indians.

THREE TRENDS

It has been noted already that though the British subjugated India economically and politically, they had to make concessions to our own traditional ways in other aspects of life. The interrelationship between
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the two countries came to be interpreted in a wider perspective more in terms of two social systems and two views and ways of life than in terms of two political ideologies. According to the attitude towards this relationship, three trends can be discerned among Indian scholars:

(i) acceptance of the way of life of the impacting society and perhaps contempt for the indigenous way of life as a whole;
(ii) complete rejection of the way of life of the impacting society with complete acceptance of the indigenous way of life;
(iii) acceptance as a fact of the impact of an alien society and the consequent changes in native society, side by side with recognition of India's past and its efficacy.

The question those who represented the third trend had to answer was what would and should be the behavioural and social pattern emerging out of this contact. This question still remains unanswered.

The interpretation that the Indian scholars presented in their Sanskrit studies differed according to which of these three attitudes they took. But as time passed and political resistance to the British grew greater and greater, more stress was laid on the indigenous element. The Indological studies of each writer subverted the particular case that he was pleading overtly or covertly. In any case the perspective of the writer remained wider: the question, what social pattern was emerging out of the Indo-British contact, was not separated from the question whether that pattern was desirable or not.

Consequently the studies remained evaluatory. It is a controversial point whether social studies can ever be completely neutral. But it is a fact that Indological and social studies in India were not neutral in their origin and development. How far the bias vitiates the observation and analysis of facts can be and should be independently judged in each particular case. A downright condemnation of all these studies is not justified.

It was in this climate that universities in India were growing; but they in their turn also affected it. The number of persons interested in these studies grew, though education in India's past and its higher culture and education in particular was confined to the groups which had a tradition of learning and which had opportunities of study owing to their socioeconomic position. Roughly, until about the first quarter of the twentieth century, education continued to affect the individual's way or view of life considerably, much more than it does today. And it is significant that for a long time social reforming social movements were led by the same persons. There was a synchronic alliance between education, social policy and politics.

PROFESSOR GHURYE

Prof Ghurye had his school and college education at this time. The study of Sanskrit was not considered useless in those times as it is today. It was a matter of pride for capable students to take to the study of Sanskrit. Prof Ghurye studied Sanskrit and became a lecturer in Sanskrit at the Elphinstone College in Bombay. He thus came to acquire a strong element of Indology, an element which is found in him still.

In 1919 the University of Bombay started a department of sociology with Sir Patrick Geddes at its head. On his recommendation the University selected Prof Ghurye to go to England for higher studies in sociology. Thus sociology was grafted on Indology and we can observe the reflection of this in Ghurye's writings. Sometimes we can observe the Indologist going to sociology and sometimes the sociologist going to Indology.

Prof Ghurye's sociological interests were influenced by the three British sociologists of the times, Patrick Geddes, L T Hobhouse and W H R Rivers. Their influence can be seen in his own work and in the work of his students. Ghurye's original make-up is that of a Hindu but he is not a revivalist as can be seen from his views on caste, marriage, sex and the position of women. His case against the caste system is based on the principle of social justice. The caste system is a negation of this principle. Under present world conditions social justice can be realised within the national community and caste comes in the way of the formation of such a community. Hobhouse's influence is obvious in this position. Ghurye's delineation of caste as a form of social grouping is an application and elaboration of the characteristics of that group in Rivers's Social Organisation. Though he differs from Rivers on some important points, his interest in kinship, dual organisation and similar forms of social organisation is derived from him. His interest in the problems of social biology and urban sociology is derived from Geddes.

WIDE RANGE

Nearly fifty students have taken their research degrees in sociology under him so far. In these days of specialisation, the range of topics on which his students have worked is astonishingly wide. A large number of students worked on the aboriginal castes and tribes in Bombay State, some students worked on the problems of marriage and family, of untouchability, on industrial workers, on social form and on the political movement. Ghurye never missed the opportunity of studying these problems outside Bombay State if he could get a student to work on them.

These studies must be viewed in relation to the development of sociology. It has been already noted that social studies grew outside the universities and as a part of Indology. They were not, however, not divorced from practical problems. They were based on observed data and data from written sources. Ghurye's work and the work of his students continued on the same lines but with one important difference. Greater attention was paid to the observation of contemporary life and this diverted attention from Indology. The observation was more rigorous than in the past and a distinction was made between description and evaluation. The studies became more empirical and gained in rigour of method. The relation of the Indian culture and civilisation began to recede into the background. It is at this point that sociology stands in India today.

This turning point in the development of sociology in India coincides with Ghurye's reaching the age of retirement and the changing of India's international political position. During the period of British rule in India, sociology in India was influenced by British sociology. But a completely new development that has taken place now is that though a small trickle of students still goes to England and a few students (British) come to India for study, an unpresendented number of students go to the United States for social studies and a considerable number of American students and teachers come to India every year. This two-way traffic is no doubt desirable but its significance for us in the influence that American sociology is likely to
have on the development of sociology in India, though it is not possible to assess its importance here.

In conclusion, some obvious points may be stated. We are generally twenty-five years behind the times in our methods in the Social sciences. In the hurry to catch up with the present, there is the danger of our being imitative and not critical enough, so that, e.g., the use of the latest terminology in writing may itself be taken as a sufficient guarantee of the validity and scientific quality of a particular study. In India, we generally ignore the scepticism with which this terminology and jargon is taken by the European scientists themselves. Individually and institutionally, we profess to belong to a particular school or to be the disciples of this or that scientist. While this may be unavoidable to some extent, there is one danger that in this situation the development insight into the development hampered. The danger of being imitative will be enhanced by the desire of our universities and Government to get quick and spectacular results from social research allowing extra-academic considerations to creep into our work. Great care must be taken to ensure that this does not happen.

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