

Evolution of Sociology in India: A Critical Analysis

***Dr. Rishi Kumar Sharma**

Abstract

This paper seeks to explore the origins and evolution of sociology in India. While sociology as a discipline emerged in the West in the 19th century, its roots in political philosophy and philosophy of history extend much further back. Social thinkers have emphasized the importance of social history across different ages. In India, the roots of sociology are often traced to the period post-1857, following the country's first war of independence against the British. During medieval India, reformist movements carried sociological implications, which later received significant attention in sociology writings. This paper critically examines two main aspects: first, the genesis of sociology in India, and second, its subsequent academic and research developments. It also evaluates the various challenges currently faced by sociology as a field in India.

Keyword: Sociology, Origin, Development, Research, Teaching, Critical, India

Sociology emerged as a systematic discipline in the early 19th century, spurred by various social and intellectual factors that fostered its growth in the West. The first notable social thinker to explore natural and social phenomena was Saint Simon (1760-1825), who advocated for applying scientific methods to the study of society. Auguste Comte (1798-1857), influenced by Saint Simon, is credited as the founding father of sociology for his contributions to positive sociology. Comte's seminal work, "Course de Philosophie Positive" or 'Positive Philosophy', written between 1830 and 1842 in six volumes, introduced concepts like the law of three stages and the idea of a "positive society". Comte aimed to apply the natural science model to understand social phenomena, influenced by the methods used in natural sciences.

Following Comte, the works of Herbert Spencer, Karl Marx, and Max Weber further enriched the development of sociology in the West. In contrast, in India, the roots of sociology are intertwined with colonial history. The Revolt of 1857 perplexed the British due to the complexity and unity displayed by Indian society, prompting them to study Indian religion and culture. This led to the introduction of ethnographic studies and the rise of sociology and anthropology in India. The origins and development of sociology in India, akin to the West, can be attributed to two main factors: understanding the impact of colonial rule on Indian society and examining writings by British scholars on India, which made Indological studies prominent.

According to Srinivas and Panini (1971: 181), the growth of sociology in India can be divided into three phases: the foundational phase (1773-1900 AD), the professionalization phase (1901-1950

Evolution of Sociology in India: A Critical Analysis

Dr. Rishi Kumar Sharma

AD), and the post-independence era, characterized by increased research activity due to planned development initiatives, exposure to international scholarship, and funding availability (Nagla, 2008: 11). Govind Sadashiv Ghurye (1893-1984) is revered as the first Indian sociologist who systematically developed the discipline of sociology in India, earning him the title of the founding father of Indian sociology.

However, despite its foundational importance, sociology in India has faced challenges post-globalization. The discipline's scope has narrowed, with more emphasis on theoretical studies than applied research. Unlike economics, political science, and history, sociology has not significantly influenced public policy institutes in India. This poses a critical challenge for sociological research to thrive and gain recognition in applied research contexts.

Sociology provides profound insights into the human and social world, scientifically studying human interactions, organizations, communities, groups, societies, attitudes, institutions, and actions. It examines the impact of social phenomena and institutions on both individuals and society. Therefore, there is a pressing need to promote sociological research within the broader framework of social science research in India.

Literature Review

R.K. Mukherjee (1979) focused extensively on the study of Indian Culture, Civilization, Art, and Architecture. His vision of sociology is deeply rooted in Indian tradition. According to Mukherjee, understanding Indian society requires creating theories based on Indian philosophy, art, culture, and tradition.

G.S. Ghurye (1932) left a profound influence on sociological literature, considering himself an indologist due to his keen interest in understanding Indian culture and society. His seminal work, "Caste and Race in India" (1932), defined the Indian caste structure and its functioning. Despite criticisms for its lack of critical depth and applicability, Ghurye's contributions continue to shape sociology in both teaching and research. His later work, "Culture and Society" (1947), further explored the societal structure of India.

Louis Dumont (1966), a French sociologist and Indologist, made significant contributions to the study of Indian society, particularly focusing on the caste system. He learned Sanskrit to delve into ancient Hindu texts and employed indological, structural, dialectical, and ethnographic methods to analyze caste practices. In his work "The Homo Hierarchicus: The Caste and its Implications" (1966), Dumont argued against the egalitarian model of society, explaining concepts like purity and impurity. However, his particular worldview drew criticism from Indian social thinkers for not presenting a universal reality.

M.N. Srinivas (1952/1966) approached the study of Indian society through a structural functionalist lens. His work, "Religion and Society among the Coorgs of South India" (1952), gained widespread acclaim and remains relevant in sociology. Srinivas introduced the concept of "Sanskritization" in his book "Social Change in Modern India" (1966), which refers to lower castes adopting the ideology,

Evolution of Sociology in India: A Critical Analysis

Dr. Rishi Kumar Sharma

beliefs, and rituals of higher castes. Despite its initial popularity, the concept of Sanskritization has faced scrutiny for its limited applicability in understanding the caste system.

A.R. Desai (1966/1981), a Marxist scholar, significantly contributed to the origin and development of sociology in India. His studies focused on peasants, social movements, and the Indian national movement, employing Marxist historical-dialectical materialism. Desai critically examined the transformation of Indian society and the social background of Indian nationalism, advocating for a Marxian approach and methods in sociological inquiry.

Yogendra Singh (1973/2000) emphasized the cultural and traditional aspects of Indian society in his sociological analyses. His book "Modernization of Indian Tradition" (1973) explored social change and modernization in India. In "Cultural Change in India" (2000), Singh delved into globalization's role in cultural change, employing structural-functional, structuralist, structural-historical, and Marxist orientations to understand Indian society.

N.K. Bose approached sociology from a civilizational viewpoint, employing historical, inductive, textual, and functional methodologies to study Indian society. Inspired by his association with Gandhi, Bose focused on nationalism, civilization, national integration, and the Indian society in his works, which remain relevant in the field of sociology.

B.R. Ambedkar provided a subaltern perspective in sociology, although not formally trained as a sociologist. His studies on Untouchables, Shudras, and caste have significantly influenced subaltern studies within sociology, highlighting social issues and perspectives often marginalized in mainstream discourse.

Other sociological thinkers such as Yogendra Singh, Andre Beteille, Panini, Dipanker Singh, T.K. Oomen, Veena Das, and T.N. Madan have made critical contributions to the discipline, each bringing unique insights and methodologies to the study of Indian society.

Background of the Study

This paper seeks to explore the foundational origins of Indian sociology. Like its Western counterpart, sociology in India is deeply intertwined with social, political, and intellectual landscapes. However, much of the scholarly focus in sociology has traditionally emphasized the development of the discipline in the West, potentially overshadowing the rich historical and philosophical roots within India. Scholars often begin their studies of Indian sociology with the works of G.S. Ghurye, a prominent figure in Indian sociology, yet overlook the broader historical and cultural contexts that shaped the philosophical underpinnings and historical evolution of sociology in India. This paper aims to highlight the shortcomings in existing sociological literature that have neglected these crucial aspects.

Methodology

This paper has been crafted by examining the contributions of various sociologists to the discipline of sociology. It also endeavors to delve into ancient and medieval history to conceptualize social events

Evolution of Sociology in India: A Critical Analysis

Dr. Rishi Kumar Sharma

and highlight prominent social thinkers. Utilizing available secondary sources, the paper employs a historical and comparative approach to interpret these sources. The historical method involves analyzing accounts pertinent to the origin and development of sociology in India, while the comparative method entails comparing perspectives between Eastern and Western sociological thought, as well as among various sociological thinkers in India.

Analysis

This paper explores various aspects related to the discipline of sociology. It begins by tracing the historical origins of sociology in India, noting its emergence as a formal discipline in the early 20th century. Ancient Indian thinkers like Kautilya and medieval reformists such as Mira, Chaitanya, Kabir, and Nanak are highlighted for their significant contributions to social thought. Moreover, movements like the Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj in the late 19th century, along with Gandhian ideology, shaped early sociological discourse in India. G.S. Ghurye is recognized as a pivotal figure who pioneered the indological approach in addressing major social issues in India.

The growth and development of Indian sociology gained momentum post-1910 with the establishment of sociology departments in universities across the country. Patrick Geddes and G.S. Ghurye played key roles in introducing sociology at Bombay University, followed by efforts at Calcutta University, Lucknow University, Mysore University, and Poona University. Ghurye's seminal work on 'Caste and Race in India' became influential, although post-globalization, critiques emerged regarding its perceived bias influenced by Brahmanical ideology. Scholars like A.R. Desai and N.K. Bose shifted focus to themes such as the Indian National Movement, nationalism, and tradition versus modernity.

Post-independence, sociology in India expanded significantly. In 1951, the Indian Sociological Society was established at Bombay University, marking a milestone in institutionalizing sociological research. During the 1960s and 70s, emphasis shifted to rural culture, urban society, and industrial sociology. Subsequently, the 1980s and 90s witnessed a diversification of research interests into areas like deviance, sociology of science and technology, globalization, social change, secularism, ecology, media, and more.

Sociology's role in academics, research, and public policy in India has seen varying levels of development. While sociology has grown in teaching institutions post-independence, it still faces challenges compared to other social sciences. Issues include outdated curricula, limited indigenous theoretical contributions, dominance of Eurocentric theories, and a disproportionate focus on caste and religion in research. The Indian Sociological Association, while active, has been critiqued for limited engagement beyond annual conferences and publications.

Theoretical and applied challenges persist in Indian sociological research. There is a need to broaden research horizons beyond traditional topics and inspire scholars towards more applied sociological studies. Addressing these challenges could bolster sociology's relevance in shaping public policy and addressing contemporary social issues effectively.

Evolution of Sociology in India: A Critical Analysis

Dr. Rishi Kumar Sharma

Findings

This paper has critically examined the challenges and issues facing sociology in both its theoretical frameworks and practical applications. It has provided a historical context to the origin and evolution of sociology in India, contributing significantly to the field of historical sociology. Highlighting the parallels with Western sociology, the paper underscores that while sociology has expanded its influence across various domains, its impact on public policy research in India remains limited. Most sociological research tends to culminate in books, articles, conferences, workshops, or university teaching, often receiving less recognition compared to other social sciences within social institutions.

The practical application of sociology in India faces significant challenges. There is a pressing need to elevate the status and relevance of sociology by fostering greater engagement with public policy institutes and governmental organizations. Current associations dedicated to sociology in India have been critiqued for their limited initiatives in advocating for the role of sociology in shaping national policies and decision-making processes.

Recommendations:

1. **Engagement and Debate:** Sociological associations should actively organize debates, seminars, and conferences to reassess and redefine the scope of sociology. Academics and research scholars should be invited to provide insights into the evolving nature of the discipline and address contemporary challenges.
2. **Recognition and Integration:** Sociology deserves equitable recognition alongside other disciplines. As a systematic study of society, sociology produces scientifically grounded insights into social phenomena. Embracing interdisciplinary approaches within sociology can enhance its capacity to address complex social issues holistically.
3. **Training and Development:** There is an urgent need to expand training opportunities for sociologists to deepen their understanding of society and tackle emerging social problems effectively. Governments should create more avenues for scholars with sociology backgrounds to contribute meaningfully to public institutions.

In conclusion, sociology holds immense potential as the foundation of all social sciences. By addressing the outlined recommendations, stakeholders can strengthen sociology's role in advancing social understanding and contributing to informed policymaking in India.

Conclusion

This paper has provided an in-depth exploration of the history, theoretical perspectives, and research landscape of sociology in India. It has identified and discussed the major challenges and issues confronting sociology within the Indian context. The paper engages in a critical evaluation of the discipline's growth in India, examining the contributions of various sociological thinkers and highlighting their impacts.

Additionally, this paper offers recommendations aimed at advancing the discipline. It calls upon

Evolution of Sociology in India: A Critical Analysis

Dr. Rishi Kumar Sharma

research institutes and governmental bodies to prioritize the development of sociology further. Given the complex and heterogeneous nature of Indian society, sociological research plays a crucial role in providing scientific insights into its dynamics. Sociology scrutinizes both the organized and unorganized sectors of society with the overarching goal of expanding knowledge.

Therefore, a deep understanding of social phenomena through sociology is pivotal for enhancing both individual well-being and societal welfare.

***Lecturer in Sociology
Govt. Girls College
Karauli (Raj.)**

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