

Towards A Critical Political Sociology in South Asia

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The Domain of political sociology is the state - society relationship. To many it means a study of the impact of social institutions on political behaviour. The institutions usually singled out for the study are class, status, ethnicity, religion, kinship and language. Political behaviour to be explained usually consists of voting participation in party politics and the awareness or exercise of efficacy in getting the state to fulfil specific demands. In this perspective, political sociology is mostly concerned with the behaviour of citizens in formally democratic societies. Other types of societies, if and when studied, are judged for their lack of democratic institutions. Explanations are offered in terms of backwardness, lack of tradition of individualism and the absence of rational economic development. Studies of state-society relationship with a wider perspective, in which historical and comparative developments are traced and specific social and political formations are understood on their own terms, also exist. However, they do not usually fall within the framework of academic political sociology. Given the massive increase in the role of the state during the last four decades questions about the origin of the state, its relative autonomy from society and prospects for its socialist transformation have naturally arisen. Those who raise these questions have rarely been in dialogue with academic political sociologists. The two groups readily dismiss each other as ideologies. Marxist theory of the state and empirical theory of democracy treat each other as non-scientific, as mystifiers of reality, and, therefore, not worthy of serious attention.

And yet, these two orientations share a common historical origin. The separation of the state from society, as a potentially autonomous entity, would have been unthinkable under classical feudalism. Once the institutions of feudalism began to crack under the weight of rapidly changing productive processes, impulses towards absolutism and nationalism had emerged in Europe. With them also began discussions

and movements about the most appropriate political arrangements for the emerging society. History of these ideas and of the corresponding societal changes has been presented many times and from a variety of perspectives. It is sufficient for our purpose to note the fact that two distinct modes of thought emerged out of that upheaval in European society. One took the scientific route of an empiricist — positivist social science modelled on the natural sciences, while the other emerged as a historical, dialectical and hermeneutic exercise, aiming at an all-encompassing critical theory of society. The latter, it has been argued, was the true inheritor of the Enlightenment.¹ These two trends in the European social thought eventually led to the two types of political sociology: academic and critical. These had common historic roots which were in the ideas of men like Rousseau and the theorists of the French Revolution.² Contemporary preoccupations of academic political sociology, in terms of stability of formal democratic institutions originated in their fascination with democracy. We can dismiss it as mere ideological mystification only if we ignore the struggles waged by the partisans of democracy on the eve of the capitalist transformation of Europe. The working people then fought, led by the rising bourgeoisie, in the name of liberty, equality and universal human community. The critical edge of self-reflection, which the thinkers of the Enlightenment had brought this commitment to democracy, only subsequently disappeared to give rise to the academically acclaimed interpretation of democracy and liberty, which we find in contemporary political sociology. An investigation of this transformation is itself a legitimate enterprise for political sociology.

It is also relevant for those interested in a critical political science for South Asian Social sciences, as we commonly understand them today, arrived in South Asia as a consequence of English colonialism. The subsequent rapid 'Americanisation' of theory and research corresponds with the world-encompassing military-industrial dominance of the United States of America. What is significant is, not only that our social science is imitative of the West, but that it is almost exclusively dependent on the Anglo-Saxon intellectual tradition. Thus both the empiricist-positivist-behavioural political sociology and the comparative - historical studies of political economy in South Asia draw their inspiration from Anglo-Saxon interpretations of European social thought. The distinctive feature of those interpretations is the one-sided advocacy of an ego-focal, technical interest in knowledge. From Hobbes, Locke and

the utilitarians it has learnt to enshrine the naturalness of instrumental reason as ultimate rationality³ More specifically, the Anglo-Saxon concept of the State as a guarantor of private competition and an arena for privatisation of public resources has been accepted as a universally valid theory of the State. Both in theory and in practice, England (and later the United States) produced political institutions with this view of the State. The uniquely English misalliance of agrarian, mercantile and industrial capitalism⁴ demanded a State which could foster and protect its own interest and at the same time claim to speak for a Hegelian, universal interest of all citizens. This was accomplished by maintaining a myth of open and universal participation of all citizens in decision-making. In reality the State could act only as an instrument of the dominant, private interests. This instrumentalist theory of the state subsequently transformed itself into a behavioural theory of democracy. Now, in the name of science, it refuses to judge contemporary reality by any critical standards. Citizen participation in collective will-formation is retained only *as a* formality, *a* far cry from Rousseau's vision of a citizen. For him reason stood for a view-point with which citizens were to engage in an active collaboration of all and thus participate in creating General Will out of a universally enjoyable political order. A full-blown critique of the Anglo-Saxon tradition, although essential for a correct understanding of our colonial heritage, is clearly beyond the scope of this paper.⁵ We should keep in mind that before a critical social science can emerge in South Asia it is important that we examine the historic roots of our contemporary thinking since they lie squarely in our colonial heritage.

A direct consequence of over-dependence on the Anglo-saxon interpretations of European society and theory is the general absence of a critical orientation in the social sciences in South Asia. At the same time the uncritical pluralism of approaches of American sociology has been fully reproduced. This is evident from the work of the various proponents of Exchange Theory, Structuralism, Ethnomethodology, and the all-pervasive structural-functionalism. Even in the studies of political economy, derived originally from Marx's insights, the potent European encounter between phenomenology and Marxism (of Lucas Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, for example,) has been bypassed in South Asia. In this paper I shall restrict myself primarily to the discussion of academic political sociology. Those who practise political sociology as a behavioural, scientific discipline in South Asia need most to reflect on and re-

examine the major antecedents and recent transformations of their discipline. To be critical it should become, in the first instance, self-critical.

Behavioural Political Sociology and Its Critique

Academic political sociology usually locates its origin in the United States of the thirties. Its distinctiveness is said to lie in conscious application of sociological research methods to politics. Lipset⁶ credits Lazarsfeld's market research with a breakthrough for American political science. Since then to do political sociology is to use empirical methods to test verifiable theories about the impact of society on the state. Because of its use of the 'scientific method' of testing theories, political sociology claims for itself the status of a universally valid scientific enterprise. Such universalistic claims notwithstanding, the rise and the popularity of this brand of political sociology has had very close links with specific changes in the political economy of the United States. By the mid-thirties earlier concerns about the rapid transition from rural agricultural to urban industrial society had begun to yield place to new ones. The traumatic experience of the Great Depression was followed by rapid expansion of corporate capitalism (1935-1954). It involved a shift in focus from production as such to a preoccupation with consumer demand, product development and marketing. The new corporate economy was based on two basic processes of differentiation (decentralization, division of tasks, splitting up of productive processes) and integration (centralization of coordination, information, management and core decisions). In keeping with these changes the relationships between the state, the economy and society also underwent fundamental changes. A novel, all-embracing relationship emerged between the working-consuming population and the capitalist enterprise. The state, in turn, became explicitly, a welfare state.

Sociology responded to these changes with a new theory of society. It was a naturalistic response, unguided by a critical reappraisal of the disappearing past or of the emerging present. This era was over-shadowed by the work of Talcott Parsons. For creating his new synthesis Parsons presented a selective reinterpretation of the ideas of some major European thinkers who had witnessed and written about the vanishing, 'premodern' society in Europe. They had also seen the rise of the new

society, full of strife, competition and the dominance of instrumental orientation. They spoke of the past with pathos and of the future with misgivings. Out of this concern Weber and Durkheim, on whom Parsons depended mainly for his major insights, had searched for the sources of a truly moral social order. The critique of modernism that they offered and their appreciation of the past is conspicuously absent in Parsons. Instead, he asserts the priority of an already established moral order and treats it as an unchanging, universal necessity. Institutions of market, money, bureaucracy and formal law, the mainstay of bourgeois-capitalist society, become 'evolutionary universals' for all societies. Hence, for Parsons, societies without them are disadvantaged because they lack the opportunity to initiate further development. By returning to Weber and Durkheim, Parsons also reopened their debate with Marx and reoriented it to the changing American political economy. The Great Depression had pushed the American government into becoming overtly interventionist. Its subsequent involvement in the war and its confrontations with its one time ally, the U.S.S.R., gave a clear indication of the new, imperial role for the United States in the world. In a sense Parsons had prepared a theoretical foundation for this new world dominant role through conceptual universalisation of uniquely capitalist institutions in their American mutation. At the same time politics of the war effort and post-war boom had quickly put an end to any nascent working class consciousness, the remnants of which were finally suppressed out of existence during the McCarthy era. A dominant government, military and industrial complex totally free of any subversive taint, was put in place.⁷ By resurrecting a debate with Marx through Weber and with a new empiricist theory of society, Parsons abolished from social theory, all critical questions which had arisen during the Great Depression. He juxtaposed the normative reality of the American society to a misunderstood theory of class conflict. He could thus establish the primacy of shared values, ideas and goals and assert the possibility of their gradual universal actualisation under capitalism.⁸ From the *Structure of Social Action* (1937) and the *Social System* (1951) to the *Evolution of Societies* (1977) Parsons inadvertently guides us through the changing phases of American society. He begins with an unmediated consensual social order that somehow generates appropriate goals and means for a social system. The system, in turn, must ensure adequate motivation for participation in the attainment of these collective goals. This is accomplished through the socialization process. A society must also administer

proper punishment for deviance through institutions of social control. Parsons ends this journey with a theory of cybernetic systems in which the increasing pacification of the human subject reaches its climax. He becomes a mere unit of energy. Given the prevalence of consumerism, civic privatism of its citizens⁹ and its aggressive quest for the leadership of the world, American socio-polity was ready to welcome a theory of society that could pretend to be voluntaristic and yet refuse to examine the potential for creative social action. It also needed a theory that was well suited, with its universalistic pretensions, for academic and conceptual imperialism.

One major contribution of such a theory to the behavioural branch of political sociology was its conceptualisation of power. Having argued that normative order and collective goal attainment occur through institutions of formal (democratic) and informal (socialization and social control) consensus, Parsons concluded that power must be seen as a fluid societal resource available for political purposes, just as wealth (as money) exists in a society for economic purposes. Polity, as a bundle of 'political' structures and processes, becomes, when viewed functionally, society's way of arriving at and attaining collective goals. Power, as a society's capacity for goal attainment, would increase with the enhancement, its ability to rely on the mechanisms of socialization and to lessen its reliance on direct coercion and social control at the level of the individual. This meant, according to Parsons, planting, in the mind of the individual, a package of orientations that includes achievement, specificity, affective neutrality and universalism. Admittedly derived from Toennies and influenced greatly by Weber's concept of rationalization, Parsons's pattern Variables, in fact, show us how specific attitudes unique to the European society were modified during the transition from traditional to modern society in the West.¹⁰ For that one and unique historical process of European transition to a purposively rational social order, Parsons claimed universal status. All human action was to be evaluated in terms of this rationality and explained as a universal evolutionary process of maturation and modernization, valid for all human societies.

Parsons was discussed at length in the previous pages because of his profound impact on political sociology. He also had a decisive influence on sociology in South Asia. The universalistic pretensions of his theory made it attractive to academic sociologists around the world. In any case, many of them were trained and immersed

in the Anglo-Saxon mode of thinking. Thus, in the study of the changing reality of South Asian society, evolutionary conceptions of changing value orientations provided a justification for elitist planning of social change. The explicit neo-Spencerian evolutionism of Parsons's theory also provides an easy way for explaining the 'adequacies' in South Asian polity as 'underdevelopment'. Parsons's later incorporation of a model of cybernetics in his social system theory has been ignored by South Asian and western political sociologists. By the time he came to explain society in those terms, a critical trend had temporarily engulfed American sociology. By making Parsons unfashionable it completely dismissed his insights into description of the changing mode of capitalism in America. We cannot discuss here the implications of the popularity of information and cybernetic theories and the prospects they hold for further pacification of privatistic citizens as happy robots in the modern world. Parsons naively sheds some light on this by claiming that the functional order of society necessarily locates the over-all direction of society with the control centre. The task of information processing is concentrated in the hands of morally neutral super-elites, while the mass of specialist, low information workers becomes the controlled unit of energy. Men and women can enjoy such a social order, happy in their false sense of freedom from coercion and control. Indications of the final shape of the increasing rationalization of modern society are thus to be found in the uncritical but accurately descriptive later writings of Parsons.

Parsons's emphasis on consensual social order and collective goal-attainment, through mass loyalty secured by means of socialization and control, has become a theoretical password for empirical studies in political sociology. However, as a theory with the intention of using established scientific procedures of verification, systems theory produced few significant hypotheses. Its primary contribution was in reiterating the importance of social variables in a field in which individualistic determinism had dominated earlier empirical studies. That earlier thrust for quantitative and behavioural analysis continued to provide testable hypotheses and thus became firmly rooted in political sociology, independently of the impact of systems theory. Men like Lazarsfeld were mainly interested in psychological variables. However, premises and assumptions of systems theory were widely, *albeit* implicitly, accepted. Concepts selected for the sociological enterprise dealt with individual attitudes and behaviours which could be studied through the technique of sampling and measurement. A subtle

combination of systemic concepts of rationality, power, legitimation and authority, with psychological variables of identification and efficacy was most readily implemented in the research on voting behaviour.

The earliest voting studies had begun with an assumption that a modern citizen votes rationally, having critically evaluated all possible alternatives. Subsequent studies revealed that the real basis of voting decision was to be found in the unconscious processes of socialization in which social institutions, such as the family, peer groups and the community, played a vital role. This confirmed the claims of the systems theory that routine mass loyalty, unquestioned commitment to the regime and habitual participation in the roles assigned by society were essential for the stability of the prevailing normative social order. Voting studies did not find it necessary to question either their own findings or to reflect on the dangers of routinization of value commitments and activities of citizens. The history of the struggle for democratic institutions, the hopes of a responsible citizenry, acting out of socially committed rationality, were dismissed as utopian. Empirical theory was forbidden from treating them as standards for a judgment on contemporary reality. They were dismissed as old, normative preoccupations without much scientific value. Concepts of public rationality thus yielded to those of ego-focal or private rationality.

Voting studies have continued, to this date, to focus on individual attitudes, perceptions and preferences. No real discussion of the significance of the vote has yet occurred within the literature. Empirical democratic theory argues, that votes, when aggregated, represent collective preference as to who should govern. On critical reflection it means that routineness of participation, lack of open, rational debate on collective, societal well-being, habitual party loyalties based on unexplained effect turn the act of voting into a periodic acclamation of indistinguishable sets of competing elites. At the same time, it is an affirmation of a political order in which citizens are expected to play a passive, spectator role. No attempt is made to contrast this state of affairs to the original ideas of rational participation by an informed 'public'.¹² Students of voting behaviour assume that an electorate becomes non-routinely involved only when issues it considers vital are at stake. It then produces, through discrete individual acts and summation of preferences a 'critical election'. In sum, when the behavioural theory of democracy discovers lack of conscious, rational, critical action, empirically,

its relevance is rejected by means of theoretical justifications. The lack of critical attitude, lack of desire for meaningful political action are interpreted as the lack of a need for conscious, socially rational participation.

Through studies of voting and other forms of participation American Political sociologists have produced an interpretation of rationality that fits reality. It is argued that since non-political aspects of life are of far greater consequence to individual citizens and since their demands on the political system are routinely satisfied by the regime, it would be irrational for them to squander scarce resources on trying to understand, discuss or evaluate issues and policies presented by competing political actors. Within this framework of justification, participatory behaviour has been subjected to increasingly sophisticated research tools over the years. However, no amount of methodological sophistication in techniques can produce answers to basic questions. The two most salient questions, why democracy has failed to fulfill its initial promise and how it has still remained viable as an object of affect for individuals, elude empiricist research. Its artificial separation of 'political' behaviour, treated isolation from all other life concerns and activities of social actors, corresponds to the reality of politics as a spectator sport in western democracies.

A detailed study of the shifts in empirical interests and conceptual preoccupations of American political sociologists reveals their implicit interest in maintaining and justifying the contemporary stable political order. All possible challenges and critical judgments are dismissed as unscientific. Take, for example, the studies of power and of ideology. Following Parsons, political sociology treats power as a fluid resource and looks at the state as one of its many depositories. Distribution of power in American city, regional and national governments is discussed and debated within this framework. Although that debate has exposed a number of assumptions about openness and fluidity of power structures, it deteriorated in the end into merely methodological squabbles about the best empirical way of locating power. The organic linkages between the elites at various levels constituting a class interest⁴³ and historical trends in the changing role of the state and its increasingly sophisticated crisis-avoidance strategies have received little attention. Studies of the 'End of Ideology' have been equally uncritical in their insights. Having equated rationality with lack of desire for non-routine participation in politics, sociologists look at protests and

revolutionary movements as indications of irrational behaviour produced by pathologies and inadequacies in the processes of socialization and social control.

On the whole academic political sociology in the west has not remained faithful to the critical tradition of the Enlightenment. The latter subsequently emerged as historical-materialist dialectics of Marx. When justificatory theories and researches of pluralist democracy came under a brief critical reappraisal, as a result of some major events in American society (such as the rising consciousness among the blacks and the insanity of the war in Vietnam), American academic sociology, for the first time, recognized the relevance of Marx's ideas. Teaching of Marx as a sociologist became respectable. However, in the prevailing ethos of Anglo-Saxon instrumentalism and methodological pluralism, even Marx's method was turned into yet another 'perspective' for empirical studies of social reality. This then is the Anglo-Saxon tradition which plays such a dominant role in South Asia.

Behavioural Political Sociology in South Asia / India

Ironically, the 'behavioural revolution' arrived in South Asia at about the same time as it began to be criticized and discredited in the west. In India, the first two General Elections did not receive the attention of behavioural theorists. Hence Sirsikar claimed:

During the last five decades there has been a spate of books on voting in the West, especially in the U.S.A. As compared with these efforts in the West, there is not much to report in India. Whatever little is done with the first and second General Elections is in the nature of reporting on published statistics.¹⁴

During this period, political scientists treated mass electoral participation with suspicion. It was widely believed that democracy based on adult franchise is a 'delicate' alien transplant into Indian soil where the essential prerequisites were conspicuously absent. Its success, it was argued, would depend on the moral vigour and total commitment of the few, western-educated, political leaders and the inherited colonial civil service. The illiterate masses were suspected of being prone to unwittingly sabotaging the electoral process. An early (1957) case study of polling in a U.P. village by a group of American Anthropologists summarized this concern as follows:

Democracy is a matter of the spirit and the democratic spirit is a matter of a set of traditions which question compulsion, rigid social stratification and blind authority. That some shift in Indian tradition has taken place is apparent. Whether greater and more significant shifts will take place, shifts important enough to influence the conditions under which officials are chosen in the rural region, remains to be seen.¹⁵

Between 1957, when this study was conducted and 1962, when the Third General Elections took place two important events occurred a linguistic-cultural reorganization of the states as completed and new local bodies were started for involving rural elites in allocative decisions about development projects. These two events were surface indicators of deeper structural changes that were underway in Indian polity. Although the Congress party continued to be the focus of all elite political activity, its structure changed internally. This process had, in fact, started in the late thirties. By 1962 it had turned the party into a vehicle for the articulation and implementation of political and economic aspirations of the rural middle peasantry of the dominant castes. The two movements for linguistic and rural state reorganization initiated by the sophisticated hegemonic rural elites, enabled them to take over the government in order to fulfil directly their private demand for public resources at all levels.¹⁶

This resurgence of hegemonic elites of the dominant castes contained within the Congress system and the corresponding skilful manipulation of factions, alliances and patronage were only dimly understood by academic political sociologists. In 1965 Kothari was still asserting, on the basis of a sample of 114 leaders, that politics was 'primarily an activity of the educated classes'. He was impressed by the continuity of leadership from the pre-independence period. Unnoticed by political scientists, the rural dominant caste elites entered the democratic political arena, quite unobtrusively, through a take over of the Congress party. They made their impact on national policies, especially on the vital issues of land tenure and agricultural inputs. Whenever their role was noticed by political sociologists, it was with a sense of alarm. Kothari, for example, was moved to describe them as:

new upstarts who have made political haggling their full-time vocation and, not the least important, the local bullies who can intimidate and cajole people who normally keep faith and who in their crude way maintain peace in the locality.¹⁷

In 1962, such descriptions of the rural elites who were now engaged in intense competition over access to public resources and policies were common. The treatment of the Congress party and the State as arenas for competition was seen as an immoral perversion of democracy.

A strong suspicion of the Indian masses, a total lack of faith in their ability to fulfil the conditions of democracy was, in part, an outcome of a moralistic belief in the virtues of western democracy and individualism. Commentators of Indian politics juxtaposed traditionalism and authoritarianism of Indian culture to the proclaimed democratic, egalitarian values and rational modernity of the west. Such modernity was hailed as essential for 'progress in freedom'. Simple prescriptions for transforming the dangerous 'mass culture' and the 'traditional idiom' were accompanied by dire warnings against the failure of democracy;

The one and only way . . . is to educate them (the people) in appropriate ways at appropriate levels to appreciate and value democracy for its own sake ... unless such education is undertaken there seems little hope of securing the minds of Indian people from the lure of totalitarianism of one kind or another.¹⁸

This moral view of Anglo-Saxon democracy did not rest on an understanding of its practice. Critical exposures of its inadequacy were ignored. The vision of a virtuous, potentially egalitarian, democracy had been perpetuated in the Anglo-Saxon world by the proponents of behavioural science. Indian political sociologists accepted it without question. In their war against normative theory Anglo-Saxon sociologists had pushed aside all critical questions about the original intentions and the later capitalist transmutations of democracy. Moral-practical standards for evaluating democracy were reduced to variables of legitimating political values and political culture.¹⁹ Having defined them behaviourally they were treated as given. The scientific task was defined as that of exploring the ways and effectiveness of implanting values and culture in the minds of individuals. The early students of Indian politics accepted this framework without question.

By mid-sixties, Indian and western political sociologists had to treat the electorate more seriously. Democracy had survived two electoral tests. New and elaborate behavioural models of the peculiarities of political participation in India were thus

produced (e.g., one party dominance). In order to understand the baffling health and durability of democratic institutions in India, students of political sociology turned to the Parsonised Weberian polarity of tradition and modernity. In any case, the earlier scepticism about the future of democracy in India was based on the surface image of it as a backward nation: a continent with a nearly unfathomable diversity of languages, sects, castes, regions and cultures. Mired in traditional superstitions, its largely illiterate, rural citizenry had seemed patently incapable of organized, interest-based activity which was considered to be the vital element of pluralist democracy. In contrast, the federal democratic form of government seemed to perform with an unexpected level of stability and sophistication. Elections were being held regularly and at all levels of government. They were, by and large, open and free of coercion. The voter turnout had been comparable to that in western democracies and the voters seemed discriminating enough, in terms of policies and parties, not to vote for the Congress party blindly at all levels, at all times or in unanimity. To explain the phenomenon, behavioural political science produced an explanatory framework that combined pluralist theory of democracy with the theory of backwardness. Armed with a battery of techniques and a conceptual virtuosity, they found organized interests in caste associations, opposition parties (as parties of pressure) and in intra-Congress factions. Congress party appeared to them to be a functional equivalent of a pluralist system of bargaining, compromising, conflict-resolving and decision-making. These developments, as yet short of a full-fledged two party system, were expected to evolve into such a system, leading in the end to a policy process of midstream centrist decisions within a fully emerged formal democracy. Although initially its benefit were being reaped by the traditionally dominant elite, they were expected to percolate to ever-widening sections of the population as a result of elite competition.

This vision of democratic development, borrowed from behavioural interpretations of western democracy and applied to India, rests in the European experience of early capitalist expansion and the concurrent development of democratic institutions. Many American proponents of pluralism, when confronted with challenges to their claims in the mid-sixties, had to admit the limitations of their analysis and the real inadequacies of democratic competition. Similar acceptance of the inability of formally democratic institutions to generate rapid growth and equitable

redistribution of productive resources in the Indian context is hindered because there exists the escape route of under development. While Americans reluctantly admitted the inability of their form of government to produce genuine democracy, the exclusion of large segments of the Indian population from the process of economic and political development is conveniently blamed on the backwardness or traditionalism of the masses. Thus political mobilization is turned into a mission of the privileged elite who are asked to commit themselves to reducing and sharing their own privilege with the slowly awakened masses. No questions are raised as to how and why one set of interest groups which has monopolized the public areas will willingly awaken and incorporate the masses in the competitive struggle for power. The double standard by which a critique of 'developed' western democracies is separated from the analysis of Indian democracy is nowhere more blatant than in the studies of voting behaviour. In the west a great deal of voting behaviour is explained in terms of party identification (such as long term loyalty to a party) often extending over a generation. In the absence of a great deal of knowledge about issues and alternatives, voters acquire party identification early in life and outside the context of policies or ideologies. Voting essentially becomes a ritual affirmation of psychic dispositions, an act satisfying in itself and closely linked to the primordial and parochial origins of the personality. Similar ritual voting is also predominant in the Indian setting. For the pluralists this latter ritualization of the vote is, however, a sign of a traditional, parochial and subject culture to which the western political culture is contrasted as participant and modern. From the early elections of the fifties to those in the sixties pluralists also see a democratically initiated transition to modernity. On the basis of the studies done in 1967, it was claimed that a major realignment in citizen loyalties had occurred. It was seen as the beginning of a new era in Indian electoral politics. Together the rising issue-orientation and conscious party identification of the Indian voter were presented as signs of progress towards a 'modern' culture of 'genuine' democratic participation.

Why do pluralists consider the lack of issue-orientation in the American or European voters to be rational and yet see its rise in the Indian voter as a sign of modernity? The answer lies in the colonially inherited notion of modernity. Rising issue orientation is considered desirable only if it is accompanied by increasing party identification which, as we have seen, is a deceptively rational term to refer to

ritualisation of voting behaviour. In India issue orientation signifies movement towards a modern, participant culture. The necessary end product in the pluralist vision is a stable democratic regime with adequate but not too much participation, adequate but not too much interest in politics, adequate but not too much knowledge of issues. Pluralists would also like to see these attributes coupled with a sense of unquestioning duty towards the system as a whole, a sense of patriotism that demands sacrifice in inverse relationship to privilege, a feeling of efficacy about one's abilities, despite lack of actual involvement and action and a sense of satisfaction about the performance of the elite dependent on the degree to which one's ego focal interests are adequately met by the distributive political process. The academic political sociologist in India, as much as his counterpart in the west, does not consider it to be his project to ask whether such a system is genuinely rational. He does not wish to consider the possibility that a non-participant or routinely participant electorate, claiming sense of political efficacy at the same time, shows satisfaction with politics because it considers the formally democratic political sphere to be of little significance for its everyday life. This apathy may have a great deal to do with the actual monopolization of that sphere by a limited elite, despite its protestations to the contrary. Political sociologists in India have rarely touched upon the similarities between the dominant elite strategies of mobilizing mass support in western democracies and those in India. A ruling elite strengthens its monopoly on politics by catering to the interests of the more articulate segments of the population while, at the same time, appealing to the primordial loyalties of the masses. Citizens may be kept apathetic to politically ensuring a minimal level of privatistic satisfaction when possible and by using other established modes of gaining subservience when necessary. In both cases, by remaining rooted to the influences of kinship, peer group, religion or ethnicity, the act of voting retains only a psychic significance for a citizen. It has no meaning as a 'public' act. These possibilities are beyond the purview of an empirically guided behavioural political sociology. No distinction is made, for example, between orientations of citizens that encourage pacification and privatism as against those that have a potential for critical or rational reexamination of the system itself. In fact, all such questions have been systematically excluded from the massive surveys and aggregate analyses of political behaviour in South Asia.²¹

South Asian Reality and Analysis of Political Economy

In fabricating and employing behaviouristic models of South Asian democracy western political scientists (including their South Asian counterparts) systematically ignored the burgeoning European critique of the interventionist capitalist state and of pervasive civic privatism in western societies even after major European thinkers in the Marxist tradition had produced a penetrating analysis of the irrationality of citizens and of the capitalist stage. An echo of those ideas can be found in A.R.Desai's lonely exposure of the claims of virtuousness of parliamentary democracy. Freedom, says Desai,

has become a cliché in the new mass-societies emerging in the capitalist world, with its large sized bureaucratic organizations, wherein the individual is transformed into a commodity, into a robot manipulated by the powerful monopolists controlling economic resources and state power and manipulating gigantic mass communications media, for conditioning views and preparing him to work as a guinea pig to be exploited in the drive for profit of the monopolies or to be slaughtered in the gigantic wars, launched by them in their drive for markets.²²

Such a recognition of the emerging cybernetic systems of control of knowledge and other productive forces is rare in the literature on the political sociology of South Asia. By accepting western interpretations of democracy, tradition and modernity and by refusing to examine their validity in the light of reality and practice of democracy, political sociologists perpetuate the sterility of the discipline. In contrast to this, a different kind of political sociology also exists in India. In recognition of the stark reality of poverty and unemployment, which defies by its magnitude all attempts to mystify oppression and in view of the continuing stability of dominant caste hegemony in the economy and politics, sensitive analysts have turned their attention to the real questions of the relations of production. Studies of peasantry, landless labour, *dalits* and tribes have thrown light on the hollowness of the implicit claims of the percolation of rewards thesis associated with a formally competitive pluralist democracy. Studies of monopoly capital, industrial, the public sector and the informal sector have systematically examined the links between economy, polity and society. Inspired by a sense of moral outrage, talented researchers have turned to

the insights of Marxism in order to come to grips with the essentials of state-society relationship in India.

But do all such studies, taken together, constitute a critical political sociology of India? To say the least they paint a much clearer picture of the socio-political reality and unmask the mystifying claims that Indian democracy is contributing, however gradually, to an increase in general human welfare. In addressing the deepening impoverishment of the working population and other disastrous consequences of India's unique transition to capitalism they point, objectively, to an emerging crisis in the domains of production and distribution of surplus. The descriptive power of these analyses, given their non-scientific orientation, is demonstrated in their penetrating discussions of aborted implementation of land reforms, of increasing landlessness and of repressive state intervention against peasant or *dalit* mobilization. Many of these writings also recognize the fact that for Marx theory is critical only where it produces a correct analysis of society, an appropriate political praxis. This practical intention of Marxism has not yet been fulfilled in the actual studies of the political economy. As a consequence an all-encompassing theory of Indian society, with an ability to guide a revolutionary political praxis, has yet to emerge. In these studies there exists an implicit theory of revolution that rests on a faith in the iron laws' of capital. It looks longingly to an eventual transition from feudal or semi-feudal relations of production to capitalism. That such a theoretical assumption guides Marxist studies can be seen in the discussions of caste and class relations. For pluralists caste is a highly resistant vestige of tradition. It is declining, nonetheless, under the onslaught of modernization. On its way to oblivion it has changed from being, a mere repository of primordial loyalties to a source of organization of interests, consistent with the interest group conception of pluralist democracy. In mobilizing interests within the idiom of caste the active agents of politics are, in fact, striking at the very ascriptive essence of the caste system. Thus goes the argument of modernization theorists. In many cases, the Marxist view of caste appears as a close parallel to that of the pluralists. Increasing preponderance of capitalist relations is expected to strike at the feudal roots of caste which will then yield its place to authentic class relations, thus revealing the fundamental antagonisms of capital and labour. Only recently the apparently paradoxical adaptability of caste to the conditions of

increasing capitalist production has been noticed? It has become evident that caste has become a potent weapon of oppression especially where wage-capital relations have become prominent in agricultural production. A theory of caste that takes into account the subjective dimension of loyalty and thus transcends this apparent paradox has not yet emerged.

This neglect of the subjective dimension in the analysis of South Asian social reality is, I think, by far the most damaging legacy of the Anglo-Saxon colonial experience. Crises in human affairs have a double edge. This Marx had recognized and incorporated in his theory of revolution as the dialectics of ideology and critique. The double edge of objective reality and its subjective consciousness was, once again, brought into focus, in the light of contemporary European experience of Capitalism, in an encounter between phenomenology and Marxism. Enlightened Marxism now recognizes that crises in human affairs are crises for and by human subjects and hence only they as subjects are potentially capable of overcoming or transcending a state of crisis. Political sociology cannot claim to be critical on the basis of objectivistic descriptions of the changing relations of production. Analysis of conscious obfuscation of class relations through the use of caste tells only part of the story. At the same time, in refusing to look at the ideologically encrusted truth of tradition as a source of critique, such analyses at least implicitly denounce the masses as ignorant and innocent victims of a conspiracy. They are assumed to be incapable of a penetrating critique of ideology out of their own past. At present Marxist analyses are a morally guided equivalent of the modernization theory. Both place the burden of educating the masses on the shoulders of self-appointed elites of a revolutionary party or, in the case of the pluralists, on those of the bureaucracy.

Neither academic political sociology nor that guided by the insights of Marx has managed to overcome the dilemma of initiating a dialogue with the subjects of revolution so as to work with them to produce a critical theory with practical intentions. In any case they have not been able to approach the masses without an arrogant imposition of their own instrumental rationality and distorted hindsight. Critical political sociology must first evaluate social reality in terms of normative standards that are universally valid and rationally justifiable.²⁵ At the same time it must also identify conditions, both objective and subjective, under which the masses become

capable of critical revolutionary activity aimed at establishing a universally valid normative social reality. For this we must first abandon a myopic view of history and of tradition. Our colonial heritage has taught us to view them as pre-rational stages in human social development. The arrogance of Comtean positivism about the stages of societal development is as much a part of that heritage as the 'South Asian file interpretation' of the succession of the modes of production. So far political sociology has remained smugly contemptuous of the revolutionary potential of South Asian tradition.²⁶ It must now begin to reinterpret the reality of history as a symbolic world of tradition and focus on the many occasions when it became a vehicle of the revolutionary impulses of the unprivileged populations. We denounce the past as irrational based on after-the-fact evidence that a successful revolution has not yet occurred. In this functionalist argument intentions are inferred from outcomes. Critical political sociology will have to overcome consciously such a temptation of distorted hindsight which is, as I have argued earlier, our one-sided colonial heritage.

Only by entering the symbolic world of the subjects can we identify the potential actors of revolutionary change. A critical theory of state - society relationship must arise out of a self- understanding of those whom Marxists have successfully identified as the victims of feudal or capitalist oppression. For the oppressed in South Asia tradition is not yet dead or estranged. It remains an essential aspect of their self- understanding. For them it is a lived reality. Even though the link between caste and occupation has been objectively destroyed as a result of colonial and post-colonial development, relations of dominance and subordination are still understood within the patrimonial idiom of mutuality. Objective analyses have correctly pointed to the instrumental use of such symbols of identity and loyalty of the masses by the elite; by those who claim to be leaders but have, in fact, become the rulers. This very availability of caste and tradition for instrumental use points at the same time to the original universal core of justifiability of traditional social orders. Such a counter-factual inference is inevitable unless we choose to dismiss all past as one long hoax, as a conspiracy perpetrated by shrewd and all-knowing rulers on the ever innocent, unsuspecting masses. From this it is only a short step to an arrogant assertion that masses have always been stupid and the rulers have always been clever. If there is a lesson in Marx's theory of alienation it is that no ideology is ever a complete lie. The main task of critical theory is to reveal the ideologically encrusted truth of tradition

by challenging false claims of legitimacy; claims that oppression is necessary in the name of a universal interest. The instrumental use of traditional loyalties estranges the rulers, not only from the masses, it must also estrange them from the once essential rationality of their leadership position in the community. What was once an authentic community, however momentary that authenticity may have been, turns into its determinate opposite as part of the dynamics of human development. This in essence is the dialectic of tradition.

Such considerations point to the basic dilemma of contemporary social science: how to arrive at an analysis of social reality which is at the same time the subjective reality of those who are to be studied. The Weberian solution of *Verstehen* has been proved inadequate. It merely uses subjectivity instrumentally, as a supplementary tool of an objectivistic social science. In contrast, dialectically informed analysis must lead to a theory of society that arises out of and returns to a social reality which is also subjective and hence ready for active transformation. It should take Vico's insight seriously and recognize that predictions about social reality can come true, in the last analysis, only if conscious subjects will act to make them come true. Critical social science and critical political sociology in particular, must first recognize their own social context. That context is of a transplanted ethos of suspended intellectual activity, occupationally and culturally separated from the everyday life of the common man. A critique of this colonial development and of uncritically transplanted western categories of social analysis is now required. Equally important is an awareness of our own estrangement from the past and our consequent alienation from the masses about whom we claim to speak.²⁷ Before we can speak of a concrete agenda for a critical political sociology for South Asia we face the preliminary task of critically re-understanding our own place as social scientists within South Asian society. For that a new reinterpretation of the colonial past and its legacy is essential. To paraphrase Mao's advice to his party workers (1967), we must find a practically oriented theoretical way of correctly understanding the current conditions in South Asia in their world context. First, we must reunderstand our history by setting aside the instrumentalist framework inherited from our Anglo-Saxon colonial experience. In reevaluating our past and appreciating the present we must avoid becoming 'gramophones and must not forget the need to 'understand and create new things'. Contemporary political sociology has failed to reexamine its roots in these terms. It

explains contemporary social reality with justificatory ideologies of order, stability, gradual development as well as formal freedoms and formal participation in and legalistic implementation of policies.

A critical rereading of Marx, unhampered by externally imposed paradigms, is capable of bringing a unique rejuvenation to social theory. In South Asia this has not occurred because of our over-reliance on the Anglo-Saxon paradigms of Marxism. We have interpreted Marxism as an imitative, objectivistic social science. Its encounters with critical hermeneutics show a promise for reappropriating 'the wealth of artistic allegories and religious symbols whose day is not yet done when the ideology which bore them disappears'²⁸ In the absence of a similar critical sense for tradition, South Asian Marxism has failed to face the question theory for the organization of political activity aimed at universal emancipation. Such a theory must have its roots in the self-understanding of the masses. A reinterpretation of South Asian tradition as a dialectic of liberation and domination must precede the formation of critical social theory. In view of this the prime tasks of a critical political sociology in South Asia may be summarized as follows:

- (1) Self critical research in the origin and development of political sociology, into its theoretical and research enterprise, as the unexamined adaptation of a pluralist, behavioural social science. Research into social science as an ideology of the practice of formal democracy in western capitalist societies.
- (2) Self-critical research on the place of the intellectuals of South Asian society in terms of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history. Political sociology, a product of the intellectuals peculiarly situated in the political economy of South Asia, can emancipate itself from routine imitation of western models, theories or perspectives, only if we fully understand our location within the emerging social order of exploitation and oppression.²⁹
- (3) Continuing critical explorations in the contemporary social reality of South Asia, not merely as the manifestation of antagonistic class forces, vitiated by an ideology of caste, but as a totality of beliefs, ideas and activities of the masses. This totality, to be viewed simultaneously as moments of creative critical activity and its ideological, hegemonic reappropriation.

(4) Critical explorations for a reunderstanding of tradition from which sociologists have become estranged as a result of untempered scepticism and ego-focal individualism and in which the masses have found an equally uncritically accepted explanation of the oppressive social reality. A rediscovery of that tradition as a critical theory of society must unlock the creative revolutionary potential of the masses for an emancipatory activity for institutional change.

A critical political sociology cannot exist without an emancipatory intention of overcoming oppressive social reality. That intention is implicit, as a moral imperative, in the writings of academic as well as Marxist political sociologists in South Asia. However, a passive moral imperative acquires salience only when it is translated into a theory that generates, within those who must act, a practical programme of emancipation and a blueprint for the future. Such a blueprint must have its base in a realistic awareness of the capacity of the present to produce such future. What the two perspectives share at the moment is only the implicit moral desire. A dialogue between the two perspectives will become possible only if both reexamine their roots from a sense of conscious selfexploration. The original intention of the European Enlightenment was once translated into a blueprint for democracy. It was thwarted and abandoned with the march of capitalism. The critique of capitalism in Max was also a critique of this abandonment.³⁰ Thus a critique of pluralism and a critique of capitalism can jointly guide South Asian political sociology only when understood out of our own critical reexamination of the past. That past was not merely a deplorable hoax perpetrated by clever men on essentially unthinking masses. It was simultaneously a creative response to oppression and an oppressive use of that response. Out of a sense for this creative critical potential of South Asian history and tradition a critical political sociology will have to emerge.

End Notes

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