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CULTURAL ROLE OF SOCIOLOGY IN MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF ECOLOGICAL DETERIORATION - A POSER FROM INDIA

BRIJ RAJ CHAUHAN

Rural societies have been associated with agricultural activities that made the use of defined territories on a small scale over generations a necessary condition of life, specially in the agricultural stages of production. Relations with nature were close and each source of water, be it a well or a pond, or a stream got associated with some deity and potency for men, animals and plants. The care of animals also acquired a routine of its own, their reproduction, growth and preservation were looked after through well-defined division of labour and magical rituals. Sowing of seeds, the protection of plants and harvesting activities revolved around groups, elaborate dance and music accompanied them investing them with the supernatural. Appropriate deities provided the need for careful attention. The calendar of festivals revolved around seasonal changes, connected with the cropping patterns. Life of the peasantry thus provided a rhythm of its own combining the social, economic and ritual dimensions into defined patterns which sedentary mode of settlement facilitated to be carried from generation to generation.

The peasant groups developed similarities in their ways of life over large territories and a few scholars like Durkheim suggested an explanation of these similarities in the atomistic nature of these communities based on the principle of likeness (Durkheim 1985). When the British administrators took charge of the Indian sub-continent, they were impressed by the non-changing character of rural communities and their imperviousness to political processes operating in the sub-continent. Basing his conclusion on such evidence, Marx in his dispatch to the New York Daily Tribune (1953) opined that the lack of mass scale economic activities and continuation of same pattern of life over generations suggested a corresponding absence of history. In general his description of the peasants as a sack of potatoes further confirmed the nature of similarity of rural communities marked by non-interaction among them. This explanation of similarities among wide spread rural communities in India received a serious challenge from Robert Redfield (1955) and other social scientists who worked on the nature of cultural forces operating in the sub-continent. A second stream of scholars in the traditions of the British anthropology too had a fresh look at the ritual structure of various castes living in rural areas, and even in towns. A.R. Radcliffe Brown had studied the Andaman Islanders at a time when forces of change had not altered their traditional mode of life in isolated islands. The field work was carried on before the first World War and published after it had

ended. When one of his eminent students, M.N. Srinivas worked on the study of religion on the mainland of India, Radcliffe Brown wrote the preface and pointed out the need for the study of links of religious practices with the philosophy and rituals of Hinduism in a wider sense, and Srinivas operationalised it by classifying village rituals along local, peninsular (regional) and national dimensions, thereby opening up the question of inter relationship among the communities (1952). Redfield and Marriott posed the problem of inter connections among the indigenous communities and the Great Tradition of Hinduism (1955). Marriott posited two processes at work; (1) Parochialization involving the local version of classical tradition and (2) Universalization of a ritual marking the upgrading and greater spread of a local ritual to the regional and national level and becoming a part of the neo-classical (1955: 199-200). Milton Singer's attempt at studying the orthogenetic growth of Madras city highlighted the cultural role of cities in stylizing the regional traditions (1956). Earlier Radha Kamal Mukherjee had characterized the city as a symbol of religious consciousness. The question has been elaborated upon by Chauhan (1979) and Doshi (1968). These studies support the interactional perspective on rural societies and demonstrate the channels of communication at work including those among the classical and the local oral traditions as well as rural-urban interactions.

Further evidence on the conduct of pilgrimages has been pooled together for the villagers, as they go for the second bath of the holy dip in the Ganga, or other pilgrim centres (Chauhan 1967). The stories of epics get enacted on a large scale on appropriate days, draw large crowds from neighbouring villages and interactions as well as the message keeps on being relayed periodically to numerous villages. Thus traditions keep on being strengthened; at times a few regional inputs are added on to the festivities, and invitation extended to well known parties from urban areas. At the cultural level, the village is a part of the wider world conscious of the great tradition, the classics, the gods and deities; and has its own mediators between the local and the regional and national centres. These channels of communication are fortified through the media, the television, religious magazines, and rendering of classics through short stories and comic strips. The village today possesses a set of literati that can keep the interaction along modern channels going together with the traditional oral performers.

Inter-village connections at regional level are mediated through the caste. In a village there may be twenty to forty such groups, each endogamous and in the major part of India practising local exogamy. Members of a caste are thus encouraged to get married in other villages and the kinship relations from one village may extend to a hundred others in the neighbourhood. Among various scholars of kinship studies, Adrian Mayer's work **Caste and Kinship in Central India** (1960) devotes full attention to a caste and its region. These regional ties are within the caste, and provide a horizontal grouping for its members. In the traditional setting, castes at the regional level were grouped in their indigenous courts to which disputes

relating to marriage and remarriage and other caste codes could be referred to (Chauhan 1967). Srinivas referred to the village community as a vertical unity of many castes, and a caste having its alliances cutting across several villages (1955). Thus within the village, people got used to the institutionalized pattern of hierarchical relations shaped largely according to tenets of Brahmanism spread all over the country; and at the regional level got conscious of the horizontal spread of their own caste. Some political arrangements also made the hierarchical pattern quite visible on significant occasions in the elite families. The elements of the traditional social structure according to the view being advanced here, contained the seeds and channels of a village interacting with the other villages and towns. Hence a proper understanding of rural societies in India, even in the traditional setting, has to be anchored not on the delimitation of these societies along atomistic symmetries, but on living communities interacting with others along defined channels and processes of communication. The village societies would then appear as repositories of such institutions as could sustain social and cultural patterns for generations, and could interact with other units. This nature of these societies enabled them to define their relations with other men, plants and animals, as well as other natural forces that provided a harmony of their own.

Analysts of the Indian society within Marxian frame have made use of cultural history to trace what they view as internal contradictions in the rural society by drawing attention to the challenges to the governing classes thrown up during the devotional (Bhakti) movements. The lower classes produced their saints who considerably simplified the classic ritual order using regional dialects as the medium to be heard by the omnipotent Everpresent Spirit. These movements covering the period of 11th to 16th centuries in different regions of India articulated the protests of the lower groups at the only level of knowledge admissible for communication of ideas viz. the religious. Even earlier, the rise of Buddhism and Jainism had been B. C. (Chauhan 1989). For the purpose of the current discussion, the significance of these allusions lies in the primacy of the cultural idioms in expressing even other contradictions of the society. They further strengthen the proposition that cultural processes have their own history and influence over the rural societies that continued to be in interaction with the major religious trends of different periods.

The modern period of the Indian history prior to the independence of the country (1947) was marked by a few revivalistic movements like the **Arya Samaj**, the **Prarthana Samaj** and the use of the religious symbols in the struggle for freedom against the British rulers. The nation itself was defined into mother goddess, given the appellation 'Mother-India' (Bharat Mata) and the seriousness of this was reflected in the formulation of 'Bande Mataram' (Salute to the Motherland) as the battle cry. Quite a few meetings and processions adopted the salutation as the starting point for attaining of heightened energy of the group, as a few freedom fighters when condemned to the gallows uttered the two words as their last act. The 'Bande Mataram' was

to provide a secular meaning to the phrase 'Bharat Mata' suggesting that all those assembled in the protest rallies constituted 'Mother India'. Gandhi's use of the religious symbol is well-known. He derived the weapon of 'Satyagraha' and fasting from the Hindu religious practices and offered prayers every morning and evening along with his followers for strengthening the inner self. He tried to broaden the base of Hinduism by adopting egalitarian modes of conduct abolishing through example several obstacles that came in the way of eradication of untouchability. He invoked multiplicity of various religions in the conduct of prayers trying to bring their practitioners together for a common cause. The use of cultural idioms for the realization of a political goal thus became a part of Indian life even in a modernizing economy and polity. That the cultural idioms couldn't be wished away became clear in the re-definition of 'Secularism' in the Indian political parlance even in the Independent India. The word doesn't stress on the delinking of the polity from the religious influence but the existence of multiple religions with equal respect on the part of the state. It is only when one religious group tries to dominate over others that the question of separation of religion from the affairs of the state is raised.

Caste and religious affiliations have provided ready made channels of conducting group activities, specially on the cultural front for over the millennia, interest groups are comparatively new formations, political parties are recent phenomenon marked by divisions, breakups, disappearance and re-emergence under various names. The Indian National Congress became a mother for several parties which every now and then come together (or give rise to splinter groups) but still a 'Congress Culture' appears to be pervading them all the time; as much as the various likes of the socialist and the communist parties tend to talk of 'progressive democratic' forces, adding the word 'Secular'. Even regional parties tend to produce their variations by adding a word signifying 'the real' before the party to provide splinter groups; or to add a regional prefix to suggest that the group does not accept the national leaders, but retains the ideology. Such illustrations, besides the more professed connections between culture and polity in some of the parties, point out the significance of the culture idioms in the conduct of the affairs of the state and political parties all of which need the use of ready made communication channels to mobilize and seek support of various sections of the people. In the process rural areas are approached through the regional languages, and success gained in one part advertised in the other part to seek greater support. The radio and the television have provided still speedier access, and under difficult situations foreign broadcasts, specially of the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) are looked upon to check the nationally broadcast or published news, and at times given greater credence. Our own studies revealed how a farm labourer could leave the company of a group in the rural areas to retire home for tuning in the BBC programme at he allocated hour (Chauhan 1990). Hence an interest in rural-urban interactions is on the rise. As the rural dwellers become conscious of the potency of ballot, and the continuing 'civic participation' in making the state

do something more for them periodically, the connecting channels between the rural settlements and political centres acquire a new significance. The villagers then come into contact with wider processes at work in the areas of poverty - alleviation, provision of irrigation, better tools and fertilizers, and the marketing process. The state too becomes conscious of spreading education, health facilities, and other welfare programmes including those relating to family limitation. The exploitation of natural resources for industrial or commercial use on a large scale and the consequent pollution now come into question, as the rural people on their own through their old age institutions try to protect and preserve their natural resources. The conflict is a real and the resources unevenly distributed. Even political control over them does not go along the one person one vote pattern. This appears to be the case both within a nation and among the nations in the world community.

Man's relations with nature in the rural setting have been negotiated over thousands of years and sustained through cultural traditions that got highly stylized in the classical written form rendering which cities played significant roles. Within the rural structure, elements for initiating interaction with other rural and urban communities have been active. The rural society in India provides a setting in which collective action along cultural lines has been organized for religious as well as secular goals. The reservoir of such cultural and social practices in the context of sustainable ecological development, needs to be researched into and then mobilized for action. At the research level, different practices relating to use of water, soil, cycles of festivals, pilgrimages and worship that affects the regulation of natural resources need continuous study. Human experience under varying conditions can be compared both nationally and internationally, and at the current speed of communication exchanged among nations. Just as plants and species of animals need preservation through the growth of gene banks, social and cultural varieties of organization and communication too need to be noted, observed and rendered in a form where in they could be studied again and again. This paper advocates the extension of 'gene bank' of natural resources to the social cultural dimensions for recording the varied human responses to the preservation, growth and use of natural sources.

The paper further argues that similarities among village communities that flow from inter-communication among the rural social units, and among the rural-urban dimensions have to be identified properly, and the earlier idea of the rural societies depicting similarities based on likeness of atomistic nature needs revision. The over-whelming evidence on the nature of interaction among the rural social units on the one hand, and with the urban sectors on the other provide the basis for the study of interacting channels. These exercises will further lead to the study of mobilizing those societies for common tasks. There is some hopeful history to rely on at least within the national and on the cultural front across the nations. The traditional experiences now need to be converted into global interaction which can be find a fertile climate and resource base in rural communities in various

countries. For Rural Sociology it will be a new task and adequate tools, man power and institutional arrangements will have to be worked out at the global level. The argument of the paper is that the cultural traditions have to be studied and varieties noted, that channels of communication exists within the communities and nations, and they provide the base on which global interaction has to be mobilized.

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SATELLITE TELEVISION AND MIDDLE CLASS YOUTH IN AN INDIAN CITY VIRENDRA PAL SINGH

Mass media communication has acquired an important place in modern industrial societies. These societies are now highly dependent on mass communication. Mass communication comprises "the institutions and techniques by which a specialized social group employ technological devices to disseminate symbolic content to large heterogeneous and widely spread audiences" (Janowitz, 1980 : 41) The social conditions for the development of mass communication in a given society are created by the forces of urbanization, industrialization and modernization. Mass media not only disseminate information in such societies but are also important resources of leisure time activities although sports, games, tourism also constitute other important leisure activities in modern societies. The scholars like Mayersohn (1968) initiated an interesting discussion on the media use particularly on the common view that mass media provide a leisure resource appropriate mainly for the poor and culturally deprived. But his re-analysis of the data collected by Steiner (1963) showed that poor people do not watch television because they have no other leisure resources and that they actually use mass media (particularly television) less than might be expected precisely because they lack the stimulus to do so which is supplied to the majority by their wider range of interest and activities including attention to the media. It suggests that the leisure interests are mutually reinforcing and television viewing is in itself a major leisure activity and is comparable to other more active leisure pursuits. The studies conducted on the use of media indicate that leisure activities are grounded in the personality or character of individuals and are formed in the early childhood during the process of socialization (Kamphorst, 1986). In a nation-wide study conducted in Czechoslovakia Radicova (1989) identified three patterns of leisure time activities. The most frequent responses focussed on activities possible at home such as household chores, viewing television and reading news papers and magazines. The second pattern was found among those who were involved in a higher energy level activities like visiting friends and neighbours. In the third group individuals left their immediate neighbourhood for club, cinema and sports activities. It suggests that different media of mass communication are associated with different patterns of leisure. Therefore, choice of the mass media for leisure may depend on a number of variables like social class, educational level, age group, occupation etc. Simultaneously different media may compete with each other in order to attract the masses in a given society.

The urban middle class in India has been highly receptive to new media of mass communication. The advent of television set in Indian middle