

The Tenth All-India Sociological Conference

Hyderabad, December 26–28, 1970

The Tenth All-India Sociological Conference was recently held at Hyderabad, with Osmania University playing host. The president of the Indian Sociological Society, Professor R. N. Saksena, delivered the presidential address.

In his address Professor Saksena directed his concern at the problem of India's economic development. While suggesting that sociologists should rid themselves of the myth that East is spiritual and otherworldly, he maintained that the values and beliefs of the rural communities formed an integrated whole. He pleaded the government to adopt a sociological perspective in its programmes of economic development. He also took this opportunity to caution sociologists against accepting the western model of industrialisation as the only suitable model for India.

The presidential address over, the conference divided itself into several panels. A panel was devoted to discuss the Sociology of Socialist Revolutions. The Ministry of Home Affairs financially supported the panel on the Sociology of National Integration. Another panel was devoted to the Sociology of Social Organisations. In the Open Panel papers which could not be included in any of the above panels were taken up for discussion. A symposium on the Role of the Indian Council for Social Science Research and a Round Table on Economic Development and Social Change were also organised.

Professor M. S. A. Rao, Delhi University, presided over the panel on the **Sociology of National Integration**. This panel attracted a large number of papers — a sufficient indicator that the Indian sociologists fully appreciate the magnitude of the problem. Professor Parvathamma in her working paper diagnosed the causes of disintegration. In her view, religion, caste, political system, language, and economic inequalities act as divisive forces. As solutions, she underlined the need for development of a sound administrative system, and an educational system oriented to the needs of the people. She stressed the role of intellectuals in bringing about integration by inspiring the younger generation to act with purpose and honesty. Apart from governmental efforts purposeful voluntary organisations, which cross narrow boundaries, are also necessary in generating a sense of solidarity. The discussion following the above paper was directed at an examination of the causes and cures for disintegration. The discussion also sparked off a controversy on definitional problems. In particular, the concept of "integration" was interpreted in diverse ways, which in the end created much confusion. The discussion unfortunately did not revolve around major theoretical issues. In this context Prof. V. L. D'Souza's paper could have received more attention. Professor D'Souza maintained that in a complex society with a variety of particularistic groups, integration can be brought about only by creating institutions such as schools, whose membership cut across these particularistic barriers.

The panel on the **Sociology of Socialist Revolution** was the star attraction of the conference. Professor S. K. Srivastava presided over the deliberations of this panel. For quite some time, social scientists of a leftist variety have been feeling that Indian sociologists are, by and large, conservative and status-quo minded. Also, Professor V. K. R. V. Rao, the Union Minister of Education, in his inaugural address to the previous Conference (held at New Delhi in November 1969) had made a plea to develop a Sociology of Socialist Revolutions. In the course of his address, he also tried to provide a tentative model for the study of socialist revolutions. In this context, this panel was an open invitation to the radical sociologists to initiate a dialogue with their "conservative" counterparts.

A young "revolutionary" sociologist of Indian origin who flew all the way from Canada to lead the discussion took the soft option of criticising Professor V. K. R. V. Rao's inaugural address to the previous Conference. His justification for this exercise was that the Union Minister for Education was the most intelligent and influential bourgeois representative of the Establishment, but it carried little weight. Professor S. Shukla, who contributed another working paper sought to highlight the conflict between sociologists and those who sought to change society. According to him, the perspective of an outsider is bound to be different from that of an individual involved in action. Therefore, the "objectivity" of sociology is regarded as spurious by Marxists. In fact, he argued, Marxists regard the sole function of "objectivity" as maintaining the **status-quo**. Professor Shukla later went on to demonstrate that the sociological study of socialist revolutions would be more rewarding to those who attempt to cope with such revolutions rather than to those who want to usher them. He maintained that the two crucial elements in a socialist revolutionary movement were: (1) failure of the ruling class to effectively organise the economy, and (2) the existence of a conscious organised revolutionary party.

The discussions that followed, however, produced much heat, but very little light. The radical sociologists took the opportunity to repeat the cliché that sociology cannot be value-free. The so called value-free sociology, they maintained, is an imperialist tool. Despite desperate attempts to resuscitate it, structural-functionalism, they held, is on its death-bed. It is singularly unfortunate that an excellent opportunity to discuss the limitations of sociological enquiry was thus squandered. Amidst all these slogan-mongering exercises, the few voices which called for more empirical work on socialist revolutions went almost unheeded.

Professor V. L. D'Souza presided over the panel on the **Sociology of Social Organisations**. This panel like the panel of national integration, also got bogged down in a discussion on definitions. The panel discussants took the liberty of using the term "social organisation", in varied ways. Perhaps, this is symptomatic more of the nature of the discipline rather than of its practitioners. Various organisations, ranging from industrial organisations to voluntary organisations, such as youth clubs, came for review. There was a consensus that these organisations ought to be studied from a historical perspective. Sociologists should not merely be content with studying internal structures of social organisations. They should also study the links of these organisations with the wider society.

The **Open Panel** covered a wide variety of topics. Professor Indra Deva presided over deliberations. Discussions took place on the Indian family in Urban Setting, Family Planning Sociological Problems and Social Crises, Bearing of Social Class

on Educational Aspirations, and so on. During the course of the deliberations of this panel there was also a discussion on the choice of techniques of sociological research. There was general agreement that sociologists cannot uncritically accept statistical techniques alone. In fact, the choice of the problem determined the research method. The statistical technique should be complimented with participant observation.

The **Round Table** on economic development and social change sparked off an interesting discussion. Professor Adrian Mayer of the University of London chaired the session. Professor Owen Lynch, Professor Joan Mencher, Dr. Konrad Thomas and Professor Yogendra Singh led the discussion. Professor Lynch, basing his analysis on the study of two low castes in urban setting, argued that a sense of dissatisfaction and insecurity motivates the lower castes to seek channels of vertical mobility. Professor Joan Mencher, on the basis of her fieldwork in Tamilnadu stressed that class values and class identification of the agents of change thwart social change. She argued that the middle and big landowners get favoured treatment from the officials with the result that the lower classes are neglected. Professor Thomas questioned the economists' definition of economic development as it leaves out important human variables. He also expressed his doubts as to whether the traditional sociological tools can study a situation of "normlessness" which arises in the wake of social change. Professor Yogendra Singh also discussed the methods adopted to study social change. He called for an extension of the study of important motivational variables that make for change. The discussion that followed revolved around the need to develop a methodology to study change and the need to look into "fundamental" issues which prevent change. The cleavage between the radical and the not-so-radical sociologists again made its appearance during this discussion.

For quite some time now, several Indian social scientists have been questioning the wisdom of foreign agencies funding research in Indian Universities. This problem became acute with the expose on the C.I.A. which resulted in the closure of an American research foundation in India. To provide funds for research the Government of India last year set up a body called the **Indian Council for Social Science Research** (ICSSR). The ICSSR invited the delegates of this Conference to discuss the composition and working of this newly constituted body. There was a general feeling among the delegates that the body should adequately represent the various regions and the research interests of sociologists all over India. Several cautioned that the ICSSR should avoid the pitfalls of bureaucratisation. There was a view that the sociologists should not be solely dependent on the ICSSR. Some preferred individual projects to projects of a gigantic nature which usually resulted in much waste.

To sum up, the Conference provided a lively meeting ground for Indian sociologists. No doubt, as an after thought, one could always feel that the discussions could have been more fruitful. Yet, it provided a good opportunity to gauge the trends of current thinking in sociology. From the discussions, it is apparent that the Indian sociologists are concerned with important methodological and other fundamental problems of sociological enquiry. The Conference, however, badly missed the contributions of some of the more eminent sociologists of the country who for various reasons could not attend.

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