
UNIT 4 HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF SOCIOLOGY IN INDIA -I

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4.0 OBJECTIVES

After studying this unit you will be able to

- describe the social antecedents of sociological thought in India
- discuss the socio-religious movements for reform
- explain the political movement for freedom

- describe the intellectual antecedents of sociological thought
- outline the emergence of sociology and social anthropology in India.

4.1 INTRODUCTION

So far in this block you learnt about the emergence of sociology in Europe in Unit 1, the founding fathers of sociology Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer in Unit 2 and about the founding fathers Georg Simmel, Vilfredo Pareto and Thorstein Veblen in Unit 3.

In this unit we have discussed the social and intellectual antecedents of the history and development of sociology in India. We have also mentioned the impact of the British in bringing about the change in the way of thinking, style of living and behaviour of the upper strata of Indian people. The socio-religious movements were an attempt to rid society of its social evils and rigid values. Freedom struggle and the Indian leaders who participated in this struggle had a great influence on Indian society and culture. It is in the background of these social changes that sociology and social anthropology emerged and developed in India.

Section 4.2 describes the social antecedents of Indian sociological thought; section 4.3 discusses the socio-religious reform movements while section 4.4 gives the social background of the freedom struggle, as well as, the complementary nature of the religious and political movements. Section 4.5 describes the intellectual antecedents of Indian sociological thought and finally, section 4.6 outlines the emergence of sociology and social anthropology in India. In the next unit, Unit 5, you will learn more about three of the major pioneers of Indian sociology, namely, Radhakamal Mukherjee, D.P. Mukherji and G.S. Ghurye.

4.2 SOCIAL ANTECEDENTS OF INDIAN SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT

India has a history extending over nearly four millennia. Its cultural heritage consists of religious and philosophical works, which were composed in classical languages such as Sanskrit, Prakrit and Pali. Besides, in the medieval period Bhakti literature was composed in regional languages such as Awadhi, Braj, Maithali, Bengali, Assamese, Marathi, Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam. Then there are classical and folk forms of performing arts, architecture, sculpture that embody India's pluralistic tradition of socio-cultural formation, ranging from tribal groups to agriculturists and urban dwellers.

4.2.1 Social Thought in Pre-British Period

India is a complex civilisation especially where its literary tradition is concerned. The Indian philosophy consists of six schools of thought namely Yoga, Sankhya, Nyaya, Vaishesika, **Vedanta** and Mimamsa. This is an important source of Indian thought. The thirteen principal Upanishads consist of philosophical enquiries into inner life and ultimate destiny of

human beings. Besides these we have the Buddhist and Jain religions which have many philosophical works. Generally, these schools of thought concern the evolution of mankind towards certain ultimate goals. Salvation, which in India means freedom from the cycle of births and deaths, is the objective of enquiry and cogitation in many of these philosophies. Indian society has all the same been changing and adapting itself to new conditions.

Indian social thought in pre-modern times was the articulation of a **multi-ethnic** society. We have had the impact of Islamic tradition which gave rise to the Sufi cult and had a wide ranging influence on the life style and values, especially in the North. The Sikh religion is a very good example of the mixture of Hindu and Islamic thought. All through, the freedom of enquiry prevailed in India and there was hardly any **persecution** of a group on grounds of belief. Hence, a tolerant attitude towards each other characterised the Indian social groups. While Indian religions thrived among the common populace, Indian philosophy was mainly cultivated among the literate, urban-based classes.

4.2.2 Impact of the British

The coming of British into India was an event which had far-reaching consequences for Indian society. The age-old traditions began to decline due to new social and economic forces. The classical languages such as Sanskrit and Persian declined and English became the official language. The traditional handicrafts in Indian country-side fell into decay as they were unable to withstand the competition of machine-made textiles and other goods brought by the British to the Indian markets from Manchester, Lancashire, Sheffield and London. The Indian villages were not able to continue as viable economic units under the colonial rule.

The British brought important changes in India by the introduction of railways, posts and telegraphs which facilitated communication between groups. Further, administrative and judicial services were extended to many parts of the subcontinent. Thus, India entered the modern stage. The schools, colleges and universities were started by the British rulers. **Missionaries** and Indian voluntary organisations also took steps to spread modern education in India.

4.2.3 Emergence of the Middle Classes

The erstwhile feudal classes such as, the Rajas, the Zamindars, the Talukdars, etc. were no longer in the center of the stage. Indeed, the middle classes, which emerged during the British period, are now prominent in nearly all spheres of social life in Indian society. The social thinkers discussed in this unit are drawn from the **middle class** base. Although castes are important in ritualistic and domestic spheres, classes have become significant in occupational, professional and public life. The term “middle class” is used here not as a pure economic category. The middle class is the product of both economics and culture. The members of the middle class not only share a common economic life but also a socio-cultural life.

4.3 SOCIO-RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS FOR REFORM

In the nineteenth century and the early parts of the twentieth century it is the members from middle classes who began to think in terms of reforming and modernising Indian society. The reformist attempts contained both religious and social components. Let us briefly discuss the reformist and revivalist movements of the nineteenth century India.

4.3.1 The Reformist Movements

One of the early nineteenth century reformers was Raja Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1833) of Bengal who believed that Indians could become progressive if they shed the superstitions and evil practices such as Sati, infanticide, etc. He advocated a new kind of religion which combined Christian teachings with Vedanta. He founded the Brahmo Samaj which was meant to be a spiritual **forum**, where a monotheistic, non-**idolatrous** worship could be conducted by its members who had nothing to do with caste or superstition. Ram Mohun Roy's influence was mainly confined to urban, literate groups of Bengal. In the same century, Mahadev Govind Ranade, a jurist of Maharashtra, founded the Prarthana Samaj in Bombay. This was broadly modeled on the Brahmo Samaj of Bengal. The social reactions raised by the two movements were, however, quite different. The Brahmo Samaj by its insistence on Western-inspired liberalism gave rise to a stormy orthodox reaction. Ram Mohun's reforms were strongly opposed by orthodox Hindus led by Radha Kant Dev. Here was a confrontation between tradition and modernity. By contrast, the liberal trends initiated by Prarthana Samaj did not create a direct conflict between tradition and modernity. Unlike the members of Brahmo Samaj, its members did not lead a distinctive, anti-traditionalist life style. So, there was no sharp reaction from society.

4.3.2 The Revivalist Movements

Two revivalist movements may be also mentioned. The Arya Samaj launched by Dayananda Saraswati (1824-1883) was based on an appeal to people to shed the unhealthy features of Hinduism (such as narrowness of caste, superstition, ritualism, etc.) and go back to the pristine purity of Vedas. It sponsored a kind of education which had both traditional and modern components. The D.A.V. or Dayananda Anglo-Vedic Colleges spread education in North India on a wide scale. The Ramakrishna Mission founded by Vivekananda had a two fold purpose: one, to make educated people in India to realise their responsibility to the weaker sections and take steps to remove poverty and social backwardness; second, to propagate Indian Vedanta to the Westerners. In regard to first, many schools and hostels were founded in urban, rural and tribal areas to improve education and employment prospects of common people. In regard to second, Advaita centers were established in many Western countries to bring about spiritual awakening among Western people.

4.3.3 Other Movements

Just as reformist and revivalist movements were precursors for social reforms in India and they gave impetus to scholarly activities related to socio-cultural awakening in Indian society., we find that in post-Independence period, degradation of environment and misguided development related movements have also influenced intellectual activity among shows sociologists who focus on the study of and problems related to deforestation (Jain 1984), 1994 and 1998-99, 2001 & 2001 6+ 2003 Sillitoc et al 2002 displacement B 1995 , Fernades.....) and unbalanced sex ratio in India (Patel.....). Most of these issues are products of movements taking place in different parts of the country.

Except this brief mention of such trends, we will not go into these details as these developments in Sociology will be included in the syllabus of course of master’s degree in Sociology.

Check Your Progress 1

- i) Name the six schools of thought found in Indian philosophy. Use about three lines to list them.

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- ii) Mention three of the important changes brought about in Indian society due to the impact of the British rule. Use about ten lines for your answer.

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- iii) Who founded Brahma Samaj? What did it stand for? Write your answer using about seven lines.

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4.4 POLITICAL MOVEMENT FOR FREEDOM IN INDIA

Towards the end of nineteenth century, a political movement for the attainment of Independence arose in India. The National Congress, founded in 1885 by Octavius Hume, established a political forum for debates and discussions.

4.4.1 Social Background of Freedom Struggle

Most members of the National Congress were drawn from urban, literate groups. Its essentially middle class character persisted from 1885-1917. With the coming of M.K. Gandhi on the scene, the Congress became a mass based political party, in which urban professionals, peasants, artisans and industrial workers formed the bulk of primary members. Broadly speaking, intellectuals in India did not have to face the type of persecution faced elsewhere for holding independent political opinions or agitating for freedom. However, numerous congress leaders and followers went to prison under the charge of sedition during the Swadeshi Movement, Non-Cooperation Movement and Quit India Movement. Several people were also executed for their participation in anti-state and termed by the British as terrorist activities. However, the distinctive mark of the Indian struggle for Independence was its non-violent approach.

Activity 1

Read one novel by famous Indian authors like Tagore, Premchand, Mulkraj Anand, Raja Rao, Venkataramani, or any other author. The background of this novel should be the freedom struggle in India.

After reading this novel write an essay of about two pages about (i) the kind of social institutions, such as family, law, political associations mentioned in the novel; (ii) about the values and norms represented through the actions of different characters in the novel.

If possible, compare your note with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

4.4.2 Complementary Nature of Religious and Political Movements

While the religious movements indirectly contributed to political movements through education and reforms, the National Congress and other political parties directly participated in political activities. The former type of movement induced self-confidence, while the latter type created a political

consciousness. Thus, the two types may be viewed as complementary developments in Indian society. We have so far discussed the social and cultural scenario that provided a backdrop for development of sociology in India. However, before we go on to discuss the topic of development of sociology in India and its major pioneers, let us discuss the intellectual climate which gave rise to its emergence.

4.4.3 Political Movements related to Peasants, Women, Minorities, Scheduled Castes and Tribes

The interface of social institutions and political processes has often given impetus to collective action with some degree of organisation. We find that in India desire for social change beginning with lobbying or advocacy has led to political movements with fairly clear objectives, action-plan and organisation. You may discuss such movements arising in India in the context of rising expectation of the masses, which are not fulfilled by current political set-up (See Kothari 1960, Bayley 1962 and Desai 1965). Mukherjee (1977), Rao (1978) and Oommen (1977) have worked on theoretical and substraction aspects of such movements in India. For enumerating examples of political movement in India, we may look at the Telnagana peasant struggle movement between 1946 and 1951. It was led by the Communist Party of India (see Dhanagare 2002 (1983)). Similarly, various shades of communist parties have continued to organise the Naxal base movement of the 1960s today (see Bannerjee 2002 or 1980, 1996). Both the Telegana and Naxal bound movements have tried to change the existing agrarian relations.

The scheduled castes and tribes, being the most exploited and oppressed segments of Indian society, have quite a long history of protests, struggles and organised movements. Omvedt (2002 or 2001) has worked on the dalit movement after Ambedkar while Sinha (2002 or 1972) and Singh (2002 or 1983) have studied tribal movements. Women's movements in India and their links with the state are subject matter of studies by such scholars as Lingam (2002 or 1998), Jain (1984) and Desai (1988). Participation of youth in student movements has significance from the point of view of leadership formation that matures in the stage of later roels in regional or national politics (see Shah 2002 or 1979. The idea of mentioning these studies at this point is to take your attention to trends in current sociological pursuits. At the level of master's degree courses, such movements will be part of a full paper on sociology of social and political movements in India. (Please note that the year given after 2002 in the above references refer to first time publication of the articles which have been re-printed in the year 2002 publication, edited by G. Shah).

4.5 INTELLECTUAL ANTECEDENTS OF SOCIOLOGICAL THOUGHT IN INDIA

We may make here a reference to the British impact on Indian elites. India had a classical literary tradition which lasted for centuries. The hallmark of elitism was knowledge of Sanskrit. But during the Bhakti phase (approximately from ninth century A.D.) there was the development of a

high quality literature in regional languages. The Bhaktas, who inspired literary activity in regional languages, were either writers themselves or else their teachings inspired literary work. Mention may be made of Tulsidas and Surdas (Awadhi and Braj respectively), Kabir (variant of Hindu), Sankaradeva (Assamese), Chaitanya (Bengali), Namdev and Tukaram (Marathi), Narsi Mehta (Gujarati), Purandaradasa (Kannada), Nayanars and Alwars (Tamil) and many others.

While the Bhaktas remained pre-eminently folk-venerated figures in several regions of India, the elites continued to cling to Sanskrit as the ideal literary form. Prestige was attached to Sanskrit compositions. Even Rabindranath Tagore had to contend with the Bengali traditional elites who held that Sanskrit was much superior medium of instruction. There was a swift but partial change over to English among the Indian elites. According to Edward Shils, in spite of this shift to English there was a sub-conscious longing among the Indian elites for the older Brahminical tradition based on Sanskrit. In other words, the modern English educated elites were more inspired by literary, **humanistic** tradition than by science and technology. This persistence was due to the hold of Sanskrit on the elites.

4.5.1 Dilemma Between Tradition and Modernity

In sum, the Indian intellectual of the twentieth century were caught in the dilemma between tradition and modernity. Tradition stood for the old customs, values, ideals etc. while modernity implied the impact of the Western ideals of rationality freedom, equality etc. Tradition and modernity should not be viewed as polar opposites, but some scholars (e.g. Edward Shills) have used them as a device to distinguish between the old and the new values. Coomaraswamy, a famous social thinker and curator of Indian art in U.S.A., almost veered to the rejection of practices. He meant by tradition the basic premises or core values which were common to both the East and the West. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, an eminent sociologist, took the other extreme of setting aside the traditions of India which were rooted in religion and spirituality. He tried to show the secular strength of India. Yet, he did not altogether reject tradition. He wanted to extract the secular component of Indian culture and use it for human progress.

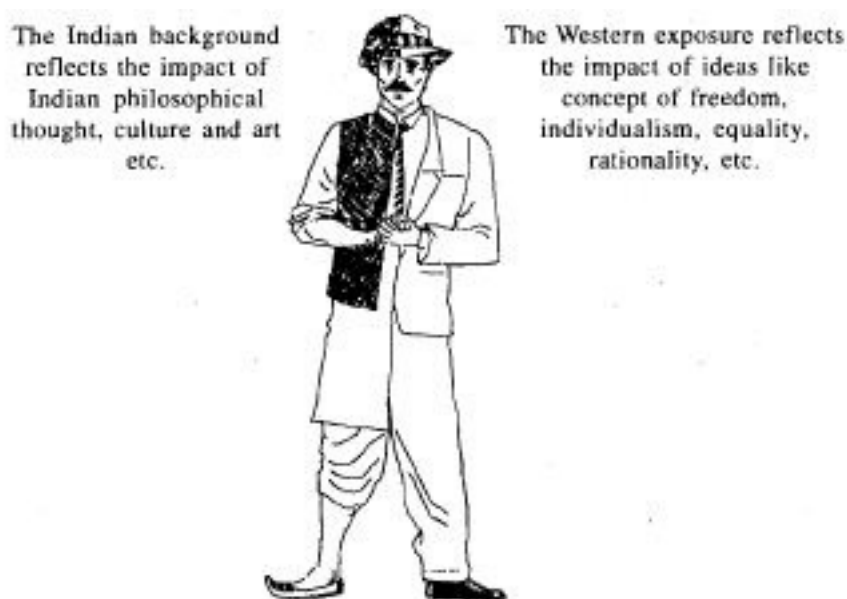


Figure 4.1: The Indian Intellectual

4.5.2 Benoy Kumar Sarkar

Benoy Kumar Sarkar was a rationalist. He did not agree with the view that the West was materialistic, while the East was spiritualistic. Sarkar argued that Indian society had materialistic as well as secular components. India's past could be described in terms of positive, materialistic terms. He did not subscribe to the view that India was mystical or otherworldly. Sarkar welcomed the transition of India from a feudal, agrarian past to a capitalistic present. The colonial rule had broken up the isolation of India and brought it into the global mainstream, capitalism or bourgeois culture was the dominant force of contemporary times. In his search for the rationalistic basis of India, B.K. Sarkar resembled Max Weber, who developed a sociology of capitalism. However, Sarkar focused on political aspects of capitalism, while Karl Marx discussed its economic aspects and Max Weber focused on bureaucracy.

In order to march along with the developed societies of the world, India needed self-confidence and poise. Sarkar was an atheist but he did not discard India's religious tradition. According to him, even India's religions had a secular basis. For example, the deities such as Shiva, Parvati or Ganesha were the creations of human mind rather than of divine origin. The Indian tradition with its undue emphasis on mysticism and renunciation could not help India's adaptation to changing times. It was appropriate, therefore, for educated Indians to reassert their rationalist, secular past and equip themselves for the challenges of an urban-industrial society. Sarkar, for example, was opposed to religious revivalism.

The bourgeoisie in the West had succeeded in setting aside their feudal past. The hegemony of the church with its mysticism and renunciation had receded to the background in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. The individuals were no longer mere cogs in the wheel of collectivity. Not only new productive patterns but also new social attitudes were emerging in the new epoch. Individualism gained prominence in the industrial society of Europe. The individuals needed to be aggressive and motivated for action and achievement. The old collective identities were, therefore, buried and new individualistic goals and aspirations began to thrive.

Sarkar was inspired by the two political philosophers of Europe: Niccolo Machiavelli and Thomas Hobbes. Niccolo Machiavelli (fourteenth century) wrote his political philosophy in the early days of emerging modern capitalism. The capitalist individual was aggressive, self-confident, and more interested in material gains. His prescription for political rulers was that they should seize hold the opportunity and act ruthlessly to achieve the goals. Thomas Hobbes (seventeenth century) was a later political philosopher. He proposed the theory of social contract. The self-seeking individuals depicted by Niccolo Machiavelli were no longer suitable for the more advanced capitalist society which required order and balance. Therefore, individuals must give up their selfish pursuits, enter into a social contract and abide by norms. This way the individual aggression would

be kept under reasonable control. Sarkar stated that Indians should firstly give up their mystical attitude and secondly they should develop a social perspective suitable to the capitalist order. Important works of B.K. Sarkar are *Positive Background of Hindu Sociology*, 4 Volumes (published in 1914 and 1937); and *Political Institutions and Theories of Hindus* (1922). He taught economics at Calcutta University.

4.5.3 Ananda Coomaraswamy

Ananda Coomaraswamy was an early Indian social thinker whose works helped in the development of sociology in India. He was an **idealist**, i.e. a person believing in the abstract values of life like God, values of goodness, etc. In this he stood in contrast to B.K. Sarkar who wished to explore the material basis of Indian society. The first two or three decades of this century may be described as a period of Indian Renaissance. Notable personalities such as Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo, Rabindranath Tagore were also trying to project an idealistic view of India. In essence all these men held that the greatness of India lay in its spirituality. Through the revival of her spirit, India could not only overcome its poverty and backwardness, but also bring solace to the West afflicted by materialistic greed and disrupted by war and violence.

Ananda Coomaraswamy extensively explored the evolution of art in India, especially architecture and sculpture. For him, Indian art in its myriad forms was not merely a decorative or aesthetic object, but it was the key to understand the Indian mind which recognises oneness of all in the universe or unity in diversity. It was an enduring testimony to a great civilisation and a culture. It embodied the ideals and values of the mankind. In a country where many people are not literate, the Indian art served as a visual medium of instruction; it depicted epics, puranas, and legends in stone, clay or marble for the instruction of folks. Further, it treasured India's religious values and summed up India's recognition of oneness in all forms of expression. Viewed thus, the harsh and the tender, the ugly and the beautiful, the rational and the expressive were all part and parcel of the total artistic experience.

Ananda Coomaraswamy wrote many books interpreting philosophy of Indian art. In the West, India's achievements in the past had been known mainly through the Sanskrit texts. The West had only a vague notion of Indian art which had developed over nearly four millennia. Coomaraswamy held that Indian images were not merely anthropomorphic forms (i.e. folk beliefs transformed in human forms) but also veritable treasure houses of Indian ideals. The Shiva-Nataraja not only denoted a peak achievement in sculpture but also symbolised liberation. Shiva's dance ended the mortal limitations and freed the human soul from its temporal trappings. He noted that there were many parallels between the Indian art and the European Gothic art. Although there were many interpretations of Indian art previously by W.B. Havell, Percy Brown etc., Coomaraswamy presented for the first time a comprehensive philosophy of Indian art.

Ananda Coomaraswamy made a unique distinction between tradition and modernity. He held that tradition was the epoch anchored in values of

collective life and qualitative achievement. As such it was common to all countries – East, Middle-East or West. This epoch was disrupted by the Industrial Revolution whose influence became world-wide. The competitiveness of the new age made human beings materialists and grasping. Ananda Coomaraswamy did not belittle science and technology. But he regretted that in modern times, the science and technology have been put to wrong uses; people became aggressive and selfish; the nations tried to dominate each other through violence and warfare.

In comparing East and West, he did not try to uphold India's superiority over the rest in spirituality and human values. He wrote extensively on the commonness of mysticism in European, Chinese and Arabic religious texts and documents. But he seemed to hold that the Western countries had smothered their mystical and spiritual traditions under the weight of materialistic achievements. Therefore, India could stimulate the spiritual regeneration of the West. India in a special sense stood for the whole of Asia. Although China was a great civilisation, much of its culture was moulded by Buddhism. The other Asian countries such as Japan, Thailand, Sri Lanka and Cambodia too have been moulded by India's culture. In the final analysis, what mattered was the activation of core values which were common heritage of all her mankind. Ananda Coomaraswamy wrote: "The chosen people of the future can be no nation, no race, but an aristocracy of the whole world, in whom the vigour of European action will be united to the serenity of Asiatic thought".

In a similar vein, he wanted the nationalists in India, who were then struggling for Independence, to nurture broad visions. He wanted the young Indians to aspire not only for independent India but for a better world free from strife and tension. Merely imitating the West in the name of progress was not going to help the emerging Indian nation. Indian women should redefine themselves in the Indian idiom; women should be true to themselves and exist on their own terms. If they merely compete with men, forgetting the core values, then they would not reach fulfillment. Ananda Coomaraswamy, in sum, did not advocate orientalising of the West nor did he desire a synthesis of the two. He stood for a return to "the first principles" by which he meant the moral values which were the basis of all humankind. His important works are: *The Dance of Shiva* (Indian edition, 1974); and *Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* (Indian edition, 1974).

4.5.4 Some Other Intellectuals

Radhakamal Mukerjee and G.S. Ghurye, two noted sociologists of Lucknow and Bombay Universities, respectively, were more directly influenced by India's Sanskrit heritage. They looked at modernity as an instrument of adapting traditions to contemporary conditions. In comparison to them, D.P. Mukerji, another eminent sociologist of Lucknow, started off as a Marxist. He viewed tradition and modernity as confronting each other and shaping each other, but he rejected the final Marxist solution of an Utopian state. In other words, he went back to Indian tradition for reconstructing modern India. You will learn more extensively about the contribution made by these three pioneers of sociology in India. But before doing that let us first understand the structure of education in India during the British period. This has had considerable influence on the nature and

type of sociology, besides other social sciences like economics, political science, etc. which developed in India. Sociology in India to a large extent became influenced by such developments primarily in Britain and then America and Europe. Therefore, to understand the structure of education in India is very important.

4.5.5 Structure of Modern Education in India

A few words may be said about the structure of Indian education. In the three British Presidencies, Calcutta, Bombay and Madras, universities were established during the nineteenth century. In the princely states of India such as Baroda, Mysore, Hyderabad etc., institutions were established for modern education. While higher institutions had English medium, the lower schools had vernacular (i.e. regional languages) medium. The purpose of education was to train Indians in arts and sciences so they would help in the smooth functioning of British rule in India. The educated Indians were usually absorbed into the lower rungs of administration and judiciary.

In the arts and sciences, a limited number of subjects were taught. These included English, history, philosophy, economics, physics, chemistry, botany and zoology. Sociology came to be taught as a major subject only after the first two decades of the twentieth century.

Sociology developed as a discipline primarily due to the need felt by the British rulers during the colonial period to understand the customs, manners and social institutions of the Indian people. For better administration they required to know the customs and practices of the people whom they were trying to govern. Thus initially it was the British administrators such as, Herbert Risley, J. H. Hutton, Wilson, Alfred Lyell, Baines, etc. who conducted extensive studies of Indian peoples, their cultures and races.

Sociology was introduced in 1914 in Bombay University. The Government of India gave a grant to the university for teaching of sociology and a course of lectures in sociology and economics was offered to the post-graduate students in the same year. In 1919, department of sociology and civics was founded under the leadership of Patrick Geddes who was a distinguished biologist and town-planner.

It was introduced in Calcutta University in 1917, in the Post-Graduate Councils of Arts and Sciences by Sir Brajendranath Seal. Seal was appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of Mysore University at this time but he was a Professor of Philosophy at Calcutta earlier. It was his efforts and the efforts of A.R. Wadia of the Mysore University, which helped establish sociology as a discipline in the Indian universities. In Calcutta, sociology was taught by Radhakamal Mukerjee and Benoy Kumar Sarkar. Both these sociologists are the pioneers in their fields. Radhakamal Mukerjee later went to Lucknow, which became another center for sociological learning in India in 1921, besides Calcutta and Bombay. He along with D.P. Mukerji and D.N. Majumdar, one a Marxologist/ sociologist and the other a social anthropologist helped found Lucknow an influential centre of teaching and research in sociology and anthropology.

We will discuss the emergence of sociology and anthropology further in section 4.6. Before going on to it, why not first complete Check Your Progress 2?

Check Your Progress 2

- i) Fill in the blanks:
 - a) The National Congress was founded in 1885 by
 - b) The National Congress was meant to be a forum for debates and discussions.
 - c) With the coming of Mahatma Gandhi, the Congress became a political party.
 - d) The socio-religious movements induced in the Indian people while the political movement created a consciousness in her people.
- ii) Describe some of the basic ideas of Benoy Kumar Sarkar using about five lines.

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4.6 EMERGENCE OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY IN INDIA

Sociology, as a discipline, came much after the contributions made by social thinkers, philosophers, administrators who worked at understanding the Indian society, in general, as well as studying some specific aspects of Indian society, such as law, family, religion, caste system and so on.

It is the contributions made by the Indologists, such as, Henry Maine, Alfred Lyell, etc. which helped the development of sociology in India. They emphasised the need to preserve the indigenous social institutions found in Indian society rather than destroying them and imposing an alien way of life on her people. They recognised the past glory of Indian cultural and literary tradition.

Besides Indologists, there were British administrators who made extensive study of Indian people, their races and cultures. Most of these studies helped generate a body of knowledge, preserved in the Census Reports, Imperial Gazatteers, District Gazetteers, etc. as well as in books and monographs, which are referred by social anthropologists and sociologists even today.

Sociology was better established on the continent i.e. in European countries like France, Germany, etc. than in England. It took even stronger roots in American universities where it has retained a dominant position till now. Alongside of sociology, anthropology was also developing in Indian

universities. In the Indian context, it is just not possible to distinguish between anthropology and sociology except in terms of methodology. Generally, sociology has studied urban-industrial groups, while anthropology has focused on tribes, castes and communities. But the sociologists have also been anthropologists and vice versa. In fact, it is better to use the term “ethno-sociologists” to describe those writing in the fields of sociology and anthropology. Ethno-sociologists combine documentary and literary data with oral traditions and field data. Thus, in the Indian academic studies, we find that tribe, caste and region have been linked with each other in a variety of ways. Both sociology and anthropology in India have one thing in common: they are mainly based on empirical data. Both of them deal with aggregates of people in a number of locales, village, town and city. During British rule, a number of ethnographic works were written by J.H. Hutton, Edward Thurston, H. Risley, L.S.S. O’ Malley and others. There were also the writings of Sir Henry Maine and W.H. Baden-Powell on the village community in India. Besides, the many district gazetteers produced by the British officials provided ethnographic and economic data pertaining to Indian society. The Indian sociological works (e.g. G.S. Ghurye’s works) have often drawn upon these early books and documents written by British officials or observers.

In these two units, namely History and Development of Sociology in India Part I and Part II, references will be made to Indian writers who may be regarded as pioneers in Indian sociology. It may be observed that there was a difference between Western and Indian intellectual developments. In the West, modern intellectuals strove to “secularise” the thought. They were reacting to the hegemony of church in doing so. By contrast, in India, the religions did not place a bar on free thinking. The stimulus to creative work in the Indian social sciences came from interaction with the West. Now let us examine briefly in the sub-section 4.6.1 the link between sociology and social anthropology, which as you already know are closely interlinked. Then we will discuss the link between sociology and Indology in sub-section 4.6.2

4.6.1 Link Between Sociology and Social Anthropology

As has been already mentioned, the link between sociology and social anthropology is very close in India. The emergence and development of both these disciplines was influenced by the growth of nationalism in India. The nationalist movement was itself a product of the impact of the West, especially British colonial rule in India. The repercussion of this impact was felt widely due to several reasons, such as great improvement in communications, transport facilities, printing press, etc.

Modern law and Western education generated a new self awareness in Indian people. The awareness of people along the lines of religion, sects, caste, tribe, region, etc. became more heightened on the one hand, while at a wider level a new sense of unity emerged. All these social changes gave rise to new problems (Srinivas and Panini 1986: 18).

The roots of sociology and social anthropology go back to the period when British officials realised that a knowledge of Indian culture and social life

was indispensable for them in their administration work. In 1769, Henry Verelst, the Governor of Bengal and Bihar, stressed in his directives to revenue supervisors the need for collecting information about the leading families and their customs. Besides the officials, the missionaries too, recorded valuable data about the society of that period. For example, Abbe Dubois, a French missionary in Mysore, wrote in 1816, a book entitled, *Hindu Manners, Customs and Ceremonies*, which is very valuable even today. In this book he wrote about the life, customs and rituals of the people with whom he lived. He studied caste and interrelations between castes.

In 1817, the first all-India census was undertaken by the British government. In 1901, Sir Herbert Risley attempted to establish an ethnographic survey of India which was part of the census. The census data became an instrument of official policy. It became a method of creating barriers between Hindus and other groups like tribes, between the various castes, and so on. The British began recording the scheduled castes as distinct from the other Hindu castes as a policy (Srinivas and Panini 1986: 20).

We have already described the establishment of sociology and social anthropology in the Indian Universities. But even before this development, several Indian and foreign scholars such as Brajendranath Seal, Patrick Geddes, W.H.R. Rivers, L.K. Ananthakrishna Iyer and S.C. Roy contributed to this field.

B.N. Seal, a Professor of Philosophy at Calcutta University was one of the first scholars to draw the attention of the university world towards sociology. He was actively involved in refuting the unilinear evolutionary doctrines, which believed that society like an organism has evolved from a simple primitive stage to a more complex industrial stage (a good example of this doctrine is the one developed by the second founding father of sociology, Herbert Spencer. For more details refer back to Unit 2 of this block).

According to the proponents of this doctrine Indian society, like several others, in its various aspects represented the lower rungs of a ladder. The twentieth century European civilisation represented the highest point of this ladder. This was an ethnocentric belief of European scholars who believed that their society was the best and most evolved while the rest of the world was in various stages of evolution.

Sir B.N. Seal rejected this view and wrote and lectured extensively, in defense of Indian culture throughout his *Comparative Sociology* (Becker & Barnes 1961: 1142). Seal was responsible for introducing sociology in Calcutta University and later Mysore University.

In Bombay, Patrick Geddes was responsible for the introduction of sociology. A department of sociology and civics opened in 1919 headed by Geddes. This was a landmark in the development of sociology in India. Geddes was influenced by Le Play, an eminent sociologist. Geddes was interested in human geography (i.e. in the relation between culture and environment) and town planning with specific interest in the problems of urban deterioration. He studied the town planning of such cities, as Calcutta, Indore, and temple cities of the South which are of great value. Many

Indian scholars were impressed by his work. G.S. Ghurye, Radhakamal Mukerjee show the influence of Geddes in their own sociological writings (Srinivas and Panini 1986: 25).

Besides these noted scholars who helped establish sociology in India, the ones who developed it and provided a firm foundation to this discipline are D.N. Majumdar and N.K. Bose. D.N. Majumdar of Lucknow university was trained in anthropology at Calcutta University. He worked extensively in both the anthropological field as well as, social anthropology. He studied the races, tribes and cultures in various regions of India. His specific interest was in the study of problems of culture changes and adaptation of tribes and their social problems. He conducted one of the first village studies in India of a village near Lucknow. He also conducted a survey of the city of Kanpur.

N.K. Bose, also a student of Calcutta University, made a very significant contribution to the development of sociology in India. He was a political and social activist who worked as a personal secretary of Mahatma Gandhi during his Noakhali (now in Bangladesh) travels in 1947. He was director of the Anthropological Survey of India from 1959-64 and from 1967-70 he held the office of the Commissioner for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes in the Government of India. His contributions were basically in the study of Indian civilisation and culture. He had a historical approach. He was influenced by the teachings of Gandhi and later wrote a critical analysis of Gandhism. His best work is believed to be the *Hindu Samajer Garhan*, which is in Bengali (Srinivas & Panini 1986: 31).

In this section we have described the links between sociology and social anthropology in the context of their growth and development in India. Let us now see the link between sociology and Indology in the same context. Both these aspects are not separate from each other. Many Indological writings are sociological or social anthropological in nature. It is only for the purpose of clarity that we are discussing them in different sub-sections. Before going on to the next sub-section, let us complete Activity 2.

Activity 2

Select two persons in your neighbourhood. One should be a Pundit or Moulvi or any person who has knowledge of the religious scriptures of his/ her religion. Choose another person who has received formal education at least uptill B.A. in any of the social sciences, such as sociology, political science or economics.

Ask both these persons questions:

- i) Is Indian society materialistic or spiritualistic?
- ii) What are the guiding norms and values of our society?

Write a note of about a page on the opinions of these two persons in two parts, namely –

- i) similar points (ii) different points

Compare your note, if possible with the notes of other students at your Study Centre.

4.6.2 Link Between Sociology and Indology

The development of sociology in India owes deeply to the contributions made by the Orientalists, such as Sir William Jones, Henry Maine, Alfred Lyell, Max Mueller and others. These scholars studied the rich ancient cultural and philosophical tradition of India. It is for these reasons that they are known as the Indologists. Indology is the study of India and its culture.

Sir William Jones established the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1787. Here he introduced the study of Sanskrit and Indology. One of the main tasks of this society was the publication of a journal devoted to anthropological and indological interests such as study of Sanskrit, comparative jurisprudence, comparative mythology, etc. Scholars like Max Muller learnt Sanskrit and helped in the translations of ancient epics and literature which had been long forgotten by the Indian people.

The knowledge of Sanskrit helped understand the great cultural and philosophical tradition of India. At a time when most educated Indians were facing ridicule at the hands of the British rulers, this knowledge helped revive the self-respect of the people. Ancient law and society came to be examined carefully by the Indologists. Henry Maine visited India and wrote *Village Communities in the East and the West* (1871),

Besides these scholars, there are other who used Indian material such as Karl Marx reports to study religion (Srinivas & Panini 1988: 22).

As already mentioned, the Indological writings dealing with the Indian philosophy, art and culture are reflected in the works of most of the Indian scholars. Ananda Coomarswamy, B.K. Sarkar, Radhakamal Mukerjee, G.S. Ghurye, D.P. Mukerji are some of the examples who have revealed this in their works. We discussed the first two thinkers in this unit but we will give you more details about the contributions of Radhakamal Mukerjee, D.P. Mukerji and G.S. Ghurye in the next units (5).

4.6.3 Irawati Karve

Besides these social thinkers there are others like Irawati Karve who has extensively used the Indological literature in her sociological writings. She was a student of G.S. Ghurye in Bombay. She came to head the combined department of sociology and anthropology which started in the late 1930s in Pune. She did extensive field-work in various regions of India. Her knowledge of Sanskrit helped her in understanding ancient literature like scriptures, law books and epics. She used this data to understand the kinship organisation in India. Her book *Kinship Organisation in India* (1952) is one of the best analysis of kinship system found in India (Srinivas and Panini 1986: 30). Irawati Karve belonged to an enlightened family and entered the family of Maharshi Karve as a daughter-in-law. That family had advocated reforms among the Brahmans to the extent of permitting widow remarriage. Her initial work was on the anthropometric measurements of various groups in Maharashtra: she distinguished social groups by their linguistic affiliations and was able to trace origins of different people following the same occupation (potters) and found how some of their groups were exogamous and formed 'castes'. On the other

hand their 'cluster' (or village community) of occupation based castes was joining together of such castes.

Her major work was *Kinship Organisation in India* (1953) in which she divided India into four zones and attempted their comparison. The work starts with the genealogies of the characters in the Hindu epic, Mahabharata and incorporates field notes from different parts of India. She read the Mahabharata intensively. She wrote on Hinduism and gave a new interpretation. In her work she combined her interest in the study of classics (called Indology by the Western writers) with field studies.

She was awarded a special prize for her work, *Yugantar*, based on Mahabharata. It was originally written in Marathi and later translated in several languages, including Hindi and English. Some of her literary pieces found a way into school books in Marathi. Those who have cleared their matriculation in Maharashtra know her as a litterateur and consider it an addition to their knowledge when they are told by their sociology teachers that she was also a sociologist. She laid the foundations of sociology and anthropology in Deccan College, Pune where great intellectuals in various fields were her contemporaries, for example, H.D. Sankhalia in Pre-History, D.R. Gadgil in Economics and so on. This academic climate led ultimately to the development of the University of Pune.

She was an engaging conversationalist and an eloquent speaker. She was also a brilliant teacher of the subject and of course, she was first in time and first in importance among the woman sociologists in India. She has been hailed as the first feminist sociologist of India (see Uberio 1993:96, and Jain).

Even today, the ancient Indian literature reveals a lot about the religion and society in India. Several sociologists are still making efforts to understand Indian society through its literature, art, etc.

Check Your Progress 3

- i) Name the three British Presidencies in which universities were established during the nineteenth century. Use about 2 lines.

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- ii) Who introduced sociology in the Calcutta University? Describe in about 10 lines his contribution to sociology.

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iii) What is Indology? Name some of the Indologists. Use about 5 lines to write your answer.

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4.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you learnt about social antecedents of Indian sociological thought. We have described the socio-religious movements for reform in India and the political movement for independence. Both the religious as well as political movements are complementary in nature. The freedom struggle was led by leaders who primarily belonged to the middle classes. Middle class, as a category, emerged due to the impact of the British rule in India.

We have described the intellectual antecedents of Indian sociological thought and provided in Unit 4 an outline of the emergence of sociology and social anthropology in India.

4.8 KEY WORDS

Advaita	The vedantic philosophy of Sankaracharya, which believes in the existence of one God
Forum	An assembly or programme for discussion of public matters related to either social-political or economic matters
Humanistic	It is that system of thought or action which is based on the nature, dignity and ideals of human beings
Idealist	A person, whose behaviour or thought is based on ideals such as, those of a visionary or impractical dreamer, or those of an adherent or practitioner of idealism in art, philosophy or literature
Idolatrous	Worship of a statue or image of God
Middle Class	In this unit it is not used as a purely economic category and refers to that category of Indians who belong to the educated class

Missionaries	Those concerned with religious missions, in the context of this unit, the term refers to persons sent by religious (Christian) community to convert heather (non-Christians).
Multi-ethnic	A society having many races and cultures, like India is a multi-ethnic society
Orientalists	Those scholars who study the Eastern cultures like China, India, Pakistan etc.
Persecution	To discriminate against some people or a social group on the basis of religion, caste or class, for example, the persecution of the Jews in Europe on religious grounds
Rationalist	A person who believes in accepting reason as the only source of knowledge and as the only basis for forming one's opinions, beliefs or course of action
Vedanta	A system of Hindu monistic (belief in one God) or pantheistic (belief in many Gods) philosophy based on the Vedas

4.9 FURTHER READING

Oommen T.K. and P.N. Mukerji, (Eds.) 1986. *Indian Sociology*. Popular Prakashan: Bombay.

4.10 SPECIMEN ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

- i) The six schools of thought of Indian philosophy are Yoga, Sankhya, Nyaya, Vaisheshika, Vedanta and Mimamasa.
- ii) Three important changes brought about in Indian society due to the impact of the British rule are
 - a) the old traditions and customs based on religion began to decline and new social and economic forces emerged.
 - b) The classical languages, like Sanskrit and Persian, declined and English became the official language.
 - c) Traditional handicrafts declined and were replaced by machine made goods produced in England.
- iii) Raja Ram Mohun Roy (1772-1835) of Bengal founded Brahma Samaj in the nineteenth century. It was a spiritual forum where a monotheistic (i.e. belief in one God), non-idolatrous (i.e. without worshipping a statue or image of God) worship could take place. It stood for a combination of Christian teachings with Vedanta.

Check Your Progress 2

- i)
 - a) Octavius Hume
 - b) Political
 - c) Mass
 - d) Self-confidence, political
- ii) Benoy Kumar Sarkar was a rationalist who tried to show the secular strength of India. He attempted to bring out the secular component of Indian culture in order to use it for human progress. He did not believe that Indian and western cultures were polar opposites, one being spiritualistic and other materialistic. According to him India had both materialistic and secular elements and it was not other wordly or mystical as popularly believed.

Check Your Progress 2

- i) The three British Presidencies where universities were established in the nineteenth century were Calcutta, Bombay and Madras.
- ii) Sociology was introduced by Sir Brajendranath Seal in Calcutta University in 1917 in the Post-Graduate Councils of Arts and Sciences. He was a Professor of Philosophy at this university and later went to Mysore University as its Vice-Chancellor. He was opposed to the unilinear evolutionary doctrine advocated by the European scholars who believed their society to be the most evolved while societies like India were at a lower rung. Seal conducted studies in what he called “Comparative Sociology”.
- iii) Indology is the study of Indian society, its culture, art philosophy, etc. Some of the noted Indologists are Sir William Jones, Henry Maine and Max Mueller.