# The Modern Social Sciences in India

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This article traces in outline the history of the modern social sciences in India from the late eighteenth century to the present. It begins with an account of the "discovery" of India by the European Enlightenment which created the field of Indological studies. It then describes the practices of the modern disciplines of social knowledge in India in their relation to the institutions of governance created under British colonial rule and thereafter to the project of the Indian nationalist movement. The final section deals with the professionalization of the disciplines in the postcolonial period. The focus is on the disciplines of history, economics, sociology, social anthropology and political science.

## 1. COLONIAL ORIGINS

### 1.1 The Intellectual Discovery of India by the West

The most significant date in the early institutional history of the modern knowledges in India is 1784 when the Asiatic Society of Bengal was founded in Calcutta at the initiative of William Jones (1746-1794), an official of the East India Company and a major linguist of his time. For almost a hundred years after its establishment, the Asiatic Society was the chief institution in India for encouraging, organizing and propagating knowledge about the country's history, philosophy, religion, language, literature, art, architecture, law, trade and manufacture. Most European scholars who worked in India were associated with the Society and helped establish Indological scholarship as a specialized field in the world of modern learning.[1]

It was above all in the study of language that Indological scholarship became particularly important for the rise of the scientific disciplines of social knowledge in Europe in the

nineteenth century. The study of Sanskrit grammar based on the classical texts of Pāṇini (c. 400 B.C.) provided the foundation for modern linguistic analysis and, following upon the pioneering work of Friedrich von Schlegel (1772-1829), Franz Bopp (1791-1867) and Eugène Burnouf (1801-1852), led to the growth of the field of comparative philology. The tracing of linguistic relationships established the common properties of an Indo-European family of languages. This in turn produced in the second half of the nineteenth century theories of a common Aryan race, two branches of which were supposed to have migrated and settled in India and Europe, respectively.[2]

The collection and study of classical Sanskrit and Pali texts by European Indologists created the idea of India as a civilization of great antiquity and philosophical and aesthetic sophistication. The compilation and translation of these texts into European languages, first by the Asiatic Society but later most famously in the series The Sacred Books of the East edited by Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900), made available to the European intellectual world the materials for the construction of a distinct civilizational entity called India. Every major current of social theory in the nineteenth century took account of this entity in its description of the historical emergence and character of the modern world. The English political economists and utilitarians, the French positivists and the great system-builders such as Hegel, Marx and Weber all devoted considerable attention to defining the place of India in the dynamics of world history.

### 1.2 The Colonial Description of Indian Society

The image of India created by the Indologists, confined as they were almost entirely to dealing with religious, philosophical and literary texts of the "high" (and predominantly Brahmanical) tradition, was supremely abstract. On the ground in India, however, the British rulers, following their military conquests, were faced with the task of raising revenues and keeping the order in a vast subcontinent. Carrying out this task meant the collection and recording of a body of empirical information about India of astounding range and detail, often shaped by projects of social engineering in which the colony acted as a

laboratory for physiocrats in the eighteenth century, utilitarians and liberal reformers in the nineteenth and welfarists in the twentieth. Taken in its entirety, governmental information of various kinds still remains by far the most important source of factual knowledge about Indian society.

There were four main forms of production and organization of this knowledge. The earliest was the writing of land revenue histories. Soon after the conquests in Bengal, British officials began to compile detailed local histories of claims, titles, rights, privileges etc., both formal and customary, of all classes of people to the use and disposal of land. Soon this became a regular series of published materials on revenue history and land settlement, organized district by district and updated every three or four decades.

The second form of official knowledge was that of the survey, which began in British India as early as in 1765 with the mapping of the conquered territories. The central institution was the Survey of India, but through the nineteenth century nearly a dozen other specialized and permanent organizations were set up to produce a cumulative body of information on India's natural resources and social and cultural features.

The census was the third institutional form of colonial knowledge. Following initial local exercises at counting the population, the Census of India was conducted once every decade from 1871. It enumerated basic information on age, occupation, caste, religion, literacy, place of birth and current residence of the entire population of British India. The census reports not only presented detailed statistical information but also contained many analytical studies on the caste system, religion, fertility and morbidity, domestic organization and economic structure. It provided the basis for such widely used government publications as the Imperial Gazetteers series which compiled all relevant imformation for each district of British India and the Tribes and Castes series in which scholar-officials put together detailed ethnographies of castes and tribal populations for each region of India.

The fourth form was that of the museum in which archaeological and artistic specimens, texts and manuscripts

were collected and preserved for the use of scholars. The first large-scale museum was set up in 1814 at the Asiatic Society and this was the collection which later became the core of the Indian Museum in Calcutta established in 1866 as the principal imperial museum. In 1874, the Archaeological Survey was set up to record archaeological sites, carry out excavations, preserve historical monuments, develop on-site museums and build collections of archaeological specimens.[3]

The voluminous published materials of official information provided for European scholars the basis for grand theoretical constructions about the nature of Indian society. Three institutions were thought to contain the key to the mystery of unchanging India: the caste system, despotic kingship and the village community. The caste system was supposed to have imposed a rigid division of labour which hindered social mobility, the institution of Oriental despotism meant a one-way extraction of the surplus from the peasant communities to a ruling elite immersed in luxury consumption, and the largely self-governing and self-reproducing village communities ensured a low-level subsistence production. This, it was argued, explained why, despite frequent changes in political regimes at the top, Indian society had remained stagnant and unresponsive to change.

## 2. NATIONALIST CONSTRUCTIONS

### 2.1 The Institutional Context

The first formal institution of modern Western learning for Indians was the Hindu College established in Calcutta in 1817. Schools and colleges for Western education proliferated all across India in the subsequent decades and in 1857 three universities were set up - at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras - to regulate the courses of study and conduct public examinations. Through the second half of the nineteenth century, secondary and higher education, consisting mainly of courses in the modern Western sciences and humanities and using both English and the modern Indian languages as media of instruction, expanded considerably, chiefly through the efforts of nationalist educationists and social reformers.

By that time, an arena of public discussion on social

and political questions had been created, especially in cities such as Calcutta, Bombay, Poona or Madras, in which intellectuals, often belonging to the new learned societies or associated with particular journals or newspapers, would engage in well-informed and theoretically sophisticated debates. Many of these public intellectuals were lawyers or teachers by profession, but before the formal disciplinization of the social sciences in university departments in the early decades of the twentieth century, they were the pioneers in modern scientific writing on social questions in India.

## 2.2 History

As far as traditional genres of history-writing in India are concerned, there were two main types. One was derived from the cosmic histories of the Puranic or mythological tradition in Sanskrit, in which mythical stories about gods and goddesses merged unproblematically with dynastic histories of earthly kings and queens. The other was the court history tradition, written mainly in Persian, followed by the Muslim rulers of India which chronicled the deeds of kings and dynasties. By the eighteenth century, the two genres were sometimes combined in regional forms of genealogical histories of prominent landed or trading families written in the vernacular languages.

These forms were in general rapidly superseded in the late nineteenth century following the adoption by the new Indian intellectual elites of Western historiographical modes for writing Indian history. Modern historical writing by Indians emerged mainly through an interlocution with British histories of India of which the three most influential texts were those of James Mill (1773-1836), Mountstuart Elphinstone (1779-1859) and Vincent A. Smith (1848-1920). Indian historians were strongly attracted by the idea established by the Indologists of the greatness of ancient Indian/Aryan civilization. Much of their efforts went into the discovery, authentication and interpretation of textual and other sources that threw light on early India. Their nationalist persuasions also made them reject the prejudiced generalization about the Oriental despot: a major focus of Indian researches on ancient history was on establishing reliable chronologies and accounts of political

dynasties in the pre-Islamic period. R. G. Bhandarkar's (1837-1925) The Early History of the Deccan (1884) and H. C. Raychaudhuri's (1892-1957) Political History of Ancient India (1923) are two of the more important examples of such research. Nationalist historians of the early twentieth century were also concerned to show the existence of responsible monarchy and representative institutions of local governance in early India: K. P. Jayaswal's (1881-1937) Hindu Polity (1918) and Radha Kumud Mookerji's Fundamental Unity of India (1914) and Local Government in Ancient India (1919) were influential books.

A common trope in the Indological construction was a narrative in which an ancient period of civilizational greatness was followed by medieval darkness. This idea was bolstered by the works of British historians of India who portrayed Islamic rulers as intolerant, degenerate and brutal. Although W. H. Moreland (1868-1938) made major advances in the early twentieth century in the more systematic and reliable use of sources for the Mughal period, his overall narrative was still one of Mughal India as a medieval tyranny relieved by the advent of British rule. Some Indian historians such as Jadunath Sarkar (1870-1958) and Ishwari Prasad (18...), who were influential writers on the period of Islamic rule, followed the same pattern. Countering this tendency were the works of Muhammad Habib (1927) and K. M. Ashraf (1935) who attempted to describe the Sultanate and Mughal periods as a distinct phase in Indian history with its own economic, social and cultural achievements - a phase in which civilizational elements from the Islamic world mingled creatively with non-Islamic elements to produce a new synthesis. At the same time, historians such as I. H. Qureshi (1942) emphasized the distinctly Islamic character of the Muslim monarchies in India and insisted that they were benevolent, tolerant and efficient systems of rule.[4]

Nationalist accounts of the period of British rule began to appear from the late nineteenth century, more in the Indian languages than in English. This was accompanied by new efforts, supported by learned societies, literary academies and princely states in the different regions, to collect, preserve and disseminate materials of local and regional history. In Bengal, for instance, the first major critical work of

nationalist history - by Akshay Kumar Maitreya (1861-1930) - described the British conquest of Bengal in 1757 as the result of corruption and low intrigue and, contrary to British accounts, portrayed Siraj-ud-daulah, the last ruler of Bengal, as courageous, patriotic and a victim of treachery. In northern India, Bharatendu Harishchandra (1850-1885) and the Kashi Nagari Pracharini Sabha launched a highly influential series of history books in Hindi which fed the new nationalist sentiments by telling a story of seven centuries of "foreign oppression" in India under Muslim rule. In Maharashtra too, nationalist histories fed into strong revivalist feelings for the Maratha empire as a bastion of Hindu rule, but at the initative of men like V. K. Rajwade (1864-1926), V. S. Khare (1858-1924) and G. S. Sardesai (1865-1959), they also produced valuable works of collection, editing and publication of historical sources. Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam were the other languages in which the histories of regional kingdoms were compiled and published, helped by the support given to these efforts by the princely states of Mysore and Travancore-Cochin.

Academic histories produced in university departments in the early twentieth century showed their nationalist affiliations by choosing subjects such as the history of the Maratha or the Sikh empires, but explicitly critical histories of the period of British rule were rare. These came from non-academic circles as, for example, the strongly anti-British history by V. D. Savarkar (1883-1966) of the 1857 revolt as the first war of Indian independence.

## 2.3 Sociological Writings

The first modern social philosophies of Europe to have a significant impact on the new Indian intellectuals were English utilitarianism and French positivism. The works of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill as well as those of Auguste Comte were avidly discussed in some of the new learned societies set up in Calcutta in the mid-nineteenth century. In 1867, the Bengal Social Science Association was founded to 'promote the development of social science' in Bengal. James Long (1814-87), Lal Behary Day (1824-94), Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-91), Abdul Latif (1828-93), Rajendra Lal Mitra (1822-91) and Romesh

Chandra Dutt (1848-1909), leading lights of the new intellectual resurgence in Bengal, were active in this body. The ideas of these men were disseminated through the new Bengali periodical press. Leading social thinkers of the period in Bengal such as Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) and Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay (1827-94), though not belonging to any particular circle, were deeply familiar with current social philosophies of the West.[5]

The main institution of Indian society that came under the new sociological gaze was, not surprisingly, that of caste. Armed with the tools of modern socio-historical analysis, Indian thinkers attempted from the late nineteenth century to write academic treatises on the Indian caste system that were, or so they claimed, better informed and more nuanced and culturally sensitive than the theories put forward by European scholars. Most of these works, such as those of S. V. Ketkar (1909), Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1914) and Bhupendra Nath Dutt (1944), consisted of sociological interpretations of classical, mostly Brahmanical, texts. A strong tendency in many such works was the nationalist desire to discover a rational kernel in the social institution of caste, based on concepts such as the division of labour or the need to maintain a harmonious unity of the social whole in the presence of natural and social differences.

The first university department for the formal study of Sociology as an academic discipline was started at the University of Bombay in 1919 at the initiative of Patrick Geddes (...-...), a town planner and geographer who spent most of his career in India. G. S. Ghurye (...-...), his student at Bombay who did his doctoral work at Cambridge and returned to head the department, is often regarded as the pioneer of academic sociology in India. The Bombay department produced a galaxy of students who would, in the 1950s, dominate the field of sociology and social anthropology. The other Sociology department that had a significant impact was the one at the University of Lucknow, where Radha Kamal Mukherjee (1889-1968), D. P. Mukerji (1894-1961) and D. N. Majumdar (1903-60) were the leading lights. It was largely from this time that Indian sociologists turned their attention from textual interpretation to the empirical study and analysis of social institutions and practices in contemporary India.

Even in the early decades of the twentieth century, it was not customary in Indian intellectual circles to make a distinction between sociology and anthropology. Of those who are regarded as pioneers of what is now recognizable as anthropological research, Sarat Chandra Roy (1878-1942) is the most distinguished figure. A lawyer living in the small town of Ranchi in southern Bihar, a region inhabited by tribal populations, he wrote several pathbreaking ethnographic studies of the Oraon, the Munda and other tribal peoples. He also founded in 1921 Man in India, one of the oldest journals of anthropology in India. Another pioneer was Ananthakrishna Iyer (... -...) who studied the tribes and castes of Cochin and Mysore in the first decade of the century. Nirmal Kumar Bose (1901-72) published in 1929 his book Cultural Anthropology which set out a functional theory of culture. D. N. Majumdar carried out many anthropological studies of tribal groups such as the Ho, the Kol, the Korwa and others, while Verrier Elwin (...-...) studied the tribes of central and north-eastern India. Until the 1940s, anthropological studies in India largely meant the study of tribal peoples.

When the Zoological Survey of India was set up in 1916, it had an Anthropological section. In 1945, less than two years before Indian independence, after much pleading from the anthropologists in the section, the government decided to open an Anthropological Survey of India. The most prominent research at the Survey in its initial years was in physical anthropology and anthropometry.

## 2.4 Economic Thought

The first generation of Indians who took part in public debates over economic issues around the middle of the nineteenth century were well versed in the writings of Adam Smith, David Ricardo, Thomas Malthus and John Stuart Mill and were, in most cases, enthusiastic supporters of the doctrine of free trade. But by the last quarter of the century, leading Indian publicists on economic questions had become critics of English political economy: the influence on them of Friedrich List and the German historical school proved decisive.

The most significant Indian writing on economics in

the late nineteenth century came from western India, especially from Bombay and Poona. This was the region where the first modern industries were started by Indian entrepreneurs; "it is thus not too surprising that the most articulate nationalist thinking on economic matters should appear there. Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917), the most statistically minded writer of the period, is best known for his demonstration of the 'economic drain' from India. He interpreted India's recurrent export surplus with Britain as a symptom of the structural imbalance of a colonial economy and of the net unilateral transfer of purchasing power from India to Britain.

A more elaborate framework of nationalist economic thinking was erected by G. V. Joshi ( - ), Mahadeo Govind Ranade (1842-1901) and Gopal Krishna Gokhale (1866-1915). Their arguments proceeded from a criticism of the colonial policy of repeatedly increasing the tax revenues to balance the budget. They pointed to the intersectoral imbalances that had emerged in India as a result of this despotic policy and argued for a more comprehensive and subtle view of the national economy as a whole. Their perspective was one of industrialization as the path of national economic growth and removal of poverty. They also argued, within the limits of their liberal political views, for state protection and support of infant industry in the face of foreign competition. In many ways, this was the triumvirate that laid out in the nineteenth century the most influential trend in Indian economic thinking that would last for more than a century.

One more significant piece of Indian economic writing from the turn of the century is the two-volume Economic History of India (1900, 1902) by Romesh Chandra Dutt (1848-1909) in which he provided the first academic-historical account of the deindustrialization of the Indian economy from the early nineteenth century. This too would remain a major element in nationalist economic thinking for a long time.[6]

Until the turn of the century, political economy was taught in colleges and universities in India as part of History. In 1909, the first chair in Economics was established at the University of Calcutta and the first undergraduate honours course opened. Soon, other universities followed suit and by the

1920s the first generation of professionally trained economists had emerged to take up academic positions in university Economics departments.

From the 1920s, there was a surge in the publication of research monographs dealing with the empirical description as well as the theoretical problems relating to different aspects of the Indian economy. The following are some of the more significant of them. V. K. R. V. Rao made the first systematic and reliable estimates of India's national income for the years 1925-29 and 1931-32 (published in 1939 and 1940). C. N. Vakil and S. K. Muranjan (1927) made an elaborate presentation of the nationalist viewpoint on monetary policy in which they argued for holding India's gold and foreign exchange reserves at home and for allowing a mutual adjustment between price levels and the exchange rate of the rupee. B. N. Ganguli published in 1938 the first systematic study of agricultural production in the Ganges valley, one of the largest agricultural regions in the country.

Considering the subjects that would be of the greatest interest in postcolonial India, the two areas in which significant developments took place in the period between the two World Wars were those of tariff protection and planned industrialization. Jehangir Coyajee (1924) and B. P. Adarkar (1941) strongly argued the case for discriminating protection of nascent industries that were in danger of being wiped out by unequal foreign competition. The first book on planned industrialization in India was not by an economist but by an engineer-administrator, M. Visvesvaraya (1861-1962), who published his Planned Economy for India in 1934. It contained the first elaboration of the idea of planning as a technical exercise carried out by experts, with industrialization as the key to rapid growth and removal of poverty. Ten years later, a group of Indian industrialists led by Purshotamdas Thakurdas would produce the first major planning document that would become known as the Bombay Plan. After independence, planning would be the most important and challenging area that would engage the attention of Indian economists.'

## 3. SOCIAL SCIENCE IN INDEPENDENT INDIA

## 3.1 The New Institutional Setting

When India became independent in 1947, there were a total of 20 universities in the country. By the early 1980s, there were over 200. This was the result of a huge expansion in higher education directed and financed almost entirely by the federal and state governments. In particular, there was a massive growth in social science teaching and research. In 1969, the Indian Council of Social Science Research was set up by the government to promote and coordinate advanced research in the social science disciplines. In the next two decades, the ICSSR established a network of nearly 25 research institutes and regional centres across the country. In addition, the Indian Council of Historical Research was founded in 1972.

There is no doubt that the base of social science teaching in India has widened enormously from the 1950s. Further, both research and teaching are now much more closely integrated with international, especially Anglo-American, professional norms, procedures and styles in each of the disciplines. Unlike in the colonial period, the bulk of the teaching at the undergraduate level is in the Indian languages. There is consequently a social science literature in these languages that is fed by the professional disciplines. Virtually all advanced research, however, is in English which is the language of professional communication among Indian social scientists.

## 3.2 History

Following independence, there were two main political concerns that influenced historical scholarship in India - one, the assessment of colonial rule and of the anticolonial struggle, and two, the shaping of a historical consciousness of independent nationhood. Both concerns were strongly affected by the fact that independence was accompanied by the partition of the country along religious lines.

For at least three decades after independence, Indian historiography was primarily engaged in presenting to the world of historical scholarship a modern, professionally sophisticated, nationalist history of India. But already by the 1950s, it was divided into two trends. One of these was

exemplified most elaborately by the eleven-volume History and Culture of the Indian People (1951-80) of which R. C. Majumdar was the general editor. This series, sponsored by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, a private educational trust, had a strong orientation towards what may be called "Hindu nationalism", i.e. a celebration of the ancient past as a history of Hindu civilization, the treatment of the centuries of Muslim rule as a period of foreign oppression and the description of the anticolonial movement as one of Hindu nationalism challenged by Muslim separatism. This orientation was countered by a trend that described itself as "secularist". The latter trend, which received official sponsorship from various state agencies but was also carried forward by a group of Marxist historians, emphasized the plurality of religious and cultural elements that went into the making of ancient and medieval Indian society and described the freedom movement as the anticolonial struggle of a composite Indian nation hemmed in by both Hindu and Muslim communalist politics. The unfinished Comprehensive History of India (1957- ) sponsored by the Indian History Congress was meant to contain the full-fledged statement of this position.

In general, however, historical scholarship from the 1950s was marked by increased professionalization, technical sophistication and the exploration of new fields of research and of new historical sources. Work on the early history of India, which had tended to rely heavily on textual sources, was now able to base itself on material evidence from much expanded archaeological, epigraphic and numismatic sources. In any case, the early history of India had been pushed back several centuries by the discoveries in the 1920s of the Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa sites in the Indus valley. From the late 1950s, new excavations were conducted in western India and Pakistan which took the pre-Aryan Harappan culture back to the third millennium B.C. The evidence from these materials raised doubts about the earlier theory of an Aryan invasion from the north and led many historians to think of the transition from the Indus cities to the Vedic social formation as one of gradual change and intermingling over several centuries.[8]

Another question over which there was a prolonged debate is that of the nature of the state in India. The dominant

nationalist tendency was to describe the pre-modern Indian state as unitary, centrally organized, territorially defined, headed by a strong ruler and administered by a hierarchical bureaucracy. In many accounts, this model of strong "stateness", supposedly exemplified by the Maurya (c.322-185 B.C.) and the Gupta (c.320-510 A.D.) empires, was evidence of the advanced nature of ancient Hindu civilization. In 1956, D. D. Kosambi, mathematician and Marxist historian, put forward the idea of two processes in India of feudalism from above and from below. In 1965, R. S. Sharma published Indian Feudalism in which he argued that in the post-Gupta period there emerged in northern India a fragmented and decentralized feudal state formation. The argument was initially challenged mainly on the ground that the Indian evidence did not fit the model of feudalism as known from European history. However, through the 1970s and 1980s, as the debate proceeded on how to characterize the pre-modern Indian state, historians following Sharma's thesis made the argument for a specifically Indian variant of feudalism, although this view too is not widely accepted. Another argument was advanced by Burton Stein, mainly on the basis of the evidence from southern India, of a segmentary state somewhere between the stateless tribal forms of government and the bureaucratic state of the Mughal empire. As a result of these debates, there is now a much greater awareness, summed up especially in the widely known writings of Romila Thapar, of variations over periods and regions and of the emergence of state formations as a changing societal process. The conventional identification in both colonial and nationalist historiographies of the ancient and medieval periods with the periods of Hindu and Muslim rule has been strongly questioned and it is now common to talk of an early medieval period starting three or four hundred years before the founding of the Turko-Afghan kingdoms in northern India in the twelfth century.[9]

Research on the Delhi Sultanate (1206-1526) and the Mughal empire (1526-1858) made great advances in detail, precision and theoretical sophistication, especially through the contributions of historians from the Aligarh Muslim University. The standard work on the Sultanate was produced in the form of volume 5 of the Comprehensive History of India (1970) edited by

Muhammad Habib and K. A. Nizami. Irfan Habib's Agrarian System of Mughal India (1963), a superbly researched account of the Mughal empire as a centralized bureaucratic state crumbling under the weight of its internal contradictions, especially in the form of a series of peasant revolts, became the classic work on the Mughal period. Most of this work, however, tended to concentrate on economic production, land revenue systems and the bureaucratic structure and largely avoided other social, religious and cultural issues. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, the orthodox view of the eighteenth century as a period of decline and disorder was challenged by a revisionist history which claimed that it was instead a period of new beginnings in indigenous economic enterprise, state-building and cultural innovation. The debate among historians such as Burton Stein, C. A. Bayly, Muzaffar Alam, Sanjay Subrahmanyam and others has now shifted the attention to the question of examining the historical significance of these new possibilities in the early years of European colonialism in India.

Until the 1970s, writings on the colonial period was dominated, on the one hand, by the emergence in India of a nationalist history of colonial exploitation and of the anticolonial struggle of the Indian people against an authoritarian state and, on the other, by new histories written at centres of South Asian studies in Britain and the USA that described Indian nationalism as the scramble for power of self-seeking Indian elites themselves spawned by British rule. Both sides in this debate made intensive use of the massive colonial archives and also opened up an extensive range of non-official records, literary and visual materials and oral sources of history-writing. In the process, a whole new range of issues concerning the histories of subordinate and marginal groups such as peasants, lower castes, tribal peoples, women, religious or linguistic minorities etc. began to be debated from the 1980s. This work, of which the writings of the Subaltern Studies (1982-) group are well-known examples, has not only spoken of distinct histories of such groups that cannot be encompassed within the terms of a history of the "nation" but has also inflected that national history itself with new questions of cultural politics. A related aspect is the emergence of well-researched regional

histories that have strongly questioned the conventional assumption that developments in northern India were somehow the key to the demarcation of the periods and phases of "Indian" history.

One must also mention the degree to which historical writing in India has become entangled with highly sensitive political issues. In a situation where the domains of the professional and the popular are clearly separated by language - English for academic research and the Indian languages for popular dissemination - some historians are worried about maintaining the integrity of their professional roles whereas others have sought to find more effective ways of undistorted popularization of historical research.

### 3.3 Sociology and Social Anthropology

The new contacts of Indian sociologists and anthropologists with international trends in the discipline meant a significant change in the style and content of their research. The most influential orientation in the 1950s and 1960s was set by a structural-functional theory of modernization. The preferred area of research was contemporary Indian rural society, especially small communities in a process of change. The village was usually treated as a functional whole with different caste groups constituting its parts. In this framework, the issues investigated were the local caste structure, factionalism, patron-client relations, relation between caste and class, and the relation between the village and the outside world. The style was clearly marked in the collection of village studies entitled India's Villages (1955) edited by M. N. Srinivas and was followed up by the monographs of S. C. Dube, McKim Marriot, F. G. Bailey, Adrian Mayer, André Béteille and others, including Srinivas himself. On social change, Srinivas's suggestion that there were two forms of mobility in contemporary Indian society, namely, sanskritization and westernization, was very influential. Sanskritization meant the upward mobility of social groups in which they adopted the cultural styles of the upper castes - a process seen in Indian history for a long time. Westernization was the recent phenomenon of adopting the cultural styles of the modern West as a sign of social power and

prestige.

Indian sociology was now faced with the task of defining the core of Indian tradition in the face of modernization, and caste continued to be the main focus of attention. Around the late 1960s, at least three sociologists attempted systematic statements of the fundamental structure of Indian society and the change it was undergoing: Irawati Karve in her Hindu Society: An Interpretation (1965), Louis Dumont in Homo Hierarchicus (1966) and Milton Singer in When a Great Tradition Modernizes (1972). The 1960s was also when the Department of Sociology at the University of Delhi, under the leadership of M. N. Srinivas, emerged as the premier centre in India of research and teaching in sociology and social anthropology. At the same time, the University of Chicago also emerged as a very important centre of research on Indian cultural anthropology.

In the 1970s, the influence of structuralism was felt in several studies, most notably in those by J. P. S. Oberoi and Veena Das, of caste structure, kinship structure, ritual and religious beliefs. Alongside, there was considerable interest in the use of Marxian methods especially to the study of the relation between caste and class and of social movements. M. S. A. Rao and A. R. Desai, in particular, organized major collections of studies on a variety of social movements in India in the colonial and contemporary periods. Another notable collection is the recent 43-volume People of India series, edited by K. Suresh Singh, in which the Anthropological Survey of India has attempted to present comparative ethnographies of over 4500 "communities" living in India, a project reminiscent of the production of colonial knowledge except that this has been carried out by an agency of the postcolonial nation-state.

The professionalization of sociology and anthropology has meant that virtually all of the specialized branches of the two disciplines now have their practitioners in India. Thus, social demography, urban sociology, industrial sociology, or sociologies of science, education, law or medicine, are all studied and taught in various Indian universities and research institutes.[10]

3.4 Economics

The inauguration of a developmental state carrying out a programme of planned industrialization presented Indian economists with a whole range of new theoretical and empirical problems. The key figure in the 1950s was P. C. Mahalanobis, physicist and statistician, who took charge of drawing up the crucial Second Five-year Plan for the government of India. From his base in the Indian Statistical Institute in Calcutta, he organized a continuous series of discussions and training courses on economic growth and planning in which virtually every major economist and statistician in the world took part. At the same time, Presidency College in Calcutta became a major centre of economics teaching and produced a steady supply of accomplished economics graduates for over three decades. Mahalanobis was also instrumental in organizing a huge official network for collecting and publishing statistical information for economic analysis. In the 1960s, the Delhi School of Economics under V. K. R. V. Rao emerged as the premier centre of postgraduate training and research in the country.

From the 1960s, Indian economists were participating in professional research and teaching at the most advanced international levels and in all branches of economics. Nevertheless, economic development and planning, in both theoretical and empirical aspects, occupied the centrestage. In the late 1960s was added the study of the welfare aspects of economic policy, especially the relation of economic growth to questions of justice and equity. Amartya Sen, Sukhamoy Chakravarty and Jagdish Bhagwati are only three names among the many who made important contributions to the growing literature on economic development in the 1960s.

By the 1970s, when the initial euphoria of the planning experience had passed, major debates emerged over certain specifically Indian themes in development economics. One was over the role of the vast agricultural sector in economic development: was it a constraint on economic growth or could it be suitably restructured to make it a contributor to the process of development? This debate was accompanied by numerous empirical studies on forms of bondage, tenancy and employment in the rural sector, on the relation between farm size and

productivity, on product and credit markets, and many other institutional features of Indian agriculture. The second theme was the role of public investment in promoting industrial growth. On this, the debate has been mainly between those who have questioned the rationale of import substitution strategies and the economic efficiency of state-sponsored industrialization and those who argue that without sufficient public investment, growth and equity would both suffer. The former group has largely relied on orthodox, neoclassical and mainly microeconomic arguments, whereas the latter group has mostly used macroeconomic reasoning in the tradition of John Maynard Keynes and Michal Kalecki. Since the 1980s, an important dimension has been added to these debates: namely, the role of the external economy and especially that of direct foreign investment. This theme has raised questions not only about the short and long-term implications for growth but also for distributive justice and national sovereignty. The fourth theme relates to technology - its import and adaptation, its appropriateness, its diffusion, the sustainability of technological change, the possibilities of innovation and indigenous development, etc. An important comparative perspective into which Indian discussions have been drawn in recent years is the so-called success story of industrialization in East and Southeast Asia as well as the problems faced by the economies of several South American countries. The fifth theme, related in many ways with the other four, is that of the revenue and monetary policies of the government and the legal regulation of economic institutions.[11]

### 3.5 Political Science

Modern political thinking in India in the late colonial period was mainly liberal in spirit and legal-constitutionalist in method. A parallel stream, however, did run alongside the main course and, for three decades from 1917-20, Gandhian leaders kept up a critique of industrial capitalism and the modern state and defended what they claimed was a less violent and more tolerant political society - the "traditional" society of the rural communities. The most significant product of modern Indian political thinking, overwhelmingly liberal but incorporating at

several points the "traditionalist" view, was the Indian constitution written in 1946-50.

The dominant framework in Indian political science in the 1950s was that of liberal modernization theory. While several key institutions of the modern state had been built in the period of colonial rule, India, it was said, was now in the phase of developing its own democratic processes and the practices of modern citizenship. Features such as patronage relations based on caste or religious loyaties and solidarities based on ethnicity were regarded as vestiges of underdevelopment that would go away with greater democratic participation. In time, however, more complex versions of this modernization theory were produced, such as the one by Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph (1967), which argued that even supposedly traditional elements such as caste or religion could adapt to modern political institutions and, by transforming themselves, become parts of political modernity itself.

The most influential account of the new political system was given by Rajni Kothari (1970) who identified its "dynamic core" in the dominance of the Congress party. Using a largely structural-functional model, Kothari described "the Congress system" as one in which the ruling party connected government with party at various levels from the national capital down to the localities, accommodated a lot of dissidence within itself and secured the legitimacy of the system as a whole through coalitions and consensus. By the mid-1970s, however, with growing authoritarianism, centralization of powers in the hands of a small group of Congress leaders and especially the state of internal emergency in 1975-77, this model of a consensual Congress system became less persuasive.

Marxist accounts were better able to describe conflicts and the repressive use of state power as systemic features of Indian politics. The state, especially its central structures, was seen as the site over which several dominant classes, none of which was able to achieve hegemony on its own, tried both to outmanoeuvre one another and to work out coalitional arrangements. The Marxist approach was, however, less successful in connecting the central account with local societal institutions and mico-level political processes.

Here, a structural-functional theory was more commonly used which assumed that the Congress system was primarily a way of pulling together the various dominant groups in the localities into a single ruling structure. The factions within the Congress party were said to be the main form through which this was accomplished: the conflicts between factions at lower levels was sorted out by the mediating skills of Congress leaders at higher levels. Later, with the centralization of the Congress in the 1970s, this mediatory form gave way to what was called plebiscitary politics in which the general elections were turned into a referendum on the leadership of Indira Gandhi, the supreme Congress leader. This allowed the Congress leadership to draw electoral support from the poor, the lower castes and the minorities without going through the locally dominant groups.

The dominant approach in Indian political science tends to accept the role of the developmental state in modernizing Indian society. However, a critique of the developmental state also exists which fundamentally questions the project of modernization and describes it as one of conflict, violence and the marginalization of vulnerable groups. Ashis Nandy, for instance, has argued that the modernist state has failed whenever it has tried to impose on Indian society a set of institutions adopted from the modern West that go against the everyday practices of collective living in local communities.[12]

### 3.6 Journals and the Public Sphere

With the professionalization of the disciplines from the 1950s, numerous journals have appeared in India in the social sciences. Of these, the Indian Economic and Social History Review and Contributions to Indian Sociology, in particular, have great prestige. However, the most remarkable institution is that of the Economic and Political Weekly published from Bombay which combines in a quite unique way the functions of a news weekly, a journal of commentary on current economic matters, a professional journal of advanced research in all of the social science disciplines and a bulletin of academic events in India. Besides, prominent social scientists frequently play a role in India as public intellectuals, intervening in political,

economic and cultural debates in the news media and on television. While the bulk of social science activities could be said to provide support for the policies and ideologies of the Indian state, there is nonetheless an active critical component which feeds into oppositional positions and movements.

## NOTES

1. On the early period of the Asiatic Society, see O. P. Kejariwal, Asiatic Society of Bengal and the Discovery of India's Past 1784-1838 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988).
2. On the contribution of Indological scholarship to the Aryan race theory, see Thomas Trautmann, Aryans and British India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).
3. For accounts of governmental knowledge production in British India, see Bernard S. Cohn, Colonialism and its Forms of Knowledge: The British in India (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996) and C. A. Bayly, Empire and Information: Intelligence Gathering and Social Communication in India 1780-1870 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).
4. For summary accounts of history-writing in India in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, see C. H. Philips, ed., Historians of India, Pakistan and Ceylon (London: Oxford University Press, 1961).
5. On social science in nineteenth-century Bengal, see Bela Dutt Gupta, Sociology in India (Calcutta: Center for Sociological Research, 1972).
6. This period of Indian economic thinking is discussed in B. N. Ganguli, Indian Economic Thought: Nineteenth Century Perspectives (New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill, 1977).
7. This period is covered in Bhabatosh Datta, Indian Economic Thought: Twentieth Century Perspectives 1900-1950 (New Delhi: Tata McGraw-Hill, 1978).
8. On this, see Romila Thapar, Interpreting Early India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1992).
9. This debate is reviewed in Herman Kulke, ed., The State in India 1000-1700 (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).
10. Sociological writings in India in the period after independence are surveyed in the two series published by the Indian Council of Social Science Research: A Survey of Research

in Sociology and Social Anthropology (1972 and 1985).

11. For surveys of these themes, see the following collections: Deepak Nayyar, ed., Industrial Growth and Stagnation: The Debate in India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1994); Dilip Mukherjee, ed., Indian Industrialization: Policies and Performance (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995); Prabhat Patnaik, ed., Macroeconomics (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1995).

12. For surveys of the literature on Indian politics, see Partha Chatterjee, ed., State and Politics in India (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997).