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.....*From Our Archives***Unitary or Unified Social Science****Ramkrishna Mukherjee**

At the time of accepting the V K R V Rao Memorial Lifetime Achievements Award from the Indian Social Association in 2004, I formulated the concept of *unitary social science* in the wake of D P Mukerji's exhortation in 1955 to break the boundaries between social science disciplines, R K Mukerjee's call in 1958 for undertaking transdisciplinary research; and, presumably, V K R V Rao's attempts from the 1950s to unify social sciences while building one institute after another. I mentioned in the same context that another outstanding pioneer R C Mahalanobis attempted from 1950s to unify all sciences but did not formulate any unitary science. Sequentially, therefore, we should discuss the difference between the efficiency of conceiving a unitary social science in place of mere unification of social sciences.

The discussion rests upon viewing the social science subjects as respective disciplines or as pertaining to one and the same discipline. This, in turn, leads us to be precise in defining an unitary discipline of social science or in a consolidation of disciplines to present unified social sciences: there cannot be unitary social science, nor can there be unified social science. We may clarify this basic proposition.

By the expression "social sciences" we mean that there are different bodies of knowledge organized as different disciplines, i.e., distinctive branches of instruction on, and understanding of society. The distinctions among such subjects as economics, political science, sociology, psychology, etc., can therefore be regarded as of crucial importance while their interrelations attain an auxiliary status as being

helpful for developing a comprehensive understanding of society. Thus, the social science subjects would be considered as analogous to each other, i.e., the subjects are parallel in origin and development, out of the would-be society they represent.

By the expression "social science", on the other hand, we mean that it is one organized body of knowledge for understanding society and, therefore, there is one discipline. It follows that different aspects of society are examined as specializations in the discipline by means of the subject categorization of economics, political science, sociology, psychology, etc. Therefore, the social science subjects should be considered as homologous in character; i.e., they have a common origin in the world of society, although they are dealt with separately because of inherent human constraint on grasping at one time the whole of society comprehensively as well as precisely'. From this perspective, therefore, the interrelationship among the social science subjects would be of primary relevance, their distinctions secondary.

This emphasis on primary relevance of interrelationship among the social science subjects is dictated by the fact that their union- on the principal axis denoted by culture, economy and polity - is such that one of the three axial ingredients cannot operate without an equal operative power of the other two, unless we conceive of society to be fissiparous and moving toward oblivion. Therefore, the social science subjects may not be regarded as just systematically related (as for interdisciplinary explorations): instead, they should be regarded as related symbiotically, in order to appraise and mould social reality in a wholesome and durable manner.

The point made above may need some clarification. The respectively specialized social science subjects have been constructed at the level of analysis of the body of knowledge known as social science because the existence and operation of society cannot be appreciated and enforced without its analytic properties viewed in evermore precise and unequivocal manner by means of diversification of specialization. But without unity of all these specialties on a generic axis denoting the mechanics of society i.e., of its statics of being at points of time in the past and at the present moment, and of the dynamics of the same

society in becoming (i.e., moving forward) into the future, social reality becomes obfuscated, diffused, and finally, distorted and destructive for the society in view.

In order to clinch this issue of methodology of unitary social science and posit the usefulness of the concept of unitary social science for formulating useful social policy, we may illustrate briefly the consequences of unilaterally stressing one or the other of the aforementioned nodal points of symbiotic unity, namely, of culture, economy, and polity.

Thus, culture represents the gravitational force to hold society together at a point in time, because it embodies valorisation of capital of a place-time bound people in their achievements and perception in a spheres of life, from the past to the contemporaneous moment. If culture assumes the role of moving force and thereby enforces unilateral changes in the society in view, it generates fissiparous tendencies at the least or produces a dead society at one extreme and leads to the same conclusion of destruction and decay, at the other.

The two extreme situations may be rather easily appreciated from our historical and contemporary experience. History (or, rather, pre-history) cites examples of some societies which had persevered to mould their contemporaneous and future situations as a mirror image of the past. They refused to introduce any newness in their economy and polity. As a result, they became *inert* societies and were eventually extinct.

On the other side, we witness, contemporarily, that fundamentalism of any persuasion blindly adheres to a past image of life, i.e., to its culture alone; and enforces this image on the society's contemporary economy and polity in order to mould its present and the future course of living. The upshot is that fundamentalism trends to destroy the fabric of the contextual society – be it a nation state or apart of nation-state.

However, the intermediate situation between these two extremes is less easily discerned, such as, the presently engineered role of caste in contemporary India. We may therefore, elaborate this example a little.

Way back in the past, *varna*, as the precursor of the caste system,

presented a symbiotic role of culture, economy and polity in a large part of India. But in course of changes in time, the *jati* structure of society evolved out of the *varna* stratification of Hindu society and overrode the *varna* structure. The *jati* structure of society, which truly depicts the caste system of India- as stressed by Emile Senart in *Les Castes dans l'Inde* (Paris, 1927, p. 176). Herman Oldenberg in "Zur Geschichte des indischen Kasten Wesens" (Leipzig, *ZDMG* 51, 1897, pp. 267 - 290), Jacob Jolly in "Beiträge zur indischen Rechtsgeschichte" (Leipzig, *ZDMG* 50, 1896, pp. 515), and other eminent Indologists- held on to cultural economic distinctions but lost any political exclusivity. The Indian polity, henceforth, cut across even the *varna* structure of society, as attested particularly from the Maurya – Gupta - Vakataka period of India's history and by the cryptic statement of Kautilya in *Arthashastra*: "*nandam eti*".

The truncated caste (*jati*) structure spread across Hindu-Muslim distinction in India's history; but, since the *entrenchment* (and not just advent of capitalism in India from the 19th century- as attested by E A Gait in "Caste" (New York, *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, 1911), L.S.S. O'Malley in *Indian Caste Customs* (Cambridge, University Press, 1932), etc. - the economic exclusiveness of *jatis* was also lost. In sum, in their exclusivity, the *jatis* became mere cultural identities.

The situation changed with the implantation of the views of Mandal Commission on Indian polity. It emphasized "caste" to provide the indicator of backwardness in Indian society. The lone voice of a sociologist, I.P. Desai, was ignored, who wrote in 1984 in *Economic and Political Weekly* (Bombay, 19 (28), pp. 1106 - 16) that the caste criterion for recognising backwardness obfuscates the very issue of backwardness in contemporary Indian society. He pointed out that chronic deprivation of the masses, and the failure of those in the lowest rung of the social ladder to even economically reproduce themselves, posit the kernel of social reality.

The rejection of such a "revolutionary" viewpoint by the stalwarts of academia and administration has thwarted the normative growth of a class society, given "caste" a meta - caste political identity, and has

fed the stream of nepotism and corruption in Indian economy and polity.

However, this course of “development” in Indian society could not be ignored altogether. Therefore, while the minority voice of a few social scientists and enlightened rulers has been ignored, the inexorable course of life has now rejected the formulation of “caste for itself”. Instead, the formulation “caste and class” has been backed, which would be the logical yield of appraising social reality from the viewpoint of unified social sciences and especially, from the Weberian standpoint.

The majority of academia and administration, therefore, has not only continued to support the British nomenclature of SC and ST (although “tribe” as a formative stage in the course of social evolution has vanished from India with the spread of capitalism to its remotest corner) but has, also, evolved a novel and amorphous category of OBC. And now, at the beginning of the 21st century, in view of pathogenic political exigencies, another category is mooted: viz., of “economically backward forward caste”!

Thus, what was a tragedy for Indian society in 1980s has, logically, become a farce by unilaterally stressing culture in place of giving equal emphasis to culture, economy, and polity. The appraisal and moulding of Indian social reality, in consequence, has been distorted by rejecting the correct formulation of “class in caste. The ultimate result of this effort can only make Indian society more fissiparous and lead it toward eventual destruction.

To consider next the unilateral stress laid upon economy, we may recall that complementing the gravitational force of culture in order to hold it in being, economy provides the driving force to move society in becoming. But a unilateral stress on economy disrupts the symbiotic relationship of culture, economy, and polity, and yields an unwholesome society. Such a consequence is inevitable from the formulation and implementation of the policy of *economic determinism*, which is usually laid at the door of Marxism - in theory and practice.

But Marx and Engels were conscious of the need for laying equal

emphasis on culture, economy and polity, despite their formulation of economy forming the basic structure of society - with polity and culture located in its superstructure. This point of symbiotic unity of culture, economy and polity has later been emphasized by notable Marxists, like, Gramsci, Lukacs, and Mao Ze Dong; nevertheless, in this brief communication, I may cite only a few examples.

Such as, while discussing the “Irish Question” and Marx noting the division of the “English proletarians and Irish proletarians” into two “hostile camps”, Engels wrote to Marx in a letter dated October 7, 1858 (Marx and Engels, *Selected Correspondence*, London 1934, Lawrence and Wishart, pp. 115 -116): “English proletariat is becoming more and more bourgeois, so that this most bourgeois of all nations is apparently aiming ultimately at the possession of a bourgeois aristocracy and a bourgeois proletariat *as well as* a bourgeoisie”. Similarly, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) Marx examined, more specifically, the symbiosis of culture, economy and polity in course of describing the class content of the extant society. In that context, he made the oft-quoted statement on the obsolescence of culture and polity in the community of the peasantry in the milieu, namely, “potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes”. This was no less true at the place and at the time than the changes in the symbiotic expression of culture, economy and polity of the peasantry over historical space, time, and people dimension of operation of the social processes.

The peasantry did not always amount to “potatoes in a sack forming a sack of potatoes”. Undergrowth and overgrowth within the social entity, and with respect to corresponding social entities, changed the contour and content of peasantry; as portrayed by Lenin with reference to *The Development of Capitalism in Russia* (1894), as pointed out by Gramsci with respect to southern Italy, and as Mao Ze Dong detected the revolutionary potential of the peasantry in China.

However, paradoxically, it is from the quarter of some non - Marxists and pronouncedly, from that of the anti - Marxists that “economic determinism” tends to emerge in theory and practice. For example, Schumpeter in *Economic Doctrine and Method* (1954, London,

George Allen and Unwin, pp. 9-23) had noted of the same base of differential but interrelated conceptualization of growth and development of society, and further pointed out in *The Theory of Economic Development* (1969, Oxford, University Press, pp. 58, 63, 64) that economic development is “merely a part of universal history”, “mere growth of the economy” should not be “designated as a process of development” because “it calls forth no qualitative new phenomena”; and, therefore, “we may not include in the data of our explanation elements of what is to be explained. But a notable economist like Sukhomoy Chakravarty asserted that “a theory of ‘growth’ as distinct from the theory of development” does not mean much; therefore: “We may as well ignore it and replace it by the terms ‘growth simpliciter’ and ‘growth proper’” (*Alternative Approaches to a Theory of Economic Growth: Marx, Marshall and Schumpeter*, 1982, New Delhi, Orient Longman, pp. 20,41).

The equation thus drawn between growth and development has been more forcefully stated by many leading social scientists, such as, by the distinguished economist W W Rostow in *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* (1962, Cambridge, University Press). This viewpoint from many other scholars I have discussed in details in my books entitled *What Will It Be?* (1979, New Delhi, Allied, pp. 89ff) and *Society, Culture, Development* (1991, New Delhi, Sage, pp. 88ff). Presently, I may note that the central point of difference from the prevalent view of economic determinism is four-fold: (a) growth is *truth-asserting* normative social process in the life-course; (b) development is a *truth-seeking* instrumental social process in the life-course; (c) the role of development is to reduce to zero both *overgrowth and undergrowth* in order to bring the social organism back to normative process of growth; and (d) the two distinct but intrinsically related concepts of growth and development are concerned with the symbiotic operation of culture, economy and polity. Therefore, any unilateral stress on economy - in the context of economic determinism - disturbs the texture of society and leads it toward disruption and decay.

However, this central point is discarded by the majority of contemporary economists who are of the view that undergrowth and

overgrowth within and across different configurations of the world society are on the same dimension of reality (vide, Sukomoy Chakravarty, 1986, “Development Dialogue in the 1980s and Beyond”, *Economic and Political Weekly* 21 (52) pp. 2267-72). They assume, therefore, that these incongruities would be removed by economic development (equated to economic growth) as the great leveller.

But what we are witnessing is quite contrary to such an assumption. For example, for India. P C Mahalanobis, the architect of the Five-Year Plan in 1950s, noted in 1960s that the rich are becoming richer and the poor poorer (Planning Commission (ed.), 1964 *Report of the Committee on Income and Level of Living*, New Delhi, Government of India). Inequalities in the distribution of economic wealth went on accentuating, along with rise in the overall economic growth rate. Loud proclamations of the Government without cutting down *overgrowth* (viz. “*garibi hatao*”, “*Development with Justice*”, etc.) had little effect on providing adequate health measures, education, and general welfare to the masses of the Indian people and uplifting the poorest to a humane level of living. Eventually, Planning Commission admitted in 1990 in *Towards Social Transformation: Approach to the Eighth Five Year Plan 1990-95* (New Delhi, Government of India, p. 71): “The past rate of growth has been attained at the cost of increasing unemployment, a widening fiscal and balance of payment deficit (both of which are unsustainable), an accentuation of economic inequalities which is not acceptable, and increasing distortions in the regional pattern of growth”.

Such belated realization in formulation and implementation of the policy of economic determinism did not change over the years, irrespective of changes in the political facade of the Indian Government. Lately, ever frequent announcements, through several *yojanas*, to provide the “people” with amenities for improving their health, imparting mass education, and ushering in overall welfare, made the rules “feel good” and proclaim, “India shining”. But the “shine” is on a thin layer of cream of society, while the middle layer cannot only not imbibe any newness in the culture amenities but is also failing evermore to hold on to their traditional culture, and those

at the lower layer of society are at the peril of maintaining their survival.

This is the upshot of imparting unilateral stress on economy in India, which the government formed in 2004, due to a mass protest from the common people, has declared to rectify. But their policy moves so far do not auger well, as their policy, also, does not seem to cut down (or even prune) overgrowth in the economic growth process.

And this is not an unique feature for India or only South Asia. It is true for the whole of erstwhile Third World, and beyond, as pointed out by some critical scholars in recent years; such as, R. Wade (2001) in "Is Globalization making World Income Distribution More Equal" (Working Paper Series 01 (01), L.S.E. Development Studies Institute), B. Milanovic (2003) in "The Two Faces of Globalization: Against Globalization as We know It" (*World Development* 3 (4), pp. 667-83), and so on.

The above mentioned deliberations of some concerned scholars, in order to resurrect world society, bring us to the consideration of unilateral stress laid on polity in appraising and moulding social reality. The distortion thus caused in a social organism we had realized earlier during the Emergency in India, which, on a mini scale, continues sporadically within and across the subcontinent and beyond. More drastically, we had witnessed the havoc created on the world-scale by the distorted polity of the Third Reich in Germany and are witnessing a similar situation in contemporary Iraq.

However, we may not appreciate so clearly the fall-out of unipolar globalization if we stress unilaterally the role of culture, again, as done, for example, by Samuel P. Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996, New York, Simon and Schuster). We shall fail, equally, if we consider, unilaterally, polity by itself; which seems to be the keynote of J. Pronk's *Collateral Damages or Calculated Default? The Millenium Goals and the Politics of Globalization* (2003, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, September 11). It will also be inadequate to harp merely on economy, as is done commonly. For, rationality, which provides the dynamics to a live organism and optimizes (not

necessarily, maximizes) the relation between the end and the means, is concerned with economy as the moving force, but it is, also, culturally conditioned and politically influenced.

Therefore, the appraisal and moulding of social reality will always be insufficient if we regard the social science specializations as respective disciplines and treat them unilaterally. Correspondingly, it will be inefficient if we restrict ourselves to multi-disciplinary research and action in the light of unified social sciences. Ultimately, then, we should conceive of unitary social science for research and consequent action, so as to usher-in a wholesome and durable world society and its equally assessed components.

Note:

1. Inaugural and KEY-NOTE Address delivered by Professor Ramkrishna Mukherjee at the occasion of the Inaugural Function of national seminar on Futuristic Vision of Social Science in India in the 21st Century organised by The Indian Social Science Association, held on October 09, 2004, at Grand Hotel, Agra.
2. Professor Ramkrishna Mukherjee is an internationally acclaimed social science scholar adorned with Professor V K R V Rao Memorial Lifetime Achievements Award of The Indian Social Science Association, awarded in February 2004 at a function organised by the Department of Sociology at Calcutta University, Kolkata.