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*.....From Our Archive***The Role and Status of Social Science in
Developing Societies****Editorial – Volume 3 Number 1 - 2008**

The role of an individual, organisation or any other unit of society may be compatible with its status, or at times it may not be in accordance with status thus causing a discord. The role and status of social science may be examined in view of society's expectations from it in the process of development particularly in developing societies and the imbalance or lag, if any, may be identified in view of changing social contexts.

Social Science(s) had its origin in the West and it is argued that since it has been implanted in the erstwhile colonial, non-western, traditional societies it has not been largely accepted by the people. More particularly its bases - positivism, scientism, neutrality etc., are oft challenged even by the academia. Hence, the doubts about its positive role and concomitant respectable status in the traditional societies, which are in the process of development, i.e. developing still. In a way, all societies are developing but the ex-colonial, traditional societies are at an early or middle stage of development. Development by itself is a much contested concept. We will not dwell on this controversy; instead, we may examine the role and status of social science(s) in the developing societies from different angles. It may be mentioned that in the industrialized-urbanized (and now the 'post industrial') societies, science, technology and now the IT have

ushered-in spectacular changes in areas like education, health, housing, food, life-style, leisure, recreation, social relations, other aspects of community life etc.; thus, the role and status of social science(s) in these societies, it is expected, has also been comparatively enhanced. The best way of evaluation of roles and statuses of societal units is to take a reference point and make comparisons. And if we take social science(s) and compare it with science (both pure and applied) and technology, obviously, social science has lower status and perhaps an inferior role in the developed societies; in the developing societies too science and technology occupy a superior status indeed, and its role in transforming developing societies is considered as an extremely important one.

Although there is an internal contradiction between the role and status of social science(s) in societies of any hue, the contradiction gets heightened when the expectations from social science(s) in accelerating the process of development and modernisation become too high particularly in the developing societies. Naturally, the outcome of science and technology in changing the face of these societies are not only big but visible too whereas, the effects of social science are both unmeasurable and invisible. All these factors may be responsible for the inexplicable role and indeterminate status of social science in society.

In the contemporary context the role of social science in traditional, ex-colonial, developing societies may be seen in changing e societal customs and traditions so that the breeze of modernization may be enjoyed by the people and they may be made aware to accept the outcome of science and technology both mentally and in reality. The role of social science in social and economic planning and development thus, becomes crucial and needs a careful appraisal.

No doubt, science and technology are most important factors in social, economic, cultural and psychological changes in any society. But it is true also that the fruits of scientific researches and technological progress are benefiting only the rich and the powerful ruling elite. The progressive social scientist views the role of social science in properly controlling and using science and technology, so that their benefits are

shared by all. This certainly leads us to visualize and carve out a proper and appropriate role of social science in the crucial development processes. It may be mentioned here that in the early period of planning and development in India the economists used to play an important and dominant role and the other social scientists not only always complained of this situation but also accused the planners and government for the skewed development in the country because of this neglect of other social sciences - anthropology, sociology, etc.

It is but natural that in differentiated and hierarchical societies there is an yearning for achieving equality - racial, caste, gender, economic; social justice and human rights of women, children and downtrodden people. In this context too the role of social science(s) as harbinger of change is indeed important. It is argued now that in the context of the irreversible process of globalization the role of social science(s) in preparing people - society, for rugged competitiveness is very crucial. In other words social science(s) is seen as an important tool and process for making society humane and foster intra-societal and inter-societal peace.

These are big expectations from a newly emerged branch of knowledge - social science, and it may be apt to critically look into its status. We may examine this aspect of status from different angles.

If we examine the status of social science in the academic world it may be seen that from philosophy, which once occupied a central position in academics, there has been a big shift making science(s) as the important aspect of teaching and learning in schools, colleges and universities. Now professional subjects/disciplines - engineering, technology, management, chartered accountancy, company secretaryship, computer application, human resource management, information technology, bio-technology, etc., occupy prime 'positions' in the schema of academics. The disciplines of philosophy and other branches of social science except of course, economics, have been relegated to secondary and even tertiary positions. Even the hard science subjects are no more popular. This in itself is an indication of status of social science in the arena of academics? The allocation of funds both in the concerned ministries, funding organisations (e.g.

University Grants Commission in India) and the universities for social science(s) is very insufficient, an meagre. The new cry of making 'higher education job oriented has pushed subjects like philosophy, history, linguistics, anthropology etc. to the corner. There are no takers. The situation has been worsened since the concept of 'self-financing' of higher education has been accepted as a policy by the state and institutions of higher learning. All this is responsible for degrading the status of social science(s) and humanities which may not be promising 'big jobs' but make the learners 'gentlemen' and socially and culturally conscientious.

So, a comparison of the status of social science(s) in the 'community of sciences' would reveal that social science has a lower status than the hard-core science subjects viz. physics, chemistry, life-science, etc. We have already delineated the reasons but to reiterate, main reasons being that modern science(s) through its researchers, application of these researches, produce products that are of use in all walks of life - medicines, fertilizers, pesticides, implements to make life easy and comfortable, speedy mode of transport, electricity for light and many other uses, phone for talking to people, mobile phone for instant contact and talk, audio-video material for leisure and pleasure, the chip revolution - computers, internet, e-mail for instant information, nanotechnology and many more. Social science(s) may not be able to produce such products. However, the uses and mis-use of these products do provide situations for study and analysis of the social science(s). Yet, its status is secondary in the society.

Social science(s) thus, may be significant in policy formulation, administration and management. All governments establish institutions or use the already established institutions (universities, research institutions) to collect significant data to be used wisely in policy formulation. But in most developing societies the policy formulation agencies and administration do not take any feedback from these organisations. Take for example, India: there is the Indian Council of Social Science Research, University Grants Commission, different Ministries of Government of India and departments of the State Governments that pump funds in social science research projects but the evidences show that in the processes of planning, policy

formation, implementation, administration of strategic areas/groups the findings of social science researches thus conducted have played insignificant role. For, it may be seen that the bureaucracy steeped in colonial ways of administration and 'ruling the people' listens to its own voice or collaborates with the dominant elite and the political outfit to formulate irrelevant policies and inept administration that help none except the upper crust of society.

In the contemporary context of globalization entailing liberalization, privatization and uncontrolled marketization it is expected of social science(s) to gauge the socio-economic, psycho-cultural and geo-political fallout but social science(s), it may be stressfully realized do not get any respectability. It is expected of social science(s) to minimize the effects of rouge-market but it is this market which diminishes the status of social science(s) giving respectability to the newer technologies.

Internal contradictions may also be responsible for the lower social status of social science(s). The various disciplines have become autonomous to the extent that their over-specialization has become a problem in itself particularly in assessing 'whole' social realities. The problem of 'closed' social science disciplines has led to the demand of their 'opening up'; it is not being successfully achieved. Social science(s) has become status-quoist, full of jargons thus being driven away from the people and is accused of being maneuvered by the ruling elite for its own benefit. These factors again are responsible for its secondary, lower status in society.

So, the expected role of social science(s) in bringing dramatic changes is too high indeed but the status of social science(s) today may not be compatible with this 'expected role'.

Rajeshwar Prasad

Chief Editor

BOOK REVIEW

Shadows of the Enlightenment: The Hidden Politics and Ideology of the Natural and Social Sciences

McCarthy E-George

Delhi, Aakar Books, 2026, Pages: 535, Price Rs. 1250

ISBN 978-93-5092-946-6

Reviewed By

Jyoti Sidana

The book authored by George E. McCarthy is a valuable contribution to the field of Scientific philosophy, process of enlightenment and dynamics in the fields of natural sciences and social sciences due to the multiple roles of ideologies, when this reviewer was reading this book of McCarthy, one more book which she read earlier appeared in her mind.

The book, according to McCarthy, is divided into three parts. The first part focuses on history, epistemology and methodology of post-analytic and neo-Kantian philosophy of science and its related descriptive-critique. The second part narrates the historical and political economic foundations of natural science in historical materialism while third part deals with the political dimensions of science as they influence our understanding of the social sciences and