

## POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY

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### *Introduction*

THE INDUSTRIAL revolution that followed in the wake of the rapid progress made in the fields of the physical sciences and technology, had a marked impact on the nature of the social system whose sub-systems became in the course of time well defined and differentiated as the functions performed by them had become more and more exclusive and specialised. This stimulated the development of the social sciences and by the beginning of this century specialisation in certain disciplines became inevitable. This no doubt added considerably to our knowledge and better understanding of each discipline, particularly after the inception of the behavioural school. The scheme of specialisation, however, had two drawbacks that became obvious soon afterwards. Not only did it fail to reckon with the relationship between the various parts of the social system, it also severely restricted the worldview of the specialist who became increasingly interested in the finer details of his speciality. To get over these difficulties, social scientists precoced the formation of interdisciplinary hybrids. Political sociology is one such interdisciplinary hybrid. Political sociology, as used and defined in this paper, refers to a perspective or a comprehensive approach based on the simultaneous use of the sociological and political approach and takes as its focus the interaction pattern between the political system and the social system (Bartlett, 1973). More on this later.

One significant, distinguishing mark of a hybrid discipline as postured in recent times is its overwhelming involvement with contemporary themes and issues.<sup>1</sup> It is heartening to note that the main trends of the writings on Indian political sociology under review, exhibit a concern (though at times somewhat truncated) with reality. A vast number of

studies are preoccupied with the theme of mass participation in the democratic processes and the development of the democratic institutions—indeed a very relevant theme. However, a closer examination reveals that a majority of the studies are based exclusively on election data, though at times supplemented by survey data closely connected with it. The criterion adopted by such studies is obvious enough—the election is treated as the sole indicator of political participation as well as democracy. Thus it is clear that these studies have concentrated on short-term processes associated with democracy while neglecting the study of democracy and its institutions in terms of a broad and long-range perspective because that is what political sociology is all about. The fault is not difficult to locate. These studies have only tried to present one side of the coin, so to say, by identifying the sociological factors responsible for the political behaviour under consideration. In short, what these studies have come up with can at best be called for what it is—sociology of political development.

It is tempting to organize this study around the neat categories provided by the various key concepts of political sociology or sociology as has been done before (Baviskar, 1971). However, such an imposition of order has been given up in favour of the natural trend which emerges from a consideration of these studies. This is so because it is contended here that, while awareness of the key concepts, techniques and methodology is not so wanting in most of these studies, there is a conspicuous lack of the basic perspective of political sociology. Accordingly, this review will be organized around the problems (broadly defined) that have attracted widest attention. The first section deals with the broad theme of growing awareness among the Indian electorate. Second section deals with the problems of social structure as identified by the study of elites and the institutions of panchayati raj. The last section deals with the state of theoretical discussion in the field of political sociology. This framework has no claim to being comprehensive enough to include all that has been done in the field of political sociology. Its only advantage is that, while it adequately describes the major concerns of the researcher, it also indicates the gaps and priority areas for further research in political sociology.

#### *Growing Awareness among the Indian Electorate*

Since the beginning of India's democratic experience an increasing number of social scientists have taken keen interest in the relationship between the traditional social organization in India and the newly introduced democratic institutions and procedures. Different models of this relationship have been proposed by various scholars. M.N. Srinivas (1962) has argued that the network of social organization based on

primordial loyalties that was still intact at the time of the establishment of parliamentary institutions was utilized to influence votes. This argument was further articulated by Selig Harrison (1960) whose investigations revealed that "the nature of political cleavage in Andhra was none other than the politically transformed social cleavage between two peasant castes." At a later stage the Radolphi (1967) suggested that fedians who have a great genius for adaptation and assimilation are using social organizations such as caste to promote participation in the newly established democratic system of government. Rejecting this thesis, Myron Weiner (1962) suggested that major social institutions like caste "have associations that articulate their interest" and when they do not have political association of their own"—increasingly, such groupings have had their political manifestations."

Opposing the view that castes get politicized *en bloc*, A.H. Sonji (1971) argues on the basis of electoral data from the 1971-72 and previous elections that "the internal cohesion of the social organization materially alters when it moves away from its primary social concerns—ritual, pollution and endogamy—to non-traditional concerns. This change is reflected in the fact that highly fragmented decision-making processes of castes in non-traditional matters often lead to their substantial vote against candidates of their own castes. Such political differentiation within castes has occurred before the advent of certain caste associations, and in some cases despite them." He thus concludes that "in the final analysis any attempt to group the relationship between caste and politics in contemporary India takes us back to the problem identified by Srinivas, that during *Pax Britannica* individual castes achieved horizontal integration at the social level. So far as their politics are concerned, in my view a reverse process is very much in evidence. Political cohesion of the castes, wherever present, is in the process of shrinking from the wider horizontal integration to smaller and more diversified residential segments. In conclusion, I am now persuaded that what the political parties do at best is to build a patch-work of segmented political support on multicaste lines, rather than rely on a caste, however numerous it may be."

Indeed, there is enough evidence to suggest that there is no simple fit between social cleavages and electoral preferences. In Punjab it was found that three major parties—the Akali Dal, the Congress and the Jan Sangh—did not neatly divide the electorate along (Hindu-Sikh) lines (Beass, 1975). In Kerala, as R.L. Hardgrave Jr. (1975) writes, the tendency of agricultural labourers and industrial workers to support the Communists is modified by caste and sub-region. M.R. Barnett's study (1975) of Tamil Nadu reveals that it is the Tamil cultural consciousness that has polarized politics around Congress and DMK because neither class, caste, rural-urban nor language divisions sharply separate the

voters. Taken together, these studies suggest that it is rather hazardous to contend that any traditional social organization determines electoral preferences. Even though a vast gap separates this formulation from the one suggested by M.N. Srinivas it is not surprising because in a transitional society there is every likelihood of the electorate becoming increasingly more conscious and responsible of its political role.

On the basis of national data D.L. Sheth (1970) demonstrates that the Indian voters have become mature enough to revolt against the vote banks and influence networks because they now realize that "election is a major device for displacing erring rulers." The Indian voter thus prefers to exercise his own judgement in casting his vote.

Micro-level studies based on one or more constituencies have similar findings to report. On the basis of a comparative study of the Haryana State Assembly polls of 1968 and 1972, Pratap Singh (1973) reports that instead of the traditional leadership loyalty, economic factors influence the voting pattern of the people of the state. Similar maturity was shown by Rajasthan villagers in the general election of the year 1967. Their experience of the three previous elections had enabled them to appreciate the value of their votes (Chakravarti, 1971).

Enhanced political consciousness on the part of the voters is, however, by no means restricted to the northern states. The study of Bombay voters also revealed that "a high percentage of women, the illiterate, the backward and the scheduled castes showed consciousness of their political right, the heavy voting in Thana proved that the rural voter, though still far behind his urban counterpart in several ways, was awake to the importance of his vote" (Dastur, 1972a). And, in Gujarat it was found that "the voters accepted parties as an indispensable part of the democratic institutional structure" (Pathak, 1972). In fact the Gujarati voter was not much influenced by the personality of the candidate because he decisively opted for the party. Thus the Gujarati voter displays his political maturity by taking a long-term institutional perspective in preference to the short-term personal consideration in casting his vote.<sup>3</sup>

Evidence suggests that this change in the voting behaviour also reduced the capability of various social organizations and groups to influence the voting behaviour of its membership in Punjab. As Verma Dua (1970) writes, "Arya Samaj has influenced Punjab politics in the 'past and continues to do so to this day'. In fact... 'chances of a person's success in the elections from a constituency where there are a large number of local Arya Centres are directly related to the extent to which he can mobilise support among the members of these local Arya Centres.'" However, things have begun to change as the voting behaviour of the Meghs (who have been awarded the status of a scheduled caste) of the B.G. Camp illustrates. The capacity of the Arya sabhas to influence their voting

preferences has been considerably reduced. The Meghs who are also members of the Arya Samaj have traditionally supported the Congress. Their status as a scheduled caste further reinforced their support to the Congress in the election of 1967; and this happened in the face of stiff opposition from the Arya Samaj which had decided to boycott the Congress. Thus Verma Dua concludes:

The election result showed the Meghs' clear preference for the Congress. The most important factors which influenced their electoral behaviour was their Scheduled Caste status. They were acutely aware of the distinction separating them from the same funds—even among the Arya Sabhas—and they felt that their social position rather than their sectarian affiliation should decide their choice of political party.  
Verma Dua (1971)

As regards the nature of minority participation, model building is still in its initial stages or, rather strictly speaking, it has not even started. Most of the few studies that are available tend to treat the Muslim community as a homogeneous, static and introverted organization of alienated individuals who are so oppressed with their environment as to have the problem of survival and security uppermost in their mind. One such study that trends this beaten path is that by Bhambhani and Verma (1972). Its main strength is that it provides some empirical support to this often-repeated argument. However, there are a few more thorough studies also and Theodore P. Wright's (1970) is one of them. Pointing out the changes in the Muslim political behaviour brought about in the wake of the 1967 general elections, he notes that "what was novel about Muslim political behaviour in the 1967 campaign was the first organized attempt by some Muslim leaders to bargain with the various parties and 'deliver the vote' to whichever candidates promised the most."

Moreover, in spite of these studies it deserves to be noted that as yet no serious effort has been made to study minority participation by employing a comprehensive approach—an approach that would observe the Muslim voting behaviour in its immediate ecological context. For one thing, this approach will most probably reveal contrary to popular belief (also shared by many researchers) that Muslims are in fact as heterogeneous a community as any other, with their own share of cleavages of a regional, political and socio-economic nature (Ahmad, 1971b). Interestingly, this might also reveal that Muslim voting behaviour in a particular constituency or state has more things in common with non-Muslim voting behaviour in the same area than with Muslims of any other area or region.

Post-princely India continues to enjoy a political distinctiveness of its own. According to William Richter (1975) the political differences between post-princely and non-princely India are of the following three types.



persistent drive to enhance its profits and the government's commitment to mass welfare and uplift of the poor. Another important source of conflict between the two is government's insistence on maintaining and fostering public enterprises whose inefficient mode of functioning endangers their profits. "The recent efforts—by young and better educated business leaders primarily—to improve the business image and to exercise larger political influence through election activities have had no systematic success" (Kochanek, 1971). Thus the areas of co-operation between the two as yet remain unidentified.<sup>8</sup> Even in the case of small entrepreneurs, R.N. Blue's findings (1971) indicate that political interaction is low among them even with education. In fact they shun all governmental help and support.

Big business's concern for the political climate in the country is again determined by its inward-looking policy. The political instability which began in the latter half of the sixties, did make business interests more alert to their need for stability in public affairs. S.A. Kochanek (1971) notes "that a goal of political stability is too removed from the usual goals of business, too social conscious for the self-seeking leaders of private enterprise, to find acceptance in the larger public."

While Kochanek and Nayar had drawn their data from the documentation provided by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industries, Howard Erdman's study (1971) of the political attitudes of Baroda industrialists is based largely on interviews which he carried out in 1966-1967. On the basis of these interviews he found a "surprising degree of uniformity of outlook among Baroda industrialists." He also found that there was a distinct possibility of business interests getting involved "in the destruction of the institutions of parliamentary democracy in India—When confronted with radical democratic pressures, industrialists may well be inclined to turn towards aristocratic/agrarian interests for common political action to forestall radicalism."

Thus, it is obvious, that the relationship between business (big and small) and the government is far from smooth. Both appear to be pursuing conflicting goals that leave little ground for reconciliation. However, in spite of a hostile political environment, business has thrived in India. In spite of the constraints imposed on the operations of big business, it continues to expand. There can only be one explanation—there exist certain extra-institutional mechanisms which help business, particularly big business, to manipulate governmental policies, controls and decisions in such a manner as to ensure their survival and growth. Little work has been done in this direction. In fact what is required is a non-institutional approach that should identify the two-way relationship between big business and the political system, which influences social change and welfare policies and measures in contemporary India.

Available evidence suggests that the Indian political elite has always

been an abode of conservative forces and that the introduction of modern democratic institutions has made no difference to its reactionary nature. On the basis of the ethnic composition of towns, and of municipal and district boards during the pre-Independence era, Harold Gould (1971) argues that crucial aspects of the styles and forms of Indian politics that emerged after Independence were evolved in hundreds of these local bodies. It was in these bodies that ordinary Indian citizens were allowed to play serious political roles for the first time by the British. He thus concludes that "it is small wonder, therefore, that so-called caste and patronage politics are played with such consummate skill in contemporary India. The ordinary grassroots politicians had half a century to learn their skill in the local arenas that Lord Ripon provided for edification."

A detailed study of municipal politics in Agra and Poona indicates that this situation has not undergone any considerable change. "Ideology and issues do not explain much of the action of these municipal politics. They are guided rather by the alignments behind particular leaders and their membership of particular groups" (Rosenthal, 1971). Harry Blair (1972) reports from Bihar that even the split in dominant castes does not affect the caste composition of the Members of the Legislative Assembly. "Dominant castes do fragment, it is true, and their fragmentation allows men of other castes to win elections—but this process appears to go only a certain distance down the caste ladder, for there is no tendency for the Kurmis, Yadavs, and Koiris to fragment in favour of caste groups beneath them in the ritual rank-order. Rather, the pattern is for upper caste predominance to reassert itself. While Bhumihars are splitting in one constituency they are crutifying in others, so that over the state as a whole the relative numbers of MLAs from the different caste clusters remain fairly constant for the last three elections."

Not is this trend confined to local or state level bodies. In fact, as Norman Nicholson (1975) has shown, it manifests itself in the Indian Council of Ministers also. On the basis of the 1952-1969 data he suggests that "recruitment patterns have been heavily influenced by the twin problems of regionalism and communalism which beset the nation at independence. They were established early and have remained stable over time." A similar trend is visible in the career pattern of the members of the Council. "The caste Hindu leaders of the state party organisations fetched a high price indeed for their move to Delhi—rapid appointment, high rank, easy promotion, and control of key ministries. Minority leaders came more cheaply. Lower caste representatives were poorly rewarded for their mobility." However, within the Council a person cannot "make much of a career out of promoting an 'interest'. He has to exhibit his capability or has to be more committed to his political career rather than 'interest'."

There has, however, been a distinct change in the political leadership of princely states in India. Kishor Sharma (1969) has argued that in the hill society of India there has been a distinct shift from the traditional leadership of the Rajas to modern democratic leaders. A much better study is that of Kolhapur politics which has undergone continual change in the past century (Rosenthal, 1973b). This study describes the phenomenon that is rather unique to the behaviour of the Indian political elite—to politicize as many areas of national life as possible. Thus, Donald Rosenthal says:

By 1962 to speak of the basis of political power in Kolhapur district, meant not only to refer to those with formal political power in state or local legislative bodies, or to men with voice in the district party, but also to those most active in the new economic institutions of the district—institutions which drew upon governmental financing organised under the guise of co-operative economic activity. Indeed so important have the major co-operative institutions become as political areas in their own right—for they have control of important financial resources which can be manipulated to the advantage of individuals or political groups—that contests for control of bodies like the district board, do not seem to raise as basic or potential a threat to the positions of major political leaders as do challenges to their controls of taluka and district co-operative institutions.

Donald B. Rosenthal (1973 b)

However, a welcome change is on the card as the trend towards bureaucratisation and institutionalisation of Kolhapur politics gains momentum and the "model for the future may be not that of individual 'co-operative kinds' but of collective leadership and corporate structure in which men participate with each other in the setting of limits to personal ambitions through the use of schemes of rotation in office and rewards based on bureaucratic skill" (*ibid.*).

On the whole, however, it appears that the emerging trend in Kolhapur politics is an exception to the general conservatism of the Indian political elite. More extensive research efforts are required to indicate the nature of the social base of a political leader as well as the mechanism by which a political leader acquires and then maintains his social base. Perhaps, the political leadership that draws its support base from the traditional values in the social structure has developed a vested interest in preserving the traditional ascriptive values.

#### *Panchayati Raj Institutions*

At the time of the establishment of the panchayati raj institutions, it was thought that their functioning would substantially alter the social and political environment of the Indian villages. Contrary to this expectation, however, as various studies indicate, the panchayati raj

institutions have as yet failed to bring about the expected change and development. K. Seshadri and S. P. Jain (1972) have noted the failure of these institutions to foster political socialization in villages. Their inquiry reveals that the panchayati raj functionaries had discussed general elections with only 15 per cent of the respondents. It was also found that the Gram Sabha as an institution of the panchayati raj does not seem to have played any significant role in the elections. In fact the panchayati raj leaders could hardly have acted as agents of political socialization because their conflicts and the panchayati raj elections were based on "personal rivalries rather than on policy issues."

In spite of the malfunctioning of panchayati raj institutions the village community is gradually opening up. As a study of the pattern of communication in rural Rajasthan reveals "the use of radio, together with the urban contacts, as one of the medium of gathering information is popular; village *shapals* are also serving as an effective forum of discussion..." (Iqbal Narain *et al.*, 1975). But largely due to the level of illiteracy and difficulties in availability, newspapers are not very popular among rural people.

Different channels of communication within the framework of the panchayati raj institutions are used by the members of the elite and the non-elite. The non-elite prefer to discuss matters of public importance with the institution's elites or villagers in a collective form. In regard to affairs of personal or of public importance, "the common villager prefers to discuss them with members of his own social group (caste, relatives, friends, etc.). On the other hand, the elite do not prefer to consult officials over matters either of personal or of public importance." "This shows that the bureaucratic elite has failed to evoke a sense of confidence both among the elite and citizenry. Further, the fact that development officials are contacted less by the low level institutional elite (pancha, etc) and reputational elite shows that the officials, by and large, still stick to their officious attitude" (*ibid.*). Also, very few citizens have actually used the forum of the Gram Sabha to communicate their demands and attitudes to the governing elite. In general, it was found that citizens were not optimistic about the prospects of the panchayati raj system. Interestingly, the study indicated a link between social structure and patterns of communication. It was found that "in the more developed districts of Ganga-Nagar and Bharatpur, officials are consulted more" (*ibid.*).

Changes in village society are gradually modifying the nature of rural leadership. M. P. Abraham's study (1971) of modernizing Indian villages indicates that "caste rank is no longer the major determinant of the leadership—power is primarily a function of economic dominance." It is true that an individual's age and caste rank serve him as sources of community power, but they do not help his emergence as a community leader. The emergence of a village leader is predicated on his social



participation and farm size. On the basis of these observations Abraham classifies leaders into two categories—the potential and dynamic leaders. A potential leader has access to sources of power and also possesses those characteristics which are traditionally associated with leadership. A dynamic leader, on the other hand, is one who actually exercises power and is nominated to places of responsibilities by others. In terms of leadership, therefore, Abraham concludes that in modernizing villages a gradual transfer of power from potential leaders to dynamic leaders is taking place.

#### *Need for Constructing Theoretical Model in Indian Political Sociology*

As this survey of literature has amply illustrated, most of the studies identify either sociological or political reasons for the behaviour of the citizens. Election studies have usually tried to explain recent changes in the political system on the basis of sociological changes—decreasing influence of traditional social values and organization on the voting decision of individuals. On the other hand, there have been few examples of the reverse trend. Strictly speaking, only a few of them can be identified as studies in political sociology. Political sociology includes both political as well as sociological reasons for the behaviour of people. In fact, genuine political sociology "is a cross-disciplinary breakthrough seeking enlarged models which reintroduce as variables the 'givens' of each component source" (Sartori, 1973: 92). Accordingly, the primary methodological objective of future studies in political sociology should be to go in for a framework that would be broad enough to include a diverse variety of interchangeable 'variables' and 'givens'. Of course, this task might prove to be formidable at times. Thus, it has been argued here that what is important is to treat political sociology as an approach or a perspective for the study of human behaviour.

Possibly the conspicuous lack of use of the perspective offered by political sociology arises from the fact that little work has been undertaken to develop the theoretical aspect of this field. On the basis of empirical studies conducted in Western societies, K.D. Krishnamurthy (1972) concludes that "political sociology may be defined as an application of sociology for the study of political phenomena and processes." Hence any behaviour, be it religious, political, economic or moral, has to be understood from a sociological perspective. This approach reveals the causative phenomena embedded in the social system. This is in essence the rationale for the application of sociology to the study of politics. In the light of the above discussion, what Krishnamurthy appears to be arguing for is the sociological reduction of politics or sociology of politics. A similar argument is put forward by C.M. Jain and S.L. Doshi (1974) who feel that "it

(political sociology) has its perspective and conceptual scheme borrowed fully from sociology." They also agree to the definition put forward by Geer and Orlans, "political sociology would seem to be, simply, the sociological study of politics" (quoted by Jain and Doshi, 1974). It is true that the political system is a sub-system of the larger system—society. But it is also true that as a sub-system it does have a certain amount of autonomy. Secondly, these authors have also failed to grasp another significant attribute of a system—the communication channels between the different constituents of a system are two way. Thus it turns out that both these studies are of a uniformly poor quality and lack theoretical understanding of the field of political sociology. Hence further debate in this area is indicated. Not just theoretical but also related methodological issues need to be settled on an urgent basis.

Future studies in Indian political sociology will have to be of accuracy broad based enough to include the two way relationship between the social and the political system. This further points to another equally important issue—research in this area should lay more emphasis on analysis rather than on description. In fact, efforts should be made to analyse the phenomena taking place during the interval between two elections. A better understanding of the social and political processes at work in times other than the actual of elections would positively contribute to a better analysis of the elections that are at present usually treated as political events without any to each other. Finally, it need to be stressed that the non-institutional approach and extra-institutional behaviour not necessarily divergent are an important concern for political sociology as the institutional approach or behaviour. Thus, what is required of a practitioner of the political sociology approach is an ability to rise above the compartmentalization in the social sciences and to display interconnectedness of all its activities our understanding of the society in which we live. This is the minimum requirement for initiating model and theory building in Indian political sociology.