

A Study On The Evolution And Growth Of Urban Sociology In India

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Abstract:

India has a long history of urbanisation and urban spread, any systematic study on Indian urban phenomena began only in early 20th century, at a time when urban sociology was getting recognition as a distinct branch of Sociology in the U.S.A. and other western countries. The birth and growth of urban sociology in India was rather slow. The reasons for this can be attributed to many factors. If we look at the geographical differentiation of Indian land into rural and urban areas, it could be observed that the vast majority of the Indian population lives in the so called rural areas. Populations in those areas, which are demarcated as urban, accommodates less than 31% (2011 Indian Census Report). This was one of the major factors which held against the requirement for a scientific discipline to study urban phenomena in India. But the majority criterion, however cannot ignore the significant variations in the institutional and organisational behaviour of the people in the urban context. At present, the urban field is subjected to multidisciplinary research involving disciplines such as economics, geography, history, political science and demography besides sociology. A more direct source for a sociological study of urbanism and urbanisation come from the studies of sociologically relevant aspects of urban social life and of segments of urban population, relating to issues such as immigration, caste system, occupational segmentation, family organisation, politics and religion etc. The birth and growth, and the state of urban sociology in India as a distinct branch of sociology discipline can be examined by taking stock of the studies on urban social settings in India that contributed to the development of the discipline. Since it is beyond the scope of this unit to include all the sociologically relevant urban studies, this research work confines its discussion to only some selected areas that fall under urban sociology.

Key words: Development, Urban social life, Immigration, Urban sociology.

Introduction:

The studies of towns and cities in India on aspects of urban social life are not too many. In India urban sociology developed as a branch of sociology, which itself is a comparatively young social science discipline. Professor Patrick Geddes, a notable town planner and sociologist, established the first department of sociology in the University of Bombay in 1920, around the time when studies about cities and city life were getting much attention due to the initiatives of the Chicago School. According to Patrick Geddes, cities are a concrete image of civilization. He initiated a few urban studies in India. Geddes wanted to revive indigenous customs and use them

for modern town planning in India. He believed that social processes and spatial form are related and therefore by changing the spatial form it is possible to change social structure as well. Geddes wrote around forty town-planning reports, in India between 1914 and 1924 at the behest of various institutions and government agencies, which were included in the work 'Town Planning Towards City Development'. These not only put forward novel ideas about preserving and reviving Indian urban centres but were also an important archive about the status of Indian cities in the early decades of the twentieth century.

Although Patrick Geddes initiated urban studies in India, it took a few more decades for the subject to take off as an area of study. The reasons for the neglect may be due to the predominant view among the sociologists that the distinction between rural and urban sociology is not meaningful due to its lower level of urbanisation and also due to the perception that there was no distinction between the traditional city and the village as both were elements of the same civilization.

The process of urbanisation and urbanism in India attracted the attention of scholars on and off since the 1950s. Social scientists began to show real interest in urban studies after the 1951 census report, which revealed high growth of urban population in India. Max Weber, Arnold Toynbee, Milton Singer, Robert Redfield, G.S. Ghurye, Radhakamal Mukherjee, D.N. Majumdar and Gideon Sjoberg are a few scholars to name who showed interest in urban phenomena in India. Prof. G.S. Ghurye, successor of Patrick Geddes at University of Bombay, showed keen interest in studying the urban situation in India. He worked on the comparative and historical aspects of urbanization and also studied rural-urban relations. He concentrated on the ecological, political and cultural aspects of ancient and medieval cities in the context of civilization. This is reflected in his article 'Cities of India' published in 1953. Max Weber (1962) has offered a comparative historical account of cities, with special attention to the institution of caste in the context of Indian cities.

Prof. Radhakamal Mukherjee initiated social ecological studies of Indian cities at Lucknow University, besides sociologists, geographers have also contributed to the social ecological studies of towns and cities. Ecological studies may not be of much value to the sociologists, but they are of valuable source of material to follow up both the social processes and implications of ecological phenomenon.

The 1971 census recorded a high rate of growth of urban population, which again attracted the interest of many more scholars into the study of cities and associated issues, which resulted in gaining fast development of urban sociology in India. The problems of rural-urban migration, urban development, and other related areas such as demography, neighborhoods, slums, stratification, education, ethnic conflict and movements, kinship, religion, politics, economy, social problems and impact of urbanization on rural areas attracted the attention of many sociologists and social anthropologists. There were a number of important studies on urbanisation related social problems in towns and cities. Sociologically relevant studies on problems like prostitution, beggary, juvenile delinquency and slums in the urban context have been carried out both by social workers and urban sociologists. Many well-known slum studies were conducted during this period. Several edited volumes of papers on urban themes were published as proceedings of a conference of special number of journals devoted to urban issues.

Demographic studies of towns and cities have been made based on the Census Reports and National Sample Surveys. Kingsley Davis, Ashish Bose, Sovani and others have made significant contributions to urban demographic analysis. These studies enable us to know more about the magnitude and scale of urbanisation in our country. Most of the studies conducted during the periods of 1950s, 60s and 70s are largely empirical generalizations about the urban phenomenon most of which lacked the rigor of scientific method.

In 1980's and afterwards there was a remarkable growth in urban studies, although certain areas received more attention, such as urbanization patterns and trends, migration studies, social problems in urban areas, in research, while other areas such as metropolitisation, regional planning, spatial structure of cities, were not explored much. A number of studies have been conducted on urban problems of slums and squatter settlements in the 1980s.

There were some more government initiatives in the 1980s and 1990s in conducting urban studies. The National Commission on Urbanisation published its five-volume report. It highlighted the problems of urbanisation at the grassroots, sub-state and state level. The government of India encouraged the city studies for the preparation of a national report on the state of Indian cities as an after effect of the 1996 Istanbul conference on Habitat by UN's Center for Human Settlement (UNCHS). Moreover the National Urban Observatory established by the Government of India is planning to promote urban databases at the city level as a part of the local urban observatories in accordance with UNCHS guidelines and suggestions.

All these efforts will provide a more congenial environment for urban studies in India. In the preceding section we had seen the development of Urban Sociology in India by having an overview of the urban studies conducted since the 1920s. We have seen urban studies in India were concentrated on different aspects of evolution of the city and city life. Based on these different perspectives let us make a broad categorization of urban studies and have a look at some of the studies in each of them.

Historical Comparative Studies

Urban studies have evoked much interest in historical and comparative perspectives on the origin and growth of cities or urban centers. Many scholars perceive cities in the wider context of the history of civilization. Some even believe that history of civilization should be written in terms of the history of cities and that the city is the symbol of civilization. The history of India's urbanization is centuries old. Scholars have attempted to classify Indian pre-modern and modern cities based on different criteria such as function of the cities, size and population of the cities etc. India's urbanism has essentially been shaped by three civilizations. The Hindu, during the early period; the Muslim, during the medieval period; and the Christian, during the modern period. The rulers representing these civilizations tried to impose elements of their culture on the urban life of India. Moreover, the urban settlement patterns in India often show juxtaposition of old and new. Thus historical perspective adds an important dimension to our understanding of the urban situation in India. There are a handful of studies on urbanism in historical India.

The influence of British colonial period on urban development in India also was an interesting theme for scholars of urban sociology. Evolution of Delhi under British rule when it became the dual city. He looks out for the symbolic meanings and hidden values implicit in British approaches to urban design and planning. A different approach to study colonial city is to study them in the Marxian framework of imperialism and exploitation and dependency theory. Moonis Raza and Atiya in their study of Characteristics of Colonial Urbanisation - A Case study of the Satellitic Primacy of Calcutta examine the growth of Calcutta into satellitic primate of the metropolitan economy under the colonial situation. The authors emphasise the need to analyse the colonial urbanisation in the framework of the development of underdevelopment under imperialist exploitation since the processes of urbanisation are closely interrelated to those of economic development. According to them Calcutta, a satellitic primate, was neither able to sustain itself as a metropolis nor induce the development of its hinterland. Calcutta grew but did not develop during the colonial era and its growth was a reflection not of the healthy process of urbanisation but rather of the diseased process of urban assertion.

Studies on Urbanization and Urban Growth

India is home to more than one-sixth of the world's population and 28% of its people live in urban areas. There are 35 urban agglomerations each with a population of more than one million, and about 37 per cent of the total urban population lives in these million- plus cities. The two largest - Mumbai (Bombay) and Delhi (including the capital, New Delhi) - had population of more than 9 million each. In the last 60 years the percentage of urban population to the total population (Urbanization) doubled from 13.86 (1941) to 27.78% (2001). The absolute number of urban population (urban growth) increased even more. Urbanization in India is proceeding at a modest pace. There has been an increase of 2.1 per cent in the proportion of urban population over the 1991 census. Urbanization and urban growth are two different concepts. Urbanization refers to the percentage of the total population, which is concentrated in urban settlements as well as to a rise in the percentage. Urban growth refers to the percentage increase in the absolute size of the urban population. The pattern of urbanization and urban growth in India shows a relatively Low rate of urbanization and high rate of urban growth (Bose 1973). However, proper documentation of urban growth and related aspects began to be recorded along with the census survey only. The population growth in the cities as well as growth of market towns occurred during the colonial period due to increase in commerce and commercialization of agriculture. The growth in small-scale industries resulted in the development of large towns. Cotton textiles and other industries caused the concentration on population location-based and in the development of urban centers. Thus there was a gradual growth of urban areas in India. The development of trade, commerce, industry, transport, communication and construction etc. all led to a faster rise in the percentage of urban population. The processes of urbanization and urban growth have been studied by social scientists from various dimensions. The demographic studies concentrate on the rate of urban growth and related aspects. Studies on migration consider migration as significant factor in urbanization. Urbanization has far reaching effects on larger societal processes and social institutions such as family and kinship. Certain urban studies focused on this aspect also.

Demographic studies of Urban:

N.V. Sovani (1966) in his study Urbanization and Urban India argued that while Indian urbanization had many resemblances in form to that of the West, it differed from the latter in content. For him the process of urbanization plays a socially dynamic role and it will continue to do so. In Urbanisation in India (1970) Ashish Bose analysed the pattern of urbanization, its structural characteristics and some related problems. The focus of examination for K.C. Zacharia was the role played by internal, migration in the process of urbanization. For this purpose he analysed the census data since 1901. Ashok Mitra (1967) in his paper A Functional Classification of Towns in India attempts to make a composite classification of towns using a triangular coordinate technique on the basis of industrial classification of workers in the 1961 census. P.B. Desai (1969) studies the changes in the size and sex composition of India's population over a period of sixty years using census data. The work examines the relationship of sex composition with other demographic variables like age structure, migration, working force and the geographical distribution of urban population.

Impact of Urbanization on Social Institutions: The family structure and the intra and inter family relations are affected by the process of urbanization. The cross cultural influence in the urban areas and its diverse nature in terms of ethnic, religious, linguistic, etc., backgrounds leads to the breaking of the old community bonds and formation of new relationships. There had been studies conducted on urban families by scholars. Studies by I.P. Desai (1964), Kapadia, K.M. (1969), A.D. Ross have pointed out that urban joint family is gradually replaced by nuclear family with the shrinking of family size and confining the kinship relation to two or three generation only. It has been shown that though the structure of urban family is changing, the spirit of individualism is not growing in the families (I .P. Desai 1964). Desai in his study observed that though most of the families are residentially nuclear, functionally and in terms of property they are joint. Apart from these, Ross found through her study (1962) that in urban settings the typical form of family unit is small joint family. Moreover the relations with one's distant kin is weakening or breaking. And the households seem to be more of an egalitarian kind rather than concentrating around the head of the family as seen in the traditional patriarchal family. Even in the midst of such changes the family \ ethos remain more or less the same.

Conclusion:

Although some scientific studies began in the 1920s, major contributions in this field commenced around the 1950s. Social scientists started showing keen interest in the urban phenomena and various related social issues after the publication of the 1950 census report, which showed an enormous urban growth. There had been studies on various dimensions of urban phenomena. From the quantum of work done in the area it can be said that urban sociology has been established as a distinct branch of Sociology now.

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