CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE SOCIAL IN 19TH CENTURY NORTH INDIA: REFLECTIONS ON THE CONCEPT OF "SAMAJ" IN HINDI

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It has been argued recently that the genealogy of the modern concepts of society and community in India can be traced back to the nineteenth century colonial, reformist and nationalist discourses. (Kaviraj, 2002; Prakash, 2002) As the studies on the colonial governmental rationality in India tell us, "Indian society" was identified in the colonial discourse with a definite and clear intention as an object of reform and restructuring. (Scott, 1995; Prakash, 2002) In the colonial discourse of Indian society, the practical-reformist intentions and epistemological perspectives got combined as society was perceived as an object of knowledge and an object of transformation simultaneously. This conceptualization took place clearly under the influence of utilitarian–liberal worldview dominant at that time, particularly from the early 19th century onwards. (Scott, 1995, 204-205; Cf. Stokes, 1989) The restructuring of the domain of the social under the regime of liberal governmentality and the emergence of concept of society in liberal political philosophy as a high order abstraction that provided a grounding for the new political rationality was happening simultaneously in the countries of Europe as well. But as David Scott and Gyan Prakash have argued, the imperatives of colonial governmentality were different from the liberal governmentality in Europe.

The colonial project, Prakash argues, was enmeshed in the basic contradiction between colonial despotism and possibility of a society as a domain of freedom. Colonial regime's inability to constitute a "civil society" in India manifested in its application of the rule of 'colonial difference' according to which the state-society relationship in India were viewed very differently than in the case of European state where liberal political philosophy provided the model for such relationship. The state in the liberal framework relates to citizens in the civil society and civil society is constituted by free and equal individuals. In case of colonial India on the contrary, Indian society was perceived and constructed by colonial discursive and institutional practices as consisting of religious communities, castes, and tribes. (Prakash, 2002, 28-34) These entities were

supposed to act on the basis of collective, and not individual, interests and affiliations as they were supposed to invoke collective bonds and rights based on ties of kinship, religion, culture, past and sentiments. Such assumptions about the nature of society in India played important role not only in the formation of Orientalist, missionary, and utilitarian discourses but also in the new legal system and the governmental technologies of counting and classification of population.

The conceptualization of the domain of the social by the Indians, beginning with the reformers, should be understood against the background of such discursive and institutional practices. That they should be understood and explained against this background doesn't mean that Indian conceptualization of the social was simply a replica of the colonial construction of Indian society. On the contrary, the colonial conceptions based on colonial assumptions were fiercely contested by the reformers and later by the nationalists. The conceptual structure of the Indian discourse about society and the social should be understood by analyzing the specificities of this conceptualization in all its historical details.

At the same time, it must be recognized that the process of conceptualization of the social in different regions of India in the nineteenth century is related but at the same time there are crucial differences because of the differing nature of political and social transformations they undergo during this period. (Kaviraj, 2002, 97–142) Some of the differences also appear because of the different dynamics of the vernacular modernity in each of the linguistic region of India, depending on the level of penetration of the colonial administrative and educational institutions. Related to the spread of new educational regime is the colonial linguistic practices, directed mainly from the Fort William College. These practices focused on defining languages discretely by producing literary histories, standardized grammars, dictionaries and glossaries, and gradually led to the standardization of modern vernaculars. (Kaviraj, 2009, 312–349)

In the second half of the nineteenth century, these standardized modern vernaculars became the media of communication in the newly emerging vernacular public spheres. (Kaviraj, 2009, 312–349) Gradually, they also became instruments for the formation of the regional linguistic identities under the leadership of regional cultural elites, a process that went parallel with the formation of a sense of national identity. (Kaviraj, 2009, 328–335) The formation of regional linguistic identities took place at a much larger geographical scale than was possible hitherto. The extension of the geographical scale was linked to the extension of the scale of social and political action made possible by administrative instruments such as language based census and the language policy on the one hand, and by

the spread of print culture on the other. These sites of vernacular modernity are particularly rich as sources of information about the formation of modern social and political ideas and concepts. Most of the leading actors in these public spheres made use of both the western and indigenous intellectual sources for the articulation of their politics. Thus, they are particularly rich sites for understanding the process of concept formation in relation to their social and political histories. At these sites of vernacular discourses were articulated the ways of being modern, Indian, and regional at the same time by the nationalist intelligentsia in different regions. (Seth, 2008, 159–180) Rest of the paper is focussed on the analysis of the conceptualization of the social in the nationalist discourse in Hindi in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Intertwinement of Linguistic, Reformist, and Nationalist Discourses

In the decades of 1860s and 70s, the social reform movements of Bengal and Bombay were beginning to influence the intellectual worlds in other regions of the country also. In the North–West Provinces, the social reformism of Bengal based Brahmo Samaj was present, but not very effective or successful. The social reform movement which was more successful in the North Indian regions, particularly in Punjab, was the Arya Samaj movement founded by Swami Dayanand Saraswati in 1875. The Arya Samaj and its foundational text, Dayanand Saraswati's Satyarth Prakash, provided a trenchant critique of some of the Hindu religious practices such as idle worship, promoted monotheism and provided a challenge to the traditional authority of the Brahmins in the performance of rituals. (Jordens, 1978; Jones, 1989) Before the publication of Satyarth Prakash, through the 60s and early 70s, Swami Dayanand was spreading his ideas through his lecture tours in the Northern parts of India. He gave a series of lectures in Banaras and other cities and towns of the North-West Provinces. The educated Hindu elite of this region stood up against Swami Dayanand's ideas and the Arya Samaj movement, in defence of what they understood as 'orthodox' Hinduism, naming it Sanatan Dharma. Bhartendu Harishchandra of Banaras was connected to one such conservative organization, the Kashi Dharma Sabha. The Kashi Dharma Sabha was constituted in order to counter the challenge posed by the growing activities and influence of Swami Dayananda and to defend what was understood as the 'Hindu tradition.' (Dalmia, 1997, 35)

The basic function of the Kashi Dharma Sabha pertained to religious rituals and ritual status involving an authoritative interpretation of canonical texts. The larger purpose of the Dharma Sabha was to defend the "Sanatan Dharma"—equated, in the conservative discourse, with Hinduism as

such—from the reformist critique. (Dalmia, 1997, 356; Zavos, 2001, 109–123) The Dharma Sabha understood Hinduism as a clearly definable entity that could be governed by rules and regulations authoritatively defined and interpreted by the Sabha itself. The Kashi Dharma Sabha was in a privileged position to carry out such a task as Banaras pundits enjoyed this privileged position since ancient times among the Hindus.

The movement for the official recognition of Hindi language with Devanagari script started around the same time i.e. during the decades of 1860s and 70s. Bhartendu Harishchandra, along with Raja Shivprasad Sitarehind, was actively involved in this movement. As the movement slowly gained momentum, it emphasized the separation of Hindi from Urdu and its distinct identity. From the very beginning the movement for Hindi language linked the identity of Hindi with the Hindu religious community and presented Hindi as the language of the Hindus of North India and Urdu as the language of the Muslims. In the course of time, particularly among the urban educated populations, the identification of Hindi with Hindus and of Urdu with Muslims was consolidated through literary and political discourses. Most remarkably, despite their mutual quarrels on the reform question, when it came to the promotion of Hindi, the Arya Samaj and the Sanatan Dharma supporters formed a united front. Thus at the moment of the birth of modern politics in the Hindi-Urdu speaking regions of North India, the construction of a new social imaginary took place in these separatist discourses in the first phase of the nationalist movement wherein linguistic, social, and political issues get intertwined with each other.

In first phase of its development, the literary and political discourse in Hindi was deeply influenced by the ideas of Bhartendu Harishchandra. Many of the prominent literary figures of this period, who were active in politics also, actively promoted his ideas. In the rest of the article, I analyze the works of some of the most prominent Hindi intellectuals of this period such as Bhartendu Harishchandra, Balkrishna Bhatt, Radhacharan Goswami, Pratap Narain Mishra, Chaudhary Badri Narayan Upadhyay 'Premghan', with a view to understand the conceptualization of the social. Most of these figures were editors of important Hindi newspapers and magazines of that period such as: Harishchandra Magazine, Kavivachan Sudha, Hindi Pradeep, Brahman, Anand- Kadambini, Bharat-Mitra, etc. Some of them were active in politics, being delegates for some sessions of the Indian National Congress or otherwise taking deep interest in politics and influencing public opinion.

These figures played a historical role in the shaping of modern Hindi literary as well as political discourse in this region. Their historical role acquires an added importance as they were also instrumental in developing

the language or idiom of modern politics in this region as they had a wide readership among the newly educated. According to Krishan Kumar, their readership was constituted by a heterogeneous public 'consisting of educated elements from landed and money-lending castes, or from families of men employed in government offices, and professionals in law, medicine, and teaching." (Kumar, 1990, 1247) In addition, their discourse is also a site for the production of social and political concepts with which the vernacular intelligentsia attempts to influence and shape public opinion.

Conceptualization of the Social I: The religious and the social

Although the Hindi intellectuals were critical of Arya Samaj and its method of social reform that combined social reform with religious reform, they were by no means the defenders of the social status quo. Thus, in his public speech delivered at Balia (1884) Bharatvarsh ki unnati kaise ho sakti hai (How can India progress), (Harishchandra, 2008 (VI), pp. 66-72.) Bhartendu Harishchandra defined the relationship between the religious and the social whereby these domains could be related and separated simultaneously. He differentiated between Dharmaniti (religious code) and Samajniti (social code). He said that "we have mixed up the two like milk and water." Then he gave examples of this mixing up. In these examples he provided non-religious, mostly utilitarian, explanations of many religious rituals and festivals. For example, according to Harishchandra's explanation, the ritual of bathing in the religious fair of Balia existed in order to make it possible for the people of that region to meet periodically and show solidarity by sharing in the happiness and grief of each other. The ritual of fasting was observed in order to purifying the body once in a month. Similarly the festival of Diwali was there so that the houses could be cleaned properly once a year. He further told his audience that such festivals and rituals were "like your municipality." The big mistake people made, according to Harishchandra, was that they considered these outward rituals like religious fairs and festivals as "real" religion. But this was clearly wrong because "real religion" (vastvik dharma) was devotion of god. The rest was only samaj dharma (social ethics). And this could be and should be changed and reformed according to the needs of time and place (deshkala). (Harishchandra, 2010 (VI), pp. 66-72.)

Harishchandra also argued that many unnecessary rituals and festivals had been included as a result of the later additions to the original doctrine of dharma. There was no need to follow all of them. He advised that people be selective about them. Thus Harishchandra made two arguments here: first argument was that there were some rituals and practices which

didn't have any basis in religion but had only non-religious justifications; such practices were not essential to religion. The second argument was that those social practices should be accepted which were prohibited by contemporary society but which were not contrary to the scriptures, but later, accretion. His examples for such practices included nothing but the main agendas of the nineteenth century social reform movements: promotion of widow remarriage, child marriage as socially harmful, criticism of Kulin polygamy, promotion of women's education etc. Like other social reformers of the nineteenth century, in this argument also, the rationalist–utilitarian justification of social reform was often combined with the invocation of the authority of the scriptures. (Harishchandra, 2008 (VI), pp. 66-72.)

Now such arguments for this kind of separation from Harishchandra were interesting also because he consistently defended the claims of "Sanatan Dharma" against the social reformers of nineteenth century while at the same time underscoring the need for reforming many of the social practices of the Hindus. (Cf. Dalmia, 1997, 25) The strategy here was to promote the social reform agenda by separating the domain of the social from that of the religious. Harishchandra publicly defended some Hindu religious practices such as idol worship, sharply critiqued and censured by the Arya Samaj movement.

In an essay titled "Vaishnavta aur Bharatvarsh" (Vaishnavism and India) where Harishchandra sought to present Vaishnavism as "the only real religion of the Hindus"[1], he ended up, towards the end of the essay, redefining the role of religion itself in interesting ways. As a matter of fact, Bhartendu argued, on the one hand, that religion should be understood as a private concern of the believer, on the hand, he conceived of communities (samaj) basically in terms of religious communities. Interestingly, religion here emerges as an important source of public identity for the people. He argued that religious worship was a matter of heart (hriday ki ratnavastu) and hence should not be made a matter of propaganda. On the other hand, he urged all the sects among the Hindus, Vaishnav, Shaiv, Sikhs, Brahmasamajis, Aryasamajis to be united under the "true" and "natural" religion of the Hindus, (Vaishnavism) so that the united Hindu religious community could compete for secular and worldly things like jobs, political power, and other economic resources. And the competition of the Hindu religious community, and this was a communal argument in the strict sense of the word, was supposed to be with other religious communities, Muslims and Christians. (Harishchandra, 2010 (V) p. 288)

Reconfiguring the role of religion in relation to the domains of the social, the economic, and the political is one of the important recurring

motifs in the nationalist discourse of the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Thus Balkrishna Bhatt, the editor of Hindi Pradeep, keeps coming back to this motif in many of his writings of this period. In an article, *Jatiyon ka Anoothapan* ("National Character", English title given by the author himself), Bhatt argued that to properly understand the essential character of a nation (jati) we needed to discover one essential element of the jati by studying its history. (Bhatt, 1973, 41–47) He further argued that this element was like a seed that, in the manner of Aristotelian teleology, unfolded in time to reveal the true character of that jati. It is the study of these essential elements that would reveal the specific differences of the jatis from each other. The defining and the differentiating element of the Hindu jati, according to Bhatt, was *manansheelata* (contemplative disposition). This element differentiates Hindu jati from other jatis as this element was absent in other jatis. (Bhatt, 1973, pp. 41–47)

There had been, according to Bhatt, both advantages and disadvantages of the dominance of this element in the history of the Hindu jati. Its main advantage was that Hindu jati accomplished great achievements in the field of religion and metaphysics. But there have been many disadvantages. First of all, Hindu jati remained lost in contemplating otherworldly affairs. This otherworldly spirit was basically responsible for the prevalence of inactivity in the worldly affairs such as science and politics. In the worldly fields such as science and politics, the Hindus always lacked the concept of praxis, an essential requirement for success in these fields. The Hindu jati always lacked a taste for free politics (swacchhand rajniti)of the kind that prevailed in Europe. The defining element of the English jati, according to Bhatt, was liberty (swacchhandata) which made the English people achieve what they had achieved with their active interest in free politics. (Bhatt, 1973, pp. 41–47)

The second major disadvantage of this spirit of contemplative religiosity, according to Bhatt, had been that the Hindus had never been able to conceptualize the domains of social life free from the intrusion of religion. Thus, Bhatt complained that religion intruded in almost all spheres of life of the Hindus: there was religion in morality (naitikata), in astrology, and even in medicine. So much so that it was impossible to imagine a sphere of morality independent of religion. Finally at the end of the essay, Bhatt argued that need of the time was to create a sphere of politics by learning from the English jati in order for the Hindu jati to become a politically organized community. This was the basic precondition of the progress (unnati) of the Hindu jati, according to Bhatt. (Bhatt, 1973, pp. 41–47)

In another essay titled *Dharam ka mahatva* ("Importance of Dharma"), he again deplored the interference of religion in all spheres of life and its

negative impact on the social and political life of the nation. He wrote, exasperated, that religion (dharma) was present in everyday activities of sleeping, waking up, sitting, standing, eating, drinking etc. (Bhatt, 1996, pp. 93-97) The social issues such as improvement of the condition of women among Hindus could not be undertaken unless they addressed this deeper problem of the dominance of the religious. In an essay titled *Hamare Dharam sambandhi kharch* ("Our Religion Related Expenses") Bhatt argued against spending too much money on religious rituals. He said that there was a need to save money from such useless expenses and for using this money for economic and political purposes. (Bhatt, 1996, pp. 93-97) Similar arguments about the importance of learning natural science, economics and politics from Europe are given in the essay Naye tarah ka junoon (A New Obsession). (Bhatt, 70-72)

Throughout his work, Bhatt places a heavy emphasis on the critique of orthodoxy, dogmatism, and prevalence of old customs among the Hindus. According to Bhatt, the persistent resistance to change, which he calls *Hamari Parivartan Vimukhta* (Our Dislike of Change) (Bhatt, 1996, 9-10) is one of the causes responsible for the decline of the Hindu community in social, economic, and political fields. These elements prevail more in those regions of India, where there is predominance of the Sanatan Dharma. Bhatt squarely holds sanatanis' attitude towards the new winds of change blowing in the wake of the movement for reforms, responsible for the backward condition of the Hindus in sanatani dominated regions. Although he doesn't subscribe to any of the reformist movement, Bhatt would like the sanatanis themselves to take up the reformist task for the removing the social evils prevailing among the Hindus. One of the locations of the prevalence of all social evils is the institution of the of the family. It is in the domain of the family that the individuality and freedom of the young people is crushed.

Child marriage and the joint family are the two social evils that stand out in Bhatt's works as the greatest enemies of individuality and freedom. Critique of the practice of child marriage keeps recurring in his articles. So much so that he often chides himself for repeating the same things too much. He promotes the spirit of freedom (swacchhandata) among young people and thus praises the institution of family in European countries that promotes freedom and independence among the young people. Educated and independent young people – who are not crushed by the unnecessary burdens of the family life at too early a stage – are important for the progress of the nation (jati) as they can contribute much more to it. Whereas the institution of joint family among the Indians and the practice of child marriage tend to burden young men (not women so much!) too

early in life with too many household responsibilities and also disturb the progress of their education: "samajik bandhan jakarate hain" (social ties immobilize). (Bhatt, 1996, 65-66)

In a short autobiographical write-up, Radhacharan Goswami, the editor of the paper Bhartendu, introduces himself as a "kattar Hindu" (orthodox Hindu) and a vaishnav. (Goswami, 1998, 24) In "Bharatvarsh mein dharma-charcha" (Discourse of Religion in India) May, 1886, He writes that: when we think of the question of the progress of nation, religion is of no use whatsoever, particularly for national progress. There came and flourished many religions in the history of India from Jainism to Islam to Theosophical society, but they haven't contributed to the progress of the nation. They have merely created temples and mosques. What India needed at present, according to Goswami, was not religion, but wealth, force, education, art, commerce, etc. He further argued that any serious thinking about progress of the nation has to exclude religion as an element. (Goswami, 1998, 74-75) Although Goswami places the imperative of deshonnati (progress of the nation) high among the important questions of the times, he doesn't undervalue the importance of the need for social reform among the Hindus.

In order to effectively combine the two imperatives in his approach, he follows a strategy which is somewhat akin to the one argued by Bhartendu in his speech in Balia mentioned above. It is a two pronged strategy: the social issues are separable from the religious issues and that social customs should be changed according to the needs of the times. About the separability of the social and the religious, he even says, albeit unconvincingly, that the issues of vaishnav religion and widow remarriage are very different (Vaishnav dharm aur vidhwa vivah alag alag vishay hain..."), implying that they are unconnected. (Goswami, 1998, 105) Goswami was a passionate supporter of widow remarriage and wrote a great deal on this question. He criticises the Hindu community for being too resistant to change. He says that times are changing, but the Hindus are not. (Goswami, 1998, 84) Criticizing Bharat Dharma Mahamandal for not taking up the question of the widows' plight, he gives fifteen arguments for the remarriage of the widows. Among these arguments, he combines the textual evidence in support of his position from the scriptures along with rationalist and utilitarian arguments. He argues that society has to change according to the needs of the times and for that customs and traditions governing the community should be changed by reinterpreting and reworking the scriptures. (Goswami, 1998, 84-85)

Conceptualization of the Social: II. The Social and the Political

In the last decades of the nineteenth century political opinion was turning more and more against the interference of the colonial state in social and religious affairs. After the formation of the Indian National Congress in 1885 and of the National Social Conference in 1887, a debate started in the reformist and nationalist circles on the question of the colonial state's legitimacy to carry out social reform legislations. As most of the leaders did accept the need for carrying out social reforms, the question had two dimensions: a) which was the appropriate agency to carry out such reforms; and b) whether the social question should precede the political question of gaining representation and finally Independence from the colonial rule. The views of Pratap Narain Mishra and Chaudhary Badrinarayan Upadhyay 'Premghan', who took active interest in the political activities of Indian national Congress, can be taken as representative of the anti-reformist position, the position of most Hindi intellectuals of this period.

Pratap Narayan Mishra was in favour of strict separation of the social and the political questions. One of his arguments for separation was that the task of reforming the community (samaj) was much more sensitive and needed delicate work and much more sophisticated skills than the political work of reforming the government institutions. Thus the task of social reform needed people who could gain the respect of the communities they were going to reform. Secondly and more importantly, Mishra argued that although the Social Conference had similar kind of influence as the Congress, its nature (swabhava) was very different. (Mishra, 2001, 144-147) Why? Because, unlike the Congress, it was not possible for the Social Conference to unite the people of different religious communities like Hindus, Muslims, and Christians. In the matters of social questions, the legitimate method would be for the Hindus to reform their community and for the Muslims theirs. According to this argument, while the social question separated Hindus and Muslims as religious communities, the political question united them.(Mishra, 1986, 273-276)

Thus arguing for an institutional separation of the social and political questions, Mishra further wrote: "Smaran rahe ki samaj ka jitna sambandh Brahmamin aur Maulviyon se hai utna government se kadapi nahin hai." (Samaj is related more directly to Brahmins and Maulvis than to the Government). (Mishra, 1986, 223-226) The appropriate agencies for carrying out social reform, according to Mishra, were the religious communities themselves and within the religious communities, the authority of Brahmins and Maulvis had to be recognized. The colonial state had once already established the authority of the Brahmins and the Maulvis in the legal sphere by assigning them the authoritative role of

interpreting the scriptures for assisting the judges in personal law cases and it is obvious that Mishra, along with many other contemporary Hindi intellectuals had internalized the colonial discourse in accepting the Brahmins and the Maulvis as the leaders of their respective communities. (Mishra, 1986, 284-285)

In another essay, "Sehwas Bill Avashya Pass hoga" (Age of Consent Bill will definitely be passed), Mishra makes privacy of the family as the main argument against the government passing the "Age of Consent Bill." But at the same time, he agrees with the substantial issue of the raising the age of consent for marriage. He argues that practices of consummation of marriage below the age of thirteen are compatible with neither the scriptures nor the folk custom (lok reeti). (Mishra, 1986, 285) The enactment of a law for such matters, Mishra says, will set a dangerous precedent, wherein the entry of the government and the police inside the essentially private space of the family will be allowed and its sanctity will be violated. Therefore, it is an urgent task of the community leaders to take up this agenda and persuade the people to eliminate such practices from the community.

Chaudhary Badrinarayan Upadhyay 'Premghan', Editor of *Anand Kadambini* and an influential intellectual of this period, is a supporter of the Sanatan Dharma Sabhas, which appeared, in his view, to counter the growing influence of the reformist organizations such as Brahmo Samaj and Arya Samaj. He considers the reformist organisations enemies. He says that if Christians and Muslims are enemies of 'our dharma', Aryasmajis and Brahmasamajis are 'half enemies (adhe shatru).' (Premghan, 1950, 214) The new samajes like Brahma Samaj and Arya Samaj, have managed to carry our social reforms within their own narrow sects. They haven't been able to influence the larger world of the Hindu samaj. The only one concrete benefit of these samajes has been to prevent a number of Hindus from going into the Christian fold. Otherwise these samajes have become a working ground for those people who are promoting Western values.(Premghan, 1950, 214-215)

But Premghan also complains, like Radhacharan Goswami, about the old mentality of the leaders of the Sanatan Dharma Sabhas. Expressing his discontent with Bharat Dharma Mahamandal and other Sanatan Dharma Sabhas, Premghan writes: "What can be done! Unfortunately those who have old mentality in every way are neither capable of doing anything new, nor are they willing to learn what is in their interest. They just promote fatalism and don't even know how to work in the field of action....Anyway, despite having lost many valuable things because of this laziness and indifference, our nationality (jatiyata) and dharma are still intact. But now such a time has come that further indifference would definitely destroy

both of them." (Premghan, 1950, 220) Like other contemporaty Hindi intellectuals of this period, Premghan's strategy is to promote some social reform agendas in order to save both the dharma and the jati (nationality). It is an important part of the thinking of these intellectuals that for them social reform in itself is not important but must be subjugated to the imperative of deshonnati, (progress of the nation) and the defence of the Hindu community. But at the same time, the old authorities among the Hindus, the traditional Brahmins and priests, are people with old mentality (purani soch) and backward looking. They can't be any longer trusted with the leadership of the community in such testing times. Old leadership according to Premghan is neither forward looking nor responsible. Such people are giving bad name to the entire community. Premghan also argues that the old structures of authority among the Hindus have crumbled anyway and it is not possible to revive them. (Premghan, 1950, 214)

At the same time, the newly educated people and the enlightened (naveen jyoti dhari) are more attracted to the superficial attractions of the Western civilization. They want to change India in the image of Europe. They should, according to Premghan, instead clean up the 'old garden of the Hindu samaj.' (Premghan, 1950, 214) The ideal situation for Premghan consists in replacing the old leadership with a responsible conservative leadership of the newly educated. Such people have indeed come forward in the form of Sanatan Dharma Sabhas but they are still not realizing the enormity of the challenge facing them. They should, according to Premghan, take up upon themselves the task of eliminating the social evils from among the Hindus. Otherwise the nexus between the social reformers and the government will carry out the same tasks.

The problem with the approach of the social reform organizations is that they always seek out the help of the government even in matters which are clearly internal affairs of the Hindus. (Premghan, 1950, 217) But Premghan wants to drive home this point for the sanatanis that such tasks of removing social evils such as child marriage can't be ignored any longer if the community and its dharma is to be saved. He exhorts: "Apna prabandh aap keejiye... apne bhoole bhaiyon ko samjhaiye...apne upper unke sudhar ka bojha uthaiye, unke liye kuchh apne samay, sahas, aur artha ka vyay keejiye; sharir ko kashta deejiye, purane andhkar ko chhod tuk naye unjele mein aaiye, sansar ki dasha aur pravah ke anusar anusaran karma aaranbha keejiye ... (Manage your affairs on your own... persuade your mistaken brothers... take responsibility of reforming them upon yourselves. Use some of your time, courage, and money to accomplish this; there will be bodily hard work, but do come out of the old darkness and enter the new light; start behaving according to the situation and the movement of the world.)" (Premghan, 1950, 222)

Conceptual-Historical reflections on the term "samaj"

It has been argued recently that to understand society as a pre-political category is wrong simply because its conceptualization this way is nothing but a liberal fiction. The alternative conceptualization argues in favour of understanding its constitution as political through and through. Gyan Prakash, for instance, argues that in the 19th century context of colonial India, the specific features of concepts of society and community in India should be understood against the background of a definite colonial intention of reforming Indian society and economy. Thus in the colonial discourse, the concept "society" in their usage, refers to a definite and positively identifiable object of knowledge and transformation. Since the colonial discourse also foregrounded the question of the status of women and the institution of family, these issues acquired centrality in the discourse of social reform. Later on other agendas gradually get included as part of the social question.

The key terms used for the conceptualization of the social in this discourse are samaj and jati. The usage of the term samaj in this historical context eludes any precise connotations. Writing about the Hindi public sphere in the second quarter of the 20th century Frencesca Orsini notices the 'semantic indeterminacy of the word samaj.' Orsini also writes that "two words were used in Hindi for society, samaj and jati, both with a number of significations and both used as equivalents of the English word society." (Orsini, 2002, 224–239) It should also be added here that both these terms could also simultaneously refer to the concept of community. The term jati also had multiple connotations as it was used to refer to community, but also to caste, nation, and species. What is interesting here is the fact that the meaning equivalent of the English word society got crystallized around the Sanskrit term samaja in some Indian vernaculars including Hindi. and Bangla. But in its modern conceptual usage, the meaning of the term shifts interestingly.

The philosopher Daya Krishna, in *The Problematic and Conceptual Structure of Classical Indian Thought about Man, Society, and Polity*, lists 32 concepts around which the classical thought in India regarding society was woven among which samaj is one: 1. dharma 2. vyavhara 3. samskara 4. varna 5. jati 6. kula 7. sreni 8. puga 9. rna 10. dana 11. daya 12. maitri 13. karuna 14. lokasamgraha 15. sarvabhutahita 16. lokakalyana 17. samabhava 18. samatva 19. samaja 20. samajika 21. nagarika 22. vyavastha 23. sambandha 24. sangha 25. samasti 26. para 27. paraspara 28. parampara 29. rudhi 30. varga 31. vis and 32. janapada. (Daya Krishna, 1996, 157) Daya Krishan writes: "The most obvious and interesting fact that emerges from even a cursory glance at these concepts is that there is no single equivalent of the word 'society'

in the Indian conceptual repertoire relating to this domain. The terms that come closest to 'society' are samaja, loka, samasti. But samaja was traditionally not used in the sense that it has come to acquire in Hindi these days. This is clearly indicated by the way the term samajika was used in the tradition. It was closer to what was conveyed by the word nagarika, that is, cultured or civilized, than what is understood by the term 'social' today." (Daya Krishna, 1996, 157-158)

Daya Krishna mentions other interesting dimensions of the classical conceptual framework for referring to the social world. One is the cosmic dimension of the social world, wherein he claims that the classical conception of the social world has trans-empirical dimension. He writes:

".…as the society in which we live is not only related to the past, but is also part of the cosmos which includes worlds other than our own and beings other than those familiar to us.… the idea of loka makes an addition of a different kind. It suggests that what happens in this world of ours, or is enacted in it, is intimately related to worlds other than this one." (Daya Krishna, 1996, 158)

The main concepts used for referring to the domain of the social in the late nineteenth century Hindi vernacular discourse are: dharma, samaj, jati, desh, unnati, public and niji (private) or gharelu/parivarik (domestic), ihlaukik (this-worldly) etc.. This set of conceptual terms are better understood in relation to each other and also as used together for describing the social world as it is being simultaneously transformed by this very discourse. This conceptual configuration is different from Daya Krishna's conceptual apparatus in terms of both temporal and spatial dimensions. As indicated earlier, an acute awareness of the critical nature of the times is one of the key features of this discourse, as indicated in frequent usage of phrases like "vartaman samay" (present time), "hamara samay" (our time). Other terms that indicate time dimension are: unnati/taraqqi (progress), itihas (history, as used here, this meaning too is different from the ancient meaning of the term itihas), ateet (past) etc.

The concept of progress, expressed with terms unnati, pragati, and taraqqi, with the notion of this-worldly expectations linked to the concept, had acquired great importance during this period, and thus becomes indispensable for understanding other social and political concepts in this discourse. Another theme that often appears in this discourse and which again recognizes the specific quality of the present is the theme of newness, expressed with terms like naya/nutan (new), "nai roshni wale" (literally, 'people of the new light', the enlightened, referring normally to the english educated). Metaphors like 'sun of knowledge rising in the West', 'morning of the new light', also indicate the time dimension of the new conceptual framework.

Another crucial feature of this conceptual configuration is that all the terms refer to entities that are understood in this-worldly, secular terms even though they don't necessarily give rise to a concept of secularism, at least not as yet. Spatial and territorial references are also more definite. The concept of nation, expressed most clearly with the terms jati and desh, comprehends geographical entities in a secular historiographical framework. Nations and communities, both expressed with the term jati, become definite subjects of history.

In the history of the Western modernity, the concept of society as elaborated in moral and political philosophy in the eighteenth century plays a foundational role. As Keith Michael Baker argues, the concept of society is an implied referent of all the main Enlightenment concepts like progress, civilization, toleration utility etc. They are unthinkable without "society" as they assume its logical priority as the essential frame of collective human existence. (Baker, 2001, 84-104) Baker shows that before the eighteenth century the term society was used either for private associations of individuals or for referring to the high society. With secularization, it comes to refers to a somewhat universalistic conception of the whole of the social order: "The Enlightenment invented society as the symbolic representation of collective human existence and instituted it as an essential domain of human practice." (Baker, 2001, 84) Baker further argues that "the social" provides "existential ground beneath our feet" and a "bedrock of reality beneath the shifting sands of discourse." (Baker, 2001, 84) In other words, despite the fact that the concept of society is a product of the Enlightenment political-philosophical discourse, it is used to refer to a vague notion of the whole, that provides grounding for all other practices, and discourse. This universalistic notion of society was in turn perfectly compatible with and supported by the notion of bourgeois subjecthood that emerged during the same period. As an entity grounded in the mutual interests of the rational individuals, society was understood in opposition to the more particularistic notion of community.

While the word samaj has come to acquire a meaning in Hindi in the last century and half which is closer to the concept of society, in its late nineteenth century usage, its references are much less universalistic than in the case of classical Western social theory. In the nineteenth century Hindi discourses also the word 'samaj' is used in at least three different senses. In one sense it is used for various voluntary associations - religious and caste associations, but also association formed for promoting various secular causes like promotion of science. The examples are Arya Samaj, Brahma Samaj, Prarthana samaj etc. In the second sense, samaj also meant community: caste or religious community. For example, Brahmin samaj or Kayastha samaj, or Muslim samaj. Community in this context could

mean either face-to-face community or imagined community. Another sense also gradually emerges in Hindi discourse, a sense described by Kaviraj as "society made of communities... the idea of a field, a secondary order of reality, a plane on which all communities of the first type existed." (Kaviraj, 2005, 116) Albeit, in case of Hindi, the third sense emerges only in the beginning of the twentieth century, particularly after the more universalistic ideology of socialism emerges in Indian politics as a major political force. As Benedict Anderson and Naoki Sakai have argued in their respective works on non-Western nationalisms, the nationalist thought emerges through comparison with the West. (Anderson, 1998; Sakai, 1997, 40-71) From the very outset, the specific nationalist modernities in different parts of the non-Western world, emerge by invoking a particularistic "we" (people/nation). Therefore, the conceptual framework that emerges within the framework of the nationalist problematic can only have a particularistic reference in contrast to the universalistic reference of the Enlightenment concept of society. Thus the concept of samaj too appears, in the beginning, with the adjective "our" as "our society" (hamara/hamari samaj).

The term samaj also refers to a notion of community, in the second sense discussed above. But this should not be understood as the persistence of some kind of pre-modern forms of collectivity. As we discussed in the beginning, the specific communities the term samaj refers to are also a product of a specific interaction with colonialism as the discourse of community rights cannot be understood outside the governmental practices of the colonial state. (Prakash, 28-34) An important conceptual twin of samaj that can help us understand the conceptualization of the social in the nineteenth century Hindi public discourse is jati. The word jati too exhibit an impressive range of meanings in this discourse. The various meanings of jati are: caste, communities of various types (racial, religious), nation. Although the terms jati and samaj are sometimes used interchangeably during this period, mostly to refer to community, a closer analysis shows that there appears a subtle difference in connotations. It seems that the concept of samaj is gradually beginning to acquire a sense and reference much broader than that of jati. The immense popularity of jati concepts (referring to religious, linguistic, caste, and national communities) in this discourse can be explained by referring back to the way colonial legal and administrative practices are restructuring the social domain. Both the new legal apparatus, based on the recognition of religious communities' person codes, and the community based census operations legitimize communities as the proper subjects of social and political action.

NOTES

1. The phrase translated by Vasudha Dalmia, (Dalmia, 1997, Chapter 6)

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