

Refresher Course

Schedule - 14. 11.2011 - 3.12.2011

Venue - Department of Sociology , Jadavpur University, Kolkata

Theme of the Course

Sociology as an Art Form

This Refresher Course intends to probe into the nature of Sociology as an intellectual discipline. Inspired by Nisbet's characterization of Sociology as an art form, we would like to enquire into the methodological as well as the substantive foundation of the discipline. Criticizing the inherent scientism of conventional positivistic sociology, Nisbet recognizes the basic similarities in the mental processes underpinning both artistic and scientific enterprises. Artists and sociologists follow the same subjective and intuitive logic of discovery, share the same conceptual imagery dominant during their time, and construct similar sociological portraits representing their world. The post modern sociology of today also favours the abolition of critical distance of an artist and a theorist. Interestingly, Sociology's proximity with art has been strengthened manifold when under the banner of Sociology of Culture, there develops a sub-field of Sociology of Art and Literature, which brings i) the world of artistic productions like poetry, novels, music, fine arts, architecture etc.; ii) the social relation among and between artists, critics, patrons; iii) the systems by which art is produced , distributed, performed, exhibited, evaluated, and aesthetically defined; and iv) the ideological messages it contains and purposes it serves; within the scope of Sociology. Art has been conceived differently in Sociology. Burger has used the concept of art as an institution primarily with reference to bourgeois society. He treats art as a historical category(Burger P and Shaw Michael The Institution of 'Art' as a category in the Sociology of Literature, Cultural Critique, no 2 9winter 1985-86):5-33). Sociology of Art, as a special branch of Sociology of Knowledge is again redefined as a phenomenology of artistic consciousness. Authorial intentionality as well as readers'/viewers' construction of meanings become important. Critical Sociology perceives art as a construction, hence the focus is on the production process.

Post critical sociology argues that to acknowledge the effectiveness of mediations at the time of production means to challenge the predominant Western view that everything can be attributed to a single creator and to recognize that creation is far more widely distributed. Studies designed to explain artistic value by means of sociological factors have often been criticized for being reductionist (Adorno 1967, 1976; for a classical Marxist survey of art history see Hauser 1982 and for a Marxian critique of this reductionism Wolff 1975). The proposed Refresher Course will make an attempt to gauge the impact of all these conceptual as well as theoretical developments on the very nature of Sociology.