

**OBITUARY**  
**Dr. Ishwar Prasad Modi**  
**(12 December 1940 – 23 May 2017)**

Towards the end of his interview with Ms Laleh Behbehanian of the International Sociological Association (ISA), conducted on 14 November 2011, lasting for 21 minutes and 49 seconds, Dr. Ishwar Prasad Modi displayed his passionate love for sociology, a discipline to which he remained unwaveringly committed for his entire academic life beginning in 1960. 'Sociology lies in my heart,' he said; and expanding on this statement, he invoked a belief central to Hinduism: 'If we believe in the theory of reincarnation and if I were to be reborn in a human form, I shall devote myself completely to the study of sociology as I have done in this life.' 'Sociology has a lot to offer,' he added, 'sociologists are like poets'. As the poets are at liberty to pick up any theme, any subject, for their creative works, in the same way, sociologists can carry out their researches on any topics they are interested in and make a meaningful contribution to it.

For his undergraduate degree, Dr. Modi read economics, political science, and sociology. Of these, sociology entranced him the most from the first day he started reading books on it. On 6 July 1961 was founded the Department of Sociology at the University of Rajasthan, having a galaxy of scholars, some of whom were later the founders of and nourished the other sociology departments in the country. Besides the humanistic perspective that sociology bestowed upon Dr. Modi, the new department of sociology with its luminaries was an added attraction. Moreover, in the 1960s, social sciences were most sought after as India was grappling with the problems of development and progress. Students joining social sciences in those days thought that they would be able to contribute substantially to the process of nation-building. Subscribing to these ideas, Dr. Modi stayed in the Jaipur Department and earned his Ph.D. degree, writing a thesis on 'Leisure, Mass Media, and Social Structure', under the stewardship of Professor Yogendra Singh, which was later published as a monograph in 1985,. Later, in 2012-4, Dr. Modi was instrumental in bringing out a set of four festschrift volumes for his doctoral teacher.

For twenty-seven years, he taught sociology at the University of Rajasthan, besides occupying a number of administrative positions and supervising more than a dozen research students. Although his doctoral work had fixed his life-long loyalty to the sociological study of leisure, he had also carried out scores of important studies, the significance of which should not be eclipsed; for instance, his writings on village India.

From the inception of his sociological work, Dr. Modi was sensitive to the diversity of Indian society. He argued that when we look at a social unit from outside, it appears to be homogeneous and unified; but when the same unit is studied from inside, it appears to be made up of layers upon layers of difference, diversity and pluralism. Take the case of an Indian village. Many writers think that its unity results from its cultural homogeneity, which, Dr. Modi believed, was far from being true. Multiple caste communities comprise a village, and each one of them has its own 'common round of life', different from the other. The dialect of a caste, its intonation and words, are different, so are its morphological features, house types, designs of jewellery and dresses, children's toys, games and sports, and the patterns of leisurely activities.

Thus, the unity of a village results not from its purported 'homogeneity', just because it is not there, but from the coordination of its internal diversity, which makes one unit depend upon the other. He conjectured that what is true of multi-caste villages would also be true of uni-caste villages, which are not uncommon in Rajasthan. In the latter, the dissimilarities would be of individuals and descent groups, besides of course of economic capability and relative success in life. Dr. Modi was skeptical of the claims of the political states and powers that they have succeeded in homogenizing their peoples, either persuasively or coercively, or both, for what is asserted by these governments is a 'monstrous mirage' created by the power of the mass media. This was the reason why one of Dr. Modi's interests lay in undertaking a sociological study of the myths and the lies that the instruments of media convincingly create and perpetuate.

As was stated previously, Dr. Modi's contribution to the sociology of leisure was commendable. Pursuing the analogy of the poet, he explored several other terrains of research (such as drug addiction, health and illness, social gerontology, social stratification, youth culture, studies of theatrical performances, and values and morality), in addition to assembling his thoughts on what should be the tenor of contemporary Indian sociology; but wherever he traversed, he eventually returned to the 'leisure studies'.

'Leisurology', a term he preferred to use interchangeably with 'leisure studies', for him was a systematic study of the ways and practices through which people spent their time when they were not working, or when they thought they were not under the pressure of work, or when they had completed their work and were 'relaxing'. He was, however, not content just to limit his enquiry to an ethnographic understanding of leisure activities. He was more interested in the study of the institutions and corporate bodies that globally promoted leisure for people. The 'leisure industry', so to say, was the third largest in the world, and included tourism, sports, visits to museum, exotic picnic spots, adventurous pastimes, and cultural festivals. For Dr. Modi, leisure was an 'umbrella term', including a myriad and a plethora of activities that ultimately aimed at invigorating the self. Sometimes, in a spirit of exuberance,

he said: 'Life is leisure'. If, on one hand, leisure for him was what people did when they distanced themselves from work, grueling and strenuous as it was expected to be in all societies, on the other, leisure was also a 'method' to study the social life of people. In a nutshell, a study of the leisurely activities of a community can help us in knowing its social organization.

Dr. Modi was an institution builder. In November 1989, in order to popularize leisure studies, he organized the first World Leisure Congress in India (at Jaipur) on behalf of the Research Committee on Leisure (RC-13) of the ISA. He was elected its Vice President in 1990-4, and then for 1998-2002 and 2002-6; and was elected its President in 2006-10, and then, 2010-14. The Statutes of RC-13, which were originally written by Dr. Gybrgy Fukasz (of Hungary) in 1979, were revised by Dr. Modi, and approved in March 2013.

Further, Dr. Modi was elected on the Board of Directors of the World Leisure and Recreation Association (WLRA), now called the World Leisure Association (WLA), in 1991, and received its Life Membership in 1994. He recalled that in 2006, RC-13 had only thirty-six members, but within one year and a half, when the Durban Conference took place, it increased to more than one hundred; and by the time of the Gothenburg Conference (Sweden), in 2010, it was more than two hundred. Dr. Modi was able to spread the passion for leisure studies to a number of Indian researchers. He was well known for unflinchingly attending the sessions of the ISA with a big Indian contingent.

Dr. Modi's unrelenting efforts led to an 'internationalization' of leisure studies. In collaboration with the research associations in other countries, he founded a group called BRIC, which included researchers from Brazil, Russia, India, and China (hence the acronym), and later, this group included South Africa as well, so it became BRICS. The aim of this group was to carry out studies on different sociological problems and sections of their respective societies according to a standard research design, and then assemble all these studies in the form of volumes which would provide country-profiles. In fact, Dr. Modi co-edited one such volume titled *Mapping Leisure across Borders* in 2014. That he was known internationally was evident when Professor B.K. Nagla and I proposed to edit a volume in his honour. Almost all those whom we had approached for papers obliged us and recapitulated in their respective contributions Dr. Modi's devotion to sociology in general, and leisure studies in particular. Even after the volume had been readied for publication, articles kept on pouring in compelling us to think in terms of another volume to be dedicated to him.

In an illustrious academic career of more than half a century, Dr. Modi occupied several positions of importance. He was the twenty-third President of the Indian Sociological Society (ISS). For his dedication to the subject of sociology and for nurturing its institutions, the ISS conferred upon him in 2015 the Life Time Achievement Award. He was the Founder-Director of the

Centre for Leisure and Tourism Studies, University of Rajasthan; and was a Visiting Professor to the Indian Institute of Health Management, Jaipur.

Dr. Modi will always be remembered as a man of great patience, whose benign smile, pleasant demeanour, and unlimited generosity made everyone feel extremely comfortable in his presence. Many young colleagues in sociology and other social sciences will eternally be indebted to him for helping them reach the niches of the international sociology.

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