

FOREWORD

This volume is the outcome of the "South Asian Regional Conference: Future of Sociology in South Asia" held during 25-27 March 1997 at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai, India. It was one of the series of ten regional conferences organized at the instance of the International Sociological Association as a lead-up to the 14th World Congress of Sociology being held at Montreal, Canada in 1998.

The countries that were identified for participating in this regional conference have been those belonging to the SAARC (South Asian Association of Regional Co-operation), viz. Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. We are a little disappointed that in spite of our concerted efforts we could not get a paper or a scholar from two of the seven SAARC countries (Maldives and Bhutan) for representation in the conference.

Funds for organizing this conference were provided by the Sir Dorabji Tata Trust (Mumbai) and the Sri Ratan Tata Trust (Mumbai). We record our sincere gratitude to both the Tata Trusts for their good will and financial support.

The steering committee for organizing this conference decided to have the future of Sociology in South Asia as the central theme of the conference. In other words, the conference was to discuss the challenges that Sociology has to face, the issues that Sociology has to address itself to, the perspective with which Sociology has to view these issues and the thrust areas on which professional activities of Sociologists have to concentrate in South Asia. Under this general theme the steering committee for organizing the conference identified the sub-themes for discussion and deliberation in the conference. The main sub-themes of the conference were nation building, institution building, inequality and development. They have been selected as the major concerns of Sociology in South Asia. All the South Asian countries have been engaged in a continuous process of nation building, institution building and development or modernization. The issue of inequality, particularly of gender, has been perceived as a critical social context of the above processes in the South Asian societies. This volume contains mainly the papers on the above sub-themes presented in the conference for discussion.

The introductory chapter on the overview of the situation of Sociology in South Asia presents the theoretical context for the discussion of the themes of the conference. The next two chapters by Partha Nath Mukherji of India and S.T. Hettige of Sri Lanka deal with the process and problems of nation building in essentially multi-ethnic countries of the region. An equally important process of modernization is discussed by T.K. Oommen (India) and Satish Saberwal (India) in the third and fourth chapters, viz. Institution building. They have brought out the dilemmas faced by the countries of the region in

institutionalizing structures that are basically rooted in the values of the Western societies. In the fifth chapter S.R. de S. Jayatilaka of Sri Lanka points out how Sociology in the region has failed to address itself adequately to the issue of inequality, particularly of gender. The last two chapters of the book deal with two issues of development in the South Asian region. S. Akbar Zaidi (Pakistan) presents a critique of the role played by the non-governmental agencies in the programmes of development and concludes that the State in the decentralized, delegatory and democratic form should play the critical role in development in South Asia. M. Asaduzzaman of Bangladesh touches upon the social problems arising out of large scale development projects undertaken in the region and emphasizes the role that the social scientists can play in such situations.

The papers presented in this volume and the discussions held during the conference on them show that Sociology has a lot to be concerned with in South Asia. It has a mission for the future and a vision of understanding the particular social processes of nation and state evolution and formation, and building and sustaining of indigenous institutions in the social context of the South Asian region. Sociology needs to be concerned with the process and projects of development in the region so as to help the agencies of development bring about a just society in the region. This realization should accentuate our quest for a Sociology for South Asia or the future of Sociology in South.

Editors

INTRODUCTION

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Poised at the end of the twentieth century, at a time when the countries of the world, particularly those in the periphery, are experiencing the convulsions and cataclysms of change and transformation, it is significant that we from the different regions of the world, however in a limited way, are engaged in a sharing of our perspectives on the state of sociology and our prognosis for the future of social sciences. Since sociology and the allied social sciences are expected to mirror, capture and comprehend the dynamics through which societies/states are passing, it is not surprising that in contemporary times, the social sciences are under a multiplicity of conflicting pressures to produce more convincing knowledge. Authenticity of the social sciences seems to be in question. The emergence of parallel paradigms is a natural outcome of the prevailing confusion in our grasp of the consequences of structures and processes caught up in the whirlwind of change. The pressures for re-legitimation of sociology and the social sciences is evident and will grow.

The main epistemic questions that become central to our discussion are: What have been the conditions under which the heritage of sociology/social sciences became 'worldwide'? In the rapidly transforming world, how have these initial conditions altered and with what consequences? Do the emergent conditions suggest how sociology/social sciences are likely to continue to be universalizing social sciences? These questions, and others, have been competently addressed at the 'worldwide' level (Wallerstein 1996; Borgatta and Cook 1988; Giddens 1987).

It will be my endeavour to examine these questions and related issues with reference to South Asia. I am aware and painfully conscious of the fact that much of this discourse is in the form of a groundswell of debates that have taken place in sociology in India and that I may be more familiar with current developments in India than in some of my neighbouring countries, particularly Sri Lanka and Bangladesh. Pakistan and Nepal have only recently opened up to the social sciences, and hence, it is normal to expect that such a discourse will yet take some time to crystallize. In comparison, Bhutan and Maldives have yet to open their social science accounts. The omissions that our neighbouring academic fraternity may find in citations, I wish to assure them, are not by design or selection as much as it is on account of non-availability of or inaccessibility to their contributions. Limitations of time, too has been a major factor contributing to this shortcoming. Notwithstanding all these, I hope

and expect that much of what will be discussed in this introduction will be perceived as relevant not only for South Asia but also for most Asian countries, if not the developing world at large.

It is not my intention in this introduction to engage in one more wandering into the expanding terrain of proliferating social science literature in South Asia. With reference to India particularly, periodic assessments have taken place in the hands of the most competent of social scientists (Beteille 1996; Singh 1996; Srinivas 1994; Das 1993; Dhanagare 1993; Srinivas 1987; ICSSR 1986; Oommen and Mukherji 1986; Singh 1983; Mukherjee 1979; Saberwal 1979; ICSSR 1969-79; Srinivas and Panini 1973; Unnithan 1967 and others). The effort is to broadly deal with the South Asian perspective on sociology and social sciences worldwide. The task is too big for the short time span within which it has to be accomplished. I am hoping that this will turn out a modest, even if insufficient, attempt which will trigger off more discussion within South Asia and beyond, bringing Asian scholars closer to each other to understand each others realities more comprehensively. It is a lamentable fact that we still continue to learn about each other more through western prisms than directly. My attempt will be not only to discuss the kind of sociology we have produced, but also raise the question why did so many critical concerns affecting us get ignored or neglected.

That sociology is facing a crisis is generally admitted, at least to no less an extent as the other allied social sciences, with the exception perhaps, in some measure, of economics. The controversies can be broadly marshaled around three themes: (a) the universal applicability or otherwise of concepts, theories and methodologies; (b) the positive-normative methodological aspects of analysis of complex social systems or societies; and (c) problem oriented theoretical research vis-à-vis solution-oriented applied research for policy formulation and implementation. In some sense, these themes converge on the common concern: social science knowledge for what and for whom? It will be naive not to see the nexus between social science knowledge and power in all its complexity - redeeming and emancipating, as well as, constricting and constraining. It requires not much imagination to realize that social science knowledge production gains in vitality under conditions of democratic freedom, which too has its limits and limitations. Finally, it should be obvious that the social scientific credential seeking universality is based in a fundamental sense on the notions of 'truth values' and 'reality' in their immanent, relative and perceptual ramifications. All these, and more, go in seeking for answers to our epistemic problems.

Universal, the Contextual and the Particular

During the decade of the seventies, there was a growing disenchantment with 'western' sociology and social science accompanied by a pressure for

'Indigenization'. The second conference of Asian Social Scientists held in India in 1973 was attended by 14 countries. Amongst them were relatively new entrants to the social sciences, like Bangladesh and Nepal. From among those who had a longer stint in the social sciences, there emerged a new demand for indigenization. It was argued that teaching material was available mostly in foreign languages and competent scholars did not contribute in the vernacular. Imported books carried illustrative and research findings which made little sense to students. Even researches done within the country were reported or published in the foreign languages. Finally, even these researches, whether carried out by native or foreign scholars, followed the models and the methodology developed in the West (Atal 1974, pp. 20-21).

The influence of western academia was clear from the country papers. The first university in Nepal (Tribhuvan University) came out of the US AID fund. Prior to this education in Nepal was an extension of Patna University in India (Chaturvedi 1974, p. 180). In Sri Lanka social scientists chose 'to pursue their research work in England in preference to any other country in the world'. There was a growing realization, nonetheless, that 'the study of social sciences has been an academic exercise unrelated to the development needs of the country' (Rajalingam 1974, p. 239). Fresh from the struggle for liberation, Bangladesh struck an optimistic note, observing 'that there runs a common factor through the social sciences - the unity in the interrelatedness of cultural, social, economic, political and psychological behaviour', further that, 'the social sciences have a peculiar methodology which at once combines' "mind and science, the common thread being objectivity" (Qadir 1974, p. 94). The Asian social scientists finally came out with a statement which was marked by moderation and cautious optimism. It stated:

"Efforts should be made to develop new methods and techniques suited for the investigation of different questions and of a variety of peoples... to derive ground-level generalizations, to construct middle-range theories, and to prepare macro profiles of the societies. In doing so, western theories and concepts may also be used. Their validity and applicability will, however, have to be examined in the Asian context..." (Atal 1974, p. 21).

Nearly a decade later in 1981, in a similar conference of Asian social scientists held in Bangkok, the problem of indigenization and universalization of social science again finds a strong echo. Gore, as Chairman of the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) declared that he was not against 'the use of the word indigenization but the limits within which this term can be used with reference to any science must be understood'. He clarified:

"...problem about the transferability of "western" social science knowledge may be at two different levels. It may be that the prescriptions of western social scientists to the ailments of Asian societies have no relevance because the Asian problems are

different. If this is the case then no basic issues arise with regard to the nature of social science knowledge. But if it is asserted that the basic patterns of motivation and behaviour of Indian and Asian peoples are different from the people of the west then questions about the very possibility of anything like social science coming into existence and, in fact, about any meaningful communications taking place between these peoples except at a very elementary level" (Gore 1983, pp. 110-111).

Gore was indicating that the discrepancy between the professed universality of theories and concepts and their mismatch with contextual realities was well within the realm of social sciences to resolve.

Actually, Eurocentric (includes U.S.) social sciences were being interrogated for their claims to applicability, appropriateness, adequacy and even relevance to Asian settings of social reality. A radical form of protest manifestation found expression in the demand for indigenization. However, that the concept of indigenization remained unelaborated beyond a point was clear; that social sciences needed to be contextual and native concepts and categories should find incorporation in the unveiling of social reality were considered important. The question that naturally arose was, what then was to be the connection between 'native' and 'universal' concepts? Could any kind of social science be erected purely out of native concepts? It was to this problematic that Gore attempted a general response. However, the most extreme form of reaction, which have few adherents, came in the form of total rejection of sociology by A.K.Saran on three counts: that sociology is premised on western ideology and values, hence incompatible with the Indian ethos; as a world view it was inferior to the traditional Indian world view; whether couched in Marxist or positivistic terms, the propositions emanating from them betrayed naturalistic reductionism and evolutionism (Singh 1983, p. 85).

That the claim of western social science to be universal remained more or less firmly established between 1945-1970, as suggested by Wallerstein, by and large, appears to be true of the South Asian countries (Wallerstein 1996, p.53). For the new entrants this assessment would take time to register at the perceptual level. Androcentrism, the packaging of a model of development and modernization based on western assumptions of a linear transition from traditional to modern societies either through evolutionary or dialectical paths, undermined considerably the legitimacy of the western Eurocentric social science paradigms. The structural and cultural realities of non-western societies were viewed through the prism of western social science. In course of time, non-western societies, which initially almost unequivocally welcomed western social science, began viewing it through their own prisms. At the same time the clamour for indigenization had receded. Eurocentricism was also being challenged at the global paradigmatic level.

At least two important views are immediately discernible on this theme. One, advocates a mix of the universal and the contextual. Andre Beteille's observation sums up this position very well:

"Today, at the close of the 20th century, it is impossible to practice sociology as a serious academic discipline without drawing on the vast reservoir of sociological concepts, methods and theories created by scholars over the last hundred years... Surely there is room for an Indian perspective, or better, several Indian perspectives, but to be viable, they have to address themselves to society and culture everywhere, and not just to Indian society and culture" (Beteille 1996, p. 23-62).

In fact, implicitly or explicitly, by and large, this is the orientation that informs much of sociology in South Asia that matters. However, an important critical perspective to this comes in the form of practice of 'academic feudalism', whereby knowledge referencing by sociologists tends to take the form of 'patronage' and 'networking', and 'academic communalism', whereby is reflected an increasing tendency to study 'one's own social categories', for example, the study of women by women, dalits by dalits, muslims by muslims', and so on. This becomes restrictive of the universalization of sociology (Oommen 1986, pp. 258-260).

The second view highlights a very basic problem that has affected the sui generis growth of sociology in South Asia. The overwhelming influence of theories related to modernization syndromes of mobility, achievement, mobilization and the like, and our preoccupation with caste and other forms of institutional inequalities have distracted our attention from the study of *secular inequalities* and its perpetuation, namely, the study of poverty. Several generations of European anthropologists and sociologists had constructed caste 'as a polar type in the continuum of the stratificatory systems' eventually creating an intellectual environment in which 'the sociological mind came to equate the caste system firmly with inequalities in Indian society overall' (Saberwal 1979, p. 247). This point can be extended to South Asia.

The more central argument that emerges out of the specific instance of omission in sociology of India pointed out by Saberwal relates to a much more serious dimension of the growth of sociology, which I had occasion to comment a decade and a half ago. Three years later, Oommen voiced the same concern (Oommen 1986, p. 263). If sociology and the social sciences are expected to mirror, capture and comprehend social reality, then sociologists were certainly contributing, but precious little, relative to the challenges that confronted them. No doubt the conceptual scheme of sanskritization, westernization, secularization and dominant caste a la M.N. Srinivas heralded a creative Indian engagement with British functionalism. No doubt the competing Marxist paradigm a la Ramkrishna Mukherjee in a lesser, but no less significant manner, was providing a valuable alternative perception of agrarian structure as compared to the village studies galore. Yet, it is amazing how sociological imagination in India at the time of its greatest ferment during the nationalist struggle in the forties, could by-pass the agrarian struggles in Bengal and in the then state of Hyderabad? How the interface between the communal and class contradictions did not attract the attention

of scholars? The ethno-religious (communal) movement that had led to the 'partition' of a people legitimated by the ethno-Eurocentric concept of nation, had in A.R. Desai presumably its solitary contributor (Desai 1966). The trauma of partition and the consequences it led to, the processes of adaptation and adjustment, the germination of ethno-religious consciousness and discriminations, etc., were not regarded as vital raw materials for sociology. The linguistic strifes that ripped the country in the sixties, resulting in the much publicized, *The Dangerous Decade*, by Selig Harrison, candidly projecting the ominous portends of further vivisection of an incomprehensible cultural plurality. The insurrectionary movements in the north eastern region remained confined to the politician and the military to contend with. While Indian society was going through all these convulsions, up to the seventies, sociology and social anthropology maintained an incredible academic placidity concerned with village, caste, family, kinship, etc. (1) It can be presumed that the same arguments would apply to Pakistan and Sri Lanka in terms of the ethnic strifes that could not be anticipated or engaged with by social science wisdom.

From the late sixties onwards a qualitative change is noticeable, in as much as sociologists/social scientists entered into new areas of enquiry not through promptings of established sociology or through fundings which constructed agendas (Ford Foundation, US AID etc.), but endogenously, through concerns which attracted their commitment for relevant knowledge. One of the first such areas of concern was that of social movements. Mukherjee acknowledges their contribution as 'committed non-conformists', for whom action orientation implied 'the view that social research should have a social function not only in the future but also in the immediate context'. Questions relating to 'what is it', 'how is it', 'what is it not', 'how is it not', 'why', 'what will it be', were directly addressed through painstaking and innovative fieldwork, without seeking direct legitimation through the established functionalist or Marxist Eurocentric paradigms. They were neither anti-functionalists nor anti-marxists, they were non-conformists, who addressed themselves to their tasks by neither accepting nor rejecting prevailing paradigms (Mukherjee 1979, pp. 112-113). Incidentally, many of the sociologists were 'indigenous' with Ph.Ds obtained in the Indian universities. With these studies, an environment was generated which drew scholars into areas of social movements, agrarian studies, ethnic studies, labour, cooperatives, education, professions, science and technology, health and medicine, gender, deprived categories such as socially discriminated castes and tribes, ethno-religious (communal) tensions and conflicts and studies in a variety of other areas. The vigour and originality of these studies lay not so much in terms of generating any new set of native concepts, but rather through creative engagement with existing concepts and theories, introducing in certain areas constructive debates, sometimes passionately pursued. The University system, and the state through the ICSSR generally welcomed, encouraged and funded such independent researches.

The point, however, that assumes importance is that, since the dawn of the liberalizing, globalizing era, a quantum shift in research is increasingly in evidence, raising doubts and scepticism about the future progression of research.(2)

The issues relating to universality of sociology and the social sciences will not be complete without a discussion on the relative importance of structure and agency and the positions taken on this. This problematic has been described as the dynamic tension between collectivist (structure) and the individualist (action) orientations lying at the heart of the major discourses in sociology. Alexander puts it very elegantly:

"Sociologists are sociologists because they believe there are patterns to society, structures somehow separate from the actors who compose it. Yet, while all sociologists believe such patterns exist, they often disagree sharply about how such an order is actually produced... It is this tension between freedom and order that provides the intellectual and moral rationale for sociology" (Alexander 1988, pp. 84-85)

With the dissolution of what Giddens calls the "orthodox consensus" - naturalism combined with functionalism' (Giddens 1987, p. 24), the heydays of Parsonian sociology came to a close, giving rise to the "multi paradigmatic character of sociology" (Alexander 1988, p.89; Giddens 1987, pp. 29-30). Giddens' summary is succinct:

"...On the whole it would probably be true to say that the majority of these schools of thought have tended to emphasize subjective aspects of human behaviour. They have reacted against what was seen as an exaggeration of the hold social institutions have over conduct of the individual agent. Such a reaction was by no means universal - structuralist accounts of the 'decentering of the subject', even in the extreme form postulated by Althusser, have found their adherents. But for the most part a common thread in the variety of competing versions of social theory was a reaction against what was widely regarded as an illegitimate sociological determinism"(Giddens 1987, p. 30).

The empowerment of the agency or actor vis-a-vis the structure has found conspicuous articulation in subaltern, gender and dalit studies, related to social movements.

A whole range of studies undertaken within the framework of subaltern historiography inspired by Ranajit Guha, now running into its ninth volume, are primarily an accumulation of studies of tribal revolts and peasant insurrections against the British imperial power, as also other contributions around the central theme of subaltern experience of felt-oppression of the 'non-elite' people. The basic point that is being made is that, the subaltern terrain has an autonomy of its own vis-a-vis the social movements inspired by the national or other macro-level political elites. That 'people' as against 'elites' are not just important objects but live, self-conscious, not-to-be-taken-for-granted subjects

who also know how to engage with oppression directly and spontaneously. Subaltern historiography is counterposed against elitist historiography, which is supposed to have neglected or ignored the subaltern as an active agent of protest and change. Theoretically this is regarded as a welcome critique of the overdetermination of rationality in Weber's theory of social action, although Weber himself had cautioned that the subjectivity of the individual actor had to be taken into account (Das 1989, p. 311).

Gender and women's studies have also displayed considerable vitality. Initial leadership to women's studies was provided by eminent scholars like Veena Mazumdar, Devaki Jain, Neera Desai and others. The International Women's Year gave fillip to a burgeoning literature on feminism and feminist movements. Western feminism and feminist theories extended their influence in the non-western world in the first phase. This was soon discovered to be discordant to the history, culture and ethos of feminist responses to culturally specific forms of patriarchy. A major analytic difference emerged between the white, western, middle-class liberal, feminism and the feminist politics of the women of colour. The former was a singular focus on 'gender as a basis for equal rights', which often took the 'form of definitions of femininity and sexuality in relation to men (specifically white privileged men)' (Mohanty, Russo, Tones 1991, p. 11).

While post modernist feminism 'challenged claims of universalism of any sort, including feminism, (Rayaprol 1997, p. 37) a feminist standpoint theory sought to develop a sociology for women which "preserves the presence of subjects as knowers and as actors' (Smith 1987, p. 36). In this framework, the binary opposition with the other gender is replaced by the concept of "relations of ruling" which 'focuses our attention on forms of knowledge; organized social institutions and practices; and questions of agency, consciousness and experience' (Mohanty 1991, cited in Rayaprol 1997, p. 36).

The recent rise to political power of the dalits is yet another historic phenomenon of change within a democratic framework. The 'objects' of yesteryears have now become empowered 'subjects', through whom far-reaching changes in the structure of power are in evidence. The analysis of dalit social movements have been invoked to explain this phenomenon with the help of social mobility and relative deprivation theory by a host of scholars (Joshi 1987; Issac 1964; Lynch 1974; Silverberg 1968; Sachidanand 1978; Bhatt 1971). It is argued that the dalit situation is more likely to head towards absolute deprivation and consequent alienation in the new liberalized phase into which the Indian state has entered. Corporate dalit consciousness has not yet emerged, but is likely to, if it can overcome their religious differentiations as Hindu and Buddhist. The empowerment of dalit as subject is implicit or explicit in sociological and other literatures (Guru 1993).

By and large, mainstream sociology in South Asia has been structural functional and structural. Once again, it is through M.N.Srinivas and Ramkrishna Mukherjee that this is explicitly stated. Srinivas observes:

"It is a truism to state that modern societies are extraordinarily complex and diversified but sociologists assume, for purely heuristic reasons, that they are functioning wholes, the parts of which are interrelated, with the result that changes in one segment tend to trigger off changes in some others. But any given moment, the intensity of the relation between any pair of segments is not the same: for instance, changes in the economy might result in changes in gender relations but not in the area of religion. The sociological perspective has been influenced by other disciplines also" (Srinivas, 1994, p. 12).

Mukherjee, attempts to accommodate 'objectivism' and 'subjectivism' in his methodological-theoretical scheme. The former, according to him, 'assumes universal laws irrespective of the Ego, for the universe exists without oneself. Therefore, one may only draw inferences on the objective world'. The latter, 'contends that there cannot be any external or objective test of truth, for one appreciates the world by oneself. Therefore, all that one may do is to perceive the objective world and deduce from it' (Mukherjee 1991, p. 25). Within the context of a process-structure-process approach which he advocates, this subjectivism means that deduction being built-in to all encounters and experiences of humans, the appraisal of social reality cannot but begin with the formulation of a social structure' (Mukherjee 1991, p. 24).

In the orientation that distinguishes between structure and agency, it is those who are oriented to the latter, would seem to be disinclined towards macro generalizations. Although, this cannot be upheld very strongly. It would be more appropriate perhaps to describe the state of the discipline as Srinivas does that, 'the bulk of the research work done is empirical, and theoretically eclectic' (Srinivas 1987, p. 138).

The Positive and the Normative

The methodological controversies of quantitative versus qualitative, of micro versus macro studies, of the social anthropological versus the sociological, have run parallel for quite some time. It is only recently that a pragmatic mix of the two, consistent with the logic of enquiry, which is becoming the preferred mode of research. The tension between the two methodological streams is obvious in the frank allusions the two giants of Indian sociology make about each other's epistemic position, which almost questions their knowledge bases. It is best to represent their views by them. Mukherjee observes:

"...Trained by the British school of social anthropology of the 1940s and 1950s, the 'Brahmins' (academic leaders) among the modernizers were not only empiricists with a bias against the historical and material dimensions of social reality but also devotees

of 'field work' conducted intensively and personally. To be sure localized micro-studies are useful bases from which to generate hypotheses for testing, but they do not warrant any generalization about the society as a whole. That calls for the use of deductive and inductive reasoning, the logic of probability, and appropriate statistical tools and techniques to deal with qualitative, quasi-quantitative and fully quantitative data..." (Mukherjee, 1979, p.53).

To this, M.N.Sriunivas gives a hard-hitting reply:

"Soon, a reaction sets in a few places against structural-functionalism, in particular, against studies of individual villages, and indeed, against intensive field work itself. The objection to intensive field-work came from several quarters including those who were used to survey research, where low-level assistants did all the legwork leaving the brainwork to the director and a small coterie around him. Survey research with its 'macro' spread, was believed to help politicians and administrators in bringing about planned change. The reliability of the data collected, especially in the big surveys, is only now beginning to be questioned seriously, and in a wider social and cultural context. The devotees of survey research, are understandably, the sharpest critics of intensive field work: "What use is a single village study?, is a question that is frequently asked in India... That the social scientist also has an obligation to advance the understanding of his society, if not of all societies, is completely ignored in such a view" (Srinivas 1987, p. 187).

While there are elements of truth in each of these criticisms, the point that seems to get diluted is that methodology does not just mean tools and techniques of data collection whether of the intensive participant observation variety of fieldwork or of the production-line oriented survey method variety. Much depends upon the problematic of a given research. If the emphasis is on capturing, 'meanings', 'sentiments', 'emotions', 'symbolisms' and the like, I wonder how this can be achieved through large-scale macro surveys, except of the social attitudinal varieties, which have their definite limits. If on the other hand, the problem relates to assessing or measuring social changes, say with respect to changes in commensal practices, I wonder how a micro-village-study will be enlightening.

It is only when the village as unit or universe of study can be theoretically and methodologically justified, that its relevance assumes its due importance. Take, for example, the situation in large parts of a state (province) in India where entire rural areas are fractured by heavily armed conflicts between the upper castes and the deprived castes with the use of fairly sophisticated armaments on each side. Can single village studies fit into such a problem? Can valid interpretations or inferences be drawn either by village studies or macro-surveys? Can these even be conducted? What about the problems of social and national integration in Kashmir, in north-eastern India, in Jaffna, in Karachi or in Sindh? Can these be studied by either of these two methods? These are macro-problems requiring a logically consistent methodology, the first logical requirement of which is to decide what is the 'universe' which will

encompass the problematic. The concept of 'universe' too need not necessarily be a spatial concept. Method(s) and methodology should not be confounded as one and the same.

Whatever may be the controversies relating to survey and intensive fieldwork, the fact remains that none of the premiere university departments, to the best of my knowledge, have a proper quantitative research methods course taught to students even at the higher levels.(3)

Further, it is also true that much of the quantitatively oriented research in the social sciences have found little currency in teaching. A very important reason for this is that such researches have taken place in research institutions rather than by faculties in the teaching departments, who are themselves not trained in the quantitative methods. As a consequence much of mainstream quantitatively oriented American sociology too goes unnoticed in India. All this is unfortunate as it does not permit a whole realm of social science knowledge to enter the cognitive frame of researchers, thereby limiting choices from which a logic of enquiry could be best constructed.

By and large, to whichever orientation one may belong, the positivistic, interpretative types, or those who advocate quantitative methods and yet do not regard themselves as positivists, there is no illusion of a value-neutrality to the definition of objectivity. It has been observed that sociology is regarded as a moral rather than a natural science and that sociologists need 'to treat values as facts, as part of his data, whether he is studying his own society or some other society, or both' (Betelle 1996, p. 23-65). Mukherjee, who is an advocate of the inductive-inferential approach for the 'appraisal of social reality', and who believes that even 'the conventional statistical and other tools evolved in the context of researches in physical and biological sciences may prove inadequate to rigorous social research', steers clear of both the value-neutralists of the functionalist-positivist variety and the 'staunch value acceptors' who are the 'dogmatists' and 'doctrinaires', positing a 'value-accommodation' approach to social science methodology (Mukherjee 1991, pp. 26-36). He links the appraisal of social reality with the realization of the 'cardinal valuation of humankind' (Mukherjee 1991: p.26) 'applicable to all humans, namely, survival, security, prosperity and progress'(Mukherjee 1991, p. 13).

Theoretical Versus Applied Research

The question: 'of what use social science?' is one that applies in the public mind as primarily pertaining to the non-economic social sciences. The advent of the community development programme via the Ford Foundation from 1951-1970 made sociology popular with the Indian Government and opened up its scope as an applied social science. Oommen clearly subscribes to the sociologists' involvement in such social policy formulation and involvement. He

considers unfair characterizing them as being enticed by the official patronage of the state (Oommen 1986, pp. 260-261, also Oommen 1983; Dhanagare 1993, p. 22).

However, the basic question raised is with regard to the role the sociologist is expected to play in his/her applied status. One would find a certain convergence of views in what Gore sums up in his observations to South Asian sociologists (Srinivas and Panini 1973, p. 198; Dhanagare 1993, pp. 22-23). Gore observes:

"...if the development of social science is to be judged by how far it contributes to the social development process they would need to participate also in the determination of the goals toward which social development process is itself to be oriented.... If knowledge does not provide the criteria for judging which ends are desirable that knowledge cannot be very useful in the choice of means either..." (Gore, 1983, p. 115).

If Oommen is referring to the ordinary run-of-the-mill sociology degree holders for whom these government jobs are an occupation for their bread and butter livelihood, I do not think there will be any quarrel on that. But if it relates to professional sociologists who lend the expertise of their disciplines, then their value-neutral or purely instrumental role becomes questionable.(4)

Of late, the issue of theory versus application in the social sciences has acquired a somewhat critical dimension at a worldwide level. The views expressed by Borgatta, which seem to be the pattern also in South Asia, should cause us considerable concern:

"The process of fostering development of sociological areas is not, of course, entirely controlled by sociologists. Funding agencies allocate most of the resources that support research, and these often target funds with specific expectations... In a global sense, sociology will need to adapt to the structural demands of funding agencies if it is to remain viable in some major aspects of the research enterprise. The era of the individual scholar as the research entrepreneur has more of an element of romanticism attached to it than is appropriate in the real world of research" (Borgatta, 1988, pp. 15-16).

Borgatta suggests that sociology should be engaged in application of knowledge which it has produced, to authenticate it through demonstration. One way of engaging in such exercise is to test hypotheses, globally stated, through policy implementations.

However innocent this may appear, for developing countries, this development is a matter of great concern. With resources diminishing for higher education in social sciences research, with universities now being asked to find out resources up to 25 per cent of recurring maintenance costs from their own incomes, with government (University Grants Commission) clearly advocating industry-and-market-friendly approach to resource mobilization, we are certainly facing a critical situation. While funding for

problem-oriented theoretical research is shrinking, resources are becoming easily available for evaluation studies and consultancies. More often than not, the design of enquiry and the tools to be used are pre-packaged by the clients. The data so collected, the analysis done and the recommendations made are not available for research publications and hence restricted from public discourse. The fate of the recommendations are often not known even to the evaluators/consultants. No reasons have to be given by the clients as to why some of the recommendations have not been pursued. The consultant, in effect, is consigned to serving as a handmaiden of the client. On their part, the consultants tend to take a smug attitude, having given their recommendations, their task was now over. This is the normal pattern and exceptions only prove it.

On the one hand, we are in an era in which evaluation projects have started being 'tendered' like turn-key projects in construction industry. Consultancies are going abegging with large amounts of money, seeking authentication of 'their' designs through respectable scholars in prestigious institutions. On the other hand, in the unfortunate situation in which the resources of the state for research is in a disarray, international funding of research now search out institutions and competent scholars, attract them to their agendas of research with sumptuous grants. Research designs compatible with the objectives of the funding organizations are presented by scholars. Generally the scope of such research is also 'international' with built-in country perspectives. This paves the way for 'international' interventions in the policies, more particularly, of the developing countries of the world. There is a separation of the 'clients' and the 'servers' much in the Gorean sense. In this portrayal I am merely projecting a modal pattern around which we have few other more acceptable patterns. This scenario is an outcome of sharing of common experiences in Executive/Governing Board meetings of some leading national research and training organizations of India.

At a time when the universities and research institutes are constrained to mobilize their own resources they have to succumb to the offers for evaluation and consultancy which the market is only too eager to offer. The realities of the land do not permit downsizing the universities/institutes to avoid this impasse.

There are several implications of such a scenario. First, scholars are getting distracted into evaluations and consultancies to the detriment of theoretically oriented research and high quality teaching. Second, research agendas are getting externally constructed by the market as well as by global funding agencies with their own agendas of research. Finally, the institutions of research and teaching are left with little option for their survival, and for providing for future contingencies.

As a consequence, basic research is at a serious discount even as the accelerated pace of change demands the most urgent and serious research attention. Teaching is getting neglected, as a result the quality of human

resource generation is bound to be affected, leading to possible alienation of the student community who well understand whether they are getting their due or not.

How do we face this dilemma? It is necessary to impress upon the state that for a nation-state to become stronger it is crucial not only to allow free space for knowledge production but also support research strongly so that this free space is not monopolized by external sources of funding with research agendas tailored more to their purposes than to those of the peripheral nation-states. This is, in fact, one of the subtly most fundamental ways in which the erosion of the peripheral nation-states has already started taking place. Unless this dangerous trend is swiftly checkmated, neo-colonial forms of interventions in myriad guises will entrench our societies and economies. Second, the evaluations, more particularly, and consultancies should be turned to advantage in a manner such that they are utilized additionally to the advantage of critical research questions in those particular areas. Third, institutions for national social science research funding should be established where they don't exist, and where they do, they need to be strengthened. Such institutions should, through a process of dialogue and discussion between national scholars set national priorities of research (Gore 1983, p. 117). It is imperative that each society, each region and the world make their own assessments about how globalization in its inevitable sweep is going to affect the respective peoples. Fourth, we should not underestimate the power of knowledge. Therefore, what kinds of knowledge get produced is crucial to the global patterns of dominance that are emerging. Finally, at the international level, it is the United Nations which should provide the major source of research funding on global issues. Like at the national level, discussion and dialogue amongst scholars of all nations should provide the basis of fixing priorities for research concerns of the U.N. This will make for greater confidence on outcomes of knowledge produced around the world on issues of common concern for member nation-states. Let us face it, primarily the nation-states at the centre are interested in research of peripheral nation-states (or powerful nation-states) only in so far as it is perceived to be in their own national interests. Knowledge for the sake of knowledge is now getting jeopardized.

Heritage, What Will it Be? What Should it Be?

What is? What will it be? What should it be? are questions inextricably interlinked. These questions and their treatment implicitly or explicitly have found expression in my discussion.

With the introduction of sociology and anthropology as academic disciplines soon after the First World War, its further establishment during the inter-War period under colonial dispensation and its steady spread after the Second World War with the added influence of American Parsonian structural

functionalism, there is no denying that sociology and social and cultural anthropology in South Asia was heavily imbued with the spirit of dominant western sociology. Paradoxically, however, it was during the nationalist phase of colonial rule that sociology and anthropology also questioned the premises of evolutionary reductionism (Singh 1983, p. 78), emphasized the positive role of tradition and the relevance of Marxist framework (Mukherji 1958) and even suggested (Mukherjee) that western theories and concepts were unsuited for explaining Indian social reality (Singh 1983, p. 78).

The development of half a decade of sociology and social anthropology since South Asia was liberated from colonial rule, has witnessed a contextually creative engagement with the classical heritage and contemporary contribution of western Sociology and social and cultural anthropology. It would not be very far from truth to say that South Asian social reality has been viewed through structural-functionalist, Marxist, 'modernist', 'post modernist', 'structuralist', 'feminist', 'hermeneutic' eyes, name the school/orientation, it is unlikely that it has not found some adherents or inspired. It has largely, though not entirely, been a one-way traffic. The legitimation of scholarship has generally come via the west. Perhaps there is nothing inherently wrong in this. But it leads one to ask: why is it that non-western scholars' contributions have generally not amounted to orientations which have had an 'universal' appeal of theory? It is largely in the non-western world that Eurocentric concepts and theories have been found to be inadequate, yet it is in the Eurocentres that parallel paradigms emerge again and again through crises perceived in their own societies - whether it be through gender or ethnicity or else. Then these again become available to the non-western world for another round of looking at their own realities, until perhaps the next disenchantment sets in. Knowledge production, in this manner gets hegemonised implicitly or explicitly by the Eurocentres.

To return to our three epistemic questions, it is a fact that sociology owes its origin and development to the European, and subsequently U.S., west. It is stated, 'Sociology, like so many other things, is a European invention... It provided self-understanding of the triumphant modernity and gave intellectual bearings to experience of rapid and fundamental transition toward the entirely new economic, political and cultural order' (Nedelmann and Sztompka 1993, p. 1). The main substantive area of sociology, it is stated, is about 'institutions and modes of life brought into being by "modernity" - the massive set of social changes emanating first of all from Europe (and which today have become global in scope) creating modern social institutions' (Giddens 1987, p. 25). Wallerstein locates the origin of social sciences in a historical rather than a Eurocentric perspective:

"...Social science is an enterprise of the modern world. Its roots lie in the attempt, full-blown since the sixteenth century, and part and parcel of the construction of our

modern world, to develop systematic, secular knowledge about reality that is somehow validated empirically" (Wallerstein 1996, p. 2).

Wallerstein's perspective on the social sciences is clearly more universal and hence historically kept open. While Nedelmann and Sztompka as well as Giddens tie up the sociological project with 'triumphant modernity', with its sets of 'institutions and modes of life', Wallerstein is judiciously content merely to identify its origin, its 'construction' in the modern world, which is historically correct. Further, and most important, he relates the scope of the social sciences to the development of 'systematic, secular knowledge about reality' which has a scientific legitimating aspect of 'validation'. Sociology and social sciences therefore are not about 'modernity' but about the 'modern world' (which is a historical reality) in an endless elongated time span. It follows from Wallerstein's logic that basic theoretical presumptions about modernity itself and its origin can be questioned. As I see it, it is in this sense, more than any other, that he has 'opened' the social sciences, as does Ramkrishna Mukherjee. It is from this position that he can say:

"...One can challenge the accuracy of the picture of what happened, within Europe and in the world as a whole in the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries. One can certainly challenge the plausibility of the presumed cultural antecedents of what happened in this period. One can implant the story of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries in a longer duration, from several centuries longer to tens of thousands of years. If one does that, one is usually arguing that the European "achievements" of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries thereby seem less remarkable, or more like a cyclical variant, or less like achievements that can be credited primarily to Europe" (Wallerstein 1996, p. 4).

In fact, in the South Asian context modernity has been debated within the framework of the Gandhian critique of the industrialism of the west, of tradition and modernity as misplaced polarities (J.R.Gusfield), of modernity of tradition and traditionalization of modernity (Y.Singh), of the very importance of tradition itself (D.P.Mukherji) and so forth. In short, the historical conditions under which the social sciences and sociology got constructed no longer remain the same for the modern world. It is therefore expected that the social sciences and sociology will generate more and more of such powerful knowledge as will enable us to comprehend the implications of the so called 'triumphant' march of Eurocentric modernism has for most peoples of the globe, as they affect their livelihood and lifeways, ecology, environment, and the concentrations of wealth and power in a fast shrinking media - controlled, media constructed rank consumerist world. Is South Asian social science adequately responding to the challenges of Eurocentric modernity? It is my view, that it is less than adequate at the turn of the century. We are still prone, by and large, to operate with received concepts and theories with the help of which we enter into our social realities. There is less of entering into concepts and theories through the primacy of our substantive concerns. Western sociology and social science are

still quite firmly anchored in their complex social realities, generating new paradigms and handing them down to the rest of the world. However, they have hardly been able to recognize anything from the rest of the world as significant to world sociology/social science. An exception perhaps could be the field of ecology (Vandana Shiva). The answer to this lies principally, as I have stated earlier, in the inadequate and eroding academic institutional infrastructures and in the hegemonic influence of knowledge production centres which with their dazzle lead to paradigmatic blindings. So strong is the hegemonic influence that our courses and curriculum in the social sciences are woefully inadequate in imparting the classic and contemporary sources of knowledge generated in our own societies by indigenous scholars. Further, many substantive areas of research remain almost unattended.

At the level of research, rigorous painstaking, academically committed research is on the decline for reasons I need not repeat. The fact is, sociology and the social sciences are lagging far behind in generating social 'scientific' knowledge about the processes of conflict, structure and change in South Asian societies. Half-baked knowledge, tempered with mismatched borrowed Eurocentric concepts are far from helping appraise our overly complex social realities. In the absence of production of authentic knowledge, the knowledge space gets increasingly mis-appropriated by various political interests, who then fill up the vacuum with their own formulations. It is not the politicians who are so much at fault as the academics who are at a default. The forces and factors in the sociology of knowledge production is too complex to be treated seriously in this short exercise.

How do we then view the prospects of social sciences in South Asia in the next century? The problems of nation-building with which in greater or lesser measure all the South Asian countries are beset, are likely to create compelling circumstances for scholarship to respond to the complex set of contradictions both endogenous and exogenous. Since the problems cannot be addressed through stereotyped disciplinary frames, this will, quite likely, compel the formulation of problems to freely cross disciplinary boundaries and work out innovative, relevant, logics of enquiry. Given the complex plurality of South Asian countries, with their rich and variegated cultures, and the multiplicity of contradictions that have spawned numerous problems, it is to be expected that knowledge production in the social sciences will be broadly within the framework of a non-deterministic dialectic in which the analysis of contradictions will acquire centrality. The complex plurality is again conducive to an approach, which in the absence of a better term, I would prefer to call, in the words of Merton, 'disciplined eclecticism' (Mukherji 1986, pp.190-91). This in essence requires an openness of mind regarding the efficiency of parallel paradigms, none of which need be rejected a priori nor espoused as though in it lay the essence of wisdom from which all social science puzzles could be solved. It involves a process of ever-transcending paradigmatic boundaries,

rather than their rejection for ever-newer alternatives or holding on to one at all costs. In this process, disciplinary boundaries will naturally get transcended. The process of ever-transcending paradigms means ever-encompassing levels of abstractions, not through piece-meal, patchwork knitting but moving towards an organic dialectically designed embroidery. If the South Asian encounters to its nation-building challenges spawn a social science knowledge that effectively demonstrates to the world how such a complex plurality can cohere, it would make to the world a lasting contribution.

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Notes

(1) In the early sixties when T.K. Oommen and myself (without knowing each other) had elected to work for our Ph.D. on the same gramdan (literally, village gift) sarvodaya (literally, welfare-or-all) movements inspired by Gandhian ideology at widely different places, both of us were subject to well-meaning, condescending, good humoured banter by some of our masters in Indian Sociology. Quite clearly we were doing something interesting, but was it sociology was the question.

(2) Several young faculty in Jawaharlal Nehru University, a premier university in India bemoan that problem-oriented, field work based rigorous research is on decline.

(3) The Tata Institute of Social Sciences where a regular diploma is offered in Research Methodology, is an exception. Here, its traditional positivistic approach is undergoing change in favour of a balanced mix between quantitative and qualitative methods.

(4) This point got strongly underscored in the debate that took place in the South Asian Regional Conference of Sociology in Mumbai. A number of case studies of development projects which were formulated by planner economists and handed over to applied sociologists for successful implementation were presented. Inevitably, the drawbacks of implementation were attributed to the limitations of the sociologists. This is precisely the point that was conveyed by Gore, as indicated earlier.

CHAPTER 1 NATION-STATE REFORMULATED: INTERROGATING RECEIVED WISDOM⁽¹⁾

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Introduction

At the turn of the century when we are poised to assess the rich heritage of Sociology and the Social Sciences, it is appropriate to confront one of the most troublesome set of concepts causing universal disquiet and unease, viz, ethnicity, nation, nationalism, nationality and the nation-state. Perhaps no other field in the social sciences is beset with so much ambiguity, controversy and hence, so little clarity. The concepts and theories are amongst the most politically pregnant and volatile, having serious consequences for peoples, their cultures, their lives and well-being and cumulatively, for the world. Presently, the world, particularly the post-colonial countries, are ridden with the political consequences of this conceptual ambiguity. The level of confusion has reached a point where even the social science literati and political leaders are not yet clear about the political identity of the people with whom they identify in the emergent world political system.

Problematique

"Nation" remains one of the most puzzling and tendentious items in the political 'lexicon', observes Charles Tilly (1975, p. 6). Notwithstanding the truth of this statement, definitions of *nation* can be broadly categorized into, (a) those which conceptually regard the nation as *independent* of the state, and (b) those which regard it as *congruent* with the state.

The first set of views appear to attach a certain degree of *voluntariness* and strong *normativeness* to the concept. Illustratively, Essien-Udon holds the view that ultimately what matters is that there just has to be a 'body of people who feel they are a nation' (cited in Oommen 1997, p. 22; 1962, p. 104). Or, a similar echo which holds that it is sufficient that 'a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation or behave as if they formed one' (cited in Oommen 1997, p. 22; Seton-Watson 1977, p. 5). Or, the description of a nation 'as a self-differentiating ethnic group' which needed no 'tangible' characteristic of its existence or non-existence (cited in Oommen 1997, p. 21-22; Connor 1994, p. 40-43). Oommen himself defines nation