

Research article

Towards Indigenization of an Uncertain Transplant: Hundred Years of Sociology in India¹

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Sociology has to go native if it has to be creative.

M. N. Srinivas and M. N. Panini²

Abstract

This paper examines the problems and prospects of indigenizing sociology in India. It is divided into five parts: Part one introduces the predicament of sociology in the context of countervailing forces of universalization and indigenization; Part two discusses the crisis confronting sociology in India by delineating its transplantation during the colonial rule and its expansion as a mimic social science in the post-independence era; Part three analyzes the issues of ontological and epistemological fit in the teaching and research in the subject; Part four examines the alternatives proposed to address these issues; and Part five concludes by reflecting on the prospects of indigenizing sociology in India.

Keywords: Indigenization; Sociology; India; Uncertain Transplant; Universal

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- 2 - M. N. Srinivas and M. N. Panini, "The Development of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India", *Sociological Bulletin*, 22, No. 2 (1973), p. 207.

مقالة بحثية

في استنباتِ حقْلِ مُريبٍ: مئة سنة من علم الاجتماع في الهند¹

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ملخص

تعالج هذه الورقة مشكلات وأفاق أهلنة علم الاجتماع في الهند، وهي مقسمة إلى خمسة أجزاء: يقدم الجزء الأول إشكالية علم الاجتماع في سياق القوى الكونية والتوطينية المقابلة، ويناقش الجزء الثاني الأزمة التي تواجه علم الاجتماع في الهند كما عُين في ظل الحكم الاستعماري واتسع كعلم اجتماعي محاك إبان الاستقلال، أما الجزء الثالث فيحلل مسألة التوافق الأنطولوجي الإيستمولوجي للتدریس والبحث في الموضوع، ويفحص الجزء الرابع البدائل المقترحة للتعاطي مع هذه المسائل، أما الجزء الأخير فينتهي إلى التفكير في آفاق أهلنة علم الاجتماع في الهند.

الكلمات المفتاحية: أهلنة، علم الاجتماع، الهند، استنبات مشبوه، كوني

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1 - تم عرض هذه الورقة البحثية خلال الندوة الدولية بعنوان «علم الاجتماع وسؤال الأقلية» التي نظمها مركز ابن خلدون للعلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية بجامعة قطر، الدوحة، في 26 أكتوبر 2019.

I- Origin and Diffusion of Sociology: Indigenous as Universal?

Sociology as an academic discipline originated in mid-19th century Western Europe. The long tradition of reflection on human beings in society culminated as a social science in response to the economic, political, and intellectual churning experienced since the preceding century. Industrial Revolution – heralding capitalist mode of production; the French Revolution – marking a shift from aristocracy to democracy; Enlightenment and Rationalism – the movement and its point of view embodying the idea that, without recourse to supernatural or traditional assistance, human understanding is capable of mastering the world in every realm; the doctrine of naturalism – that all phenomena can be explained in terms of cause and effect sequences occurring in the world of nature; the Critical Spirit of the age – associated with Francois Voltaire (1694–1778), David Hume (1711–76), and Thomas Paine (1737–1809) emphasizing the importance of destructive criticism for creative work; Laissez-faire doctrine – emerging as a reaction to mercantilism and the paramountcy of the state; geographical discoveries and contact with other cultures; and the intellectual environment of the existing social and political philosophies – all these contributed to the emergence of a new social science.

The French intellectual Auguste Comte (1798–1857) was the first major thinker to assert and then prove by deed that a science of society, both theoretical and empirical, was possible and desirable. In fact, it was Comte who coined the term sociology¹ to designate the new science; hence, he has been called the founding father or “founder-in-chief”² of sociology³. However, it was only in the writings of classical scholars like Émile Durkheim (French, 1858–1917), Max Weber (German, 1864–1920), Ferdinand Tönnies (German, 1855–1936), Georg Simmel (German, 1858–1918), Herbert Spencer (English, 1820–1903), Vilfredo Pareto (Italian, 1848–1923), etc. that sociology gained recognition as an independent academic discipline, a “science”.

1 - Sociology, a hybrid term, has two stems – the Latin *socius* (companion) and the Greek *logos* (the study of). Literally, it means the study of the processes of companionship. See Nicholas Abercrombie et al., *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), p. 333.

While no definition of the term is entirely satisfactory, for the purpose of this paper, it could be broadly defined as “the scientific study of the phenomenon arising out of the group relations of human beings”. See Henry Pratt Fairchild et al., (eds.), *Dictionary of Sociology* (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams and Co., 1970), p. 302.

2 - The title bestowed on him in an article commemorating the centenary of his invention of the term “sociology”. See Frank H Hankins, “A Comtean Centenary: Invention of the Term ‘Sociology’,” *American Sociological Review*, 4 (1939), p. 16.

The term was first used by Comte in his letter to Valat dated 25 December 1824. It was made public in 1838 in the fourth volume of *Cours de philosophie positive* (Course of Positive Philosophy). Almost simultaneously, it appeared in English in an anonymous article on Comte in *Blackwood’s Magazine* and in John Stuart Mill’s *Logic VI* in 1843. *Sociology for the South, or, The Failure of Free Society* by George Fitzhugh (1806–81) is believed to be the first English-language book to include the word sociology in its title. (Julius Gould, “Unfinished Business: Traditions in Social Analysis,” *Encounter*, (March 1980), 49). Spencer wrote his three-volume *Principles of Sociology* between 1876 and 1896.

3 - Studies and theories that today would be called sociological, however, ante-date Comte; the works of Charles-Louis de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu (1689–1755) in France and Adam Ferguson (1723–1816) in Scotland are cases in point.

In each country where sociology came to be introduced and practiced, it carried the distinct imprint of the ontological and epistemological traditions there; it addressed the emerging social concerns there. That is, the production of sociological knowledge is “socially conditioned”¹, since the concepts and categories of sociology, the methods and tools it employs for comprehending social reality, and its priority areas of research bear the imprint of or is mediated by the history and social forces, culture, and traditions operative in a society.

Thus, French sociology was strongly influenced by objectivist ontology and positivist epistemology²; sociology modelled itself after Newtonian physics as a science³. This is best reflected in the sociological contributions of Durkheim⁴, the first empirical sociologist, who had preeminent influence not only on French sociology, but also on British social anthropology and American sociology. Durkheim categorically dismissed subjective perceptions as a source of data and looked for objective data in the form of law codes, social statistics, and religious dogmas, myths, and rites⁵. Durkheim’s key conceptual categories of solidarity and integration and collective conscience and collective representations are reflective of the collectivist orientation of Judaism and Roman Catholicism and his *The Rules of Sociological Method* is the best illustration of objectivist/positivist sociology⁶.

Similarly, German sociology was strongly influenced by the constructivist ontology and interpretivist epistemology and historicism and idealism⁷. Unlike in France, in Germany a clear distinction was made between disciplines that study human beings, society, and history (*Geisteswissenschaften*, literally “sciences of the spirit”) and natural sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*, literally “sciences of the nature”). Unlike the natural sciences, which focus on the external manifestations of a phenomenon, the human studies, including sociology, seek an understanding (*Verstehen*) of “their essentially meaningful subject matter” through

1 - Yogendra Singh, *Indian Sociology: Social Conditioning and Emerging Concerns* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1986), ix.

2 - Claude Lévi-Strauss, “French Sociology,” in Georges Gurvitch and Wilbert E. Moore, *Twentieth Century Sociology* (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1959), pp. 503-537.

3 - In fact, initially, Comte had toyed with the idea of calling the new discipline “social physics”, but dropped it because of what he considered to be its misleading use by the Belgian statistician Lambert Adolphe Jacques Quetelet (1796–1874) in a book published in 1835 titled *On Man and the Development of Human Faculties: An Essay on Social Physics*.

4 - See Robert K. Nisbet, *The Sociology of Émile Durkheim* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).

5 - It is important to note that “Durkheim’s three empirical studies rely almost entirely upon these types of data”: *The Division of Labour in Society*, mainly upon law codes; *Suicide*, upon social statistics; and *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, upon religious dogmas, myths, and rites.

See Emile Benoit-Smullyan, “The Sociologism of Émile Durkheim and His School,” in Harry E. Barnes, (ed.), *An Introduction to History of Sociology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1965), 528, En 11.

6 - Durkheim’s “first and most fundamental rule” for the observation of social fact is: “*Consider social facts as things*”. See Émile Durkheim, “The Rules of Sociological Method”, Sarah A. Solovay and John H. Mueller, (trans.), and George E. G. Catlin, (eds.) (New York: The Free Press, 1966), p. 14.

7 - See Raymond Aron, *German Sociology, Mary and Thomas Bottomore*, (trans.) (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1964).

interpretation¹. This is best reflected in the sociological contributions of Weber² perhaps the most prominent sociologist of Germany who profoundly influenced sociological thinking in the rest of Europe and in America. Weber's key conceptual categories of *verstehen*, social action (subjectively meaningful behavior oriented to others), social relationship, legitimate order, authority, etc., are best reflective of the individualistic/voluntaristic orientation of Protestantism and his *Theory of Social and Economic Organisation* (Weber 1964) and *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (Weber 1949) are the best illustrations of constructivist/interpretivist sociology.

A review of the history of sociology reveals that, the discipline that originated in France and Germany, with two distinct ontological and epistemological foundations, were indigenized in European countries or regions where it was introduced³. Thus, we have descriptors like American sociology, Belgian sociology, British sociology, Russian sociology, Spanish sociology, Latin-American Sociology, besides French sociology and German sociology⁴. Semantically different from these are descriptors locating sociology in individual countries or regions, e.g., sociology *in* Italy, sociology *in* non-Germanic countries, sociology *in* Latin America, sociology *in* the Germanic languages, or Italian contributions *to* sociology⁵.

Some clarifications are in order. Although Spencer, who is often described as the English counterpart of Comte, wrote his three-volume *Principles of Sociology* between 1874 and 1896, sociology did not take roots in Britain. Spencer, in fact, "went into eclipse and became a virtual non person among many twentieth century social scientists" and "there is a curious tendency among historians of sociology to pass Spencer by and skip directly from Comte to Durkheim"⁶. Despite the valuable contributions of Leonard T. Hobhouse (1864–1929) and Morris Ginsberg (1889–1970), sociology's reception was relatively late to come in Britain. "It began slowly in the 1950s and gained currency in the 1960s when it became an expanding vogue-subject in [British] Universities and Polytechnics"⁷.

The social science that became preeminent in British universities – especially in Cambridge and Oxford, and at the London School of Economics (LSE) – and which received patronage of the government was social anthropology⁸. Social anthropology was useful to the colonial

1 - Anthony Quinton, "Hermeneutics (2)," in Alan Bullock and Oliver Stallybrass, (eds.), *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (London: Fontana Books, 1977), p. 281.

2 - See Reinhard Bendix, *Max Weber: An Intellectual Portrait* (London: Methuen and Co., 1966).

Julien Freund, *The Sociology of Max Weber, Mary Ilford*, (trans.) (Middlesex, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1968).

3 - See Harry E. Barnes, (ed.), *An Introduction to History of Sociology*.

4 - See Heinz Maus, *A Short History of Sociology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962).

5 - See Howard Becker and Harry Elmer Barnes, *Social Thought from Lore to Science Vol. III – Sociological Trends throughout the World to the Start of the Twentieth Century's Seventh Decade* (New York: Dover Publications, 1961).

6 - Peter A. Corning, "Durkheim and Spencer," *The British Journal of Sociology*, 33, No. 3 (1982), p. 359.

7 - Julius Gould, "Unfinished Business: Traditions in Social Analysis", p. 46.

8 - See E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951); Adam Kuper, *Anthropologists* ▶▶

masters in administering their far-flung colonies¹, and it was social anthropology that was institutionalized as sociology in the English-speaking countries of the British Empire². Not surprisingly, M. N. Srinivas (1916–99), one of the most distinguished architects of sociology in India, believed that there is no real difference in aim between sociology and social anthropology³.

In their effort to indigenize sociology, a large number of East European sociologists found the work and approach of Karl Marx (1818–83) to be basic and useful; his influence on sociology and other social sciences in Africa and Asia has also been considerable. However, the place of Marx is ambivalent in the history of sociology. The Russian-born French sociologist George Gurvitch (1894–1965) called Marx the “Prince of Sociologists”⁴. In Donald G. MacRae’s judgement, however, Marx “was not a sociologist”, and his influence on sociology, great as it may have been, is “unfortunate”⁵. It cannot be an accident that Marx is not given the dignity of a section in the 950-page, *An Introduction to the History of Sociology* edited by Harry Elmer Barnes (1965) and “hardly, if at all, mentioned in most of the American introductory texts”⁶. It is true that Marx did not invoke the rubric sociology; and that he is not a sociologist as Durkheim or Weber was, but it can hardly be denied that “there is a sociology in Marx”⁷.

Curiously, when the indigenized versions of sociology were exported to other countries, under academic colonialism or neo-colonialism, they became universalistic or cosmopolitan disciplines! For instance, the indigenization of sociology in America involved the blending of the pragmatic philosophy with European concepts and theories, which resulted in a variety of theoretical/methodological approaches – theory of social system (Talcott Parsons), symbolic interactionism (George Herbert Mead and Herbert Blumer), phenomenological sociology (Alfred Schutz), social constructionism (Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman), ethnomethodology (Harold Garfinkel). This indigenized version of sociology, which should appropriately be called American sociology, has been sought to be spread as a universal discipline in the developing countries since World War II. Accordingly, the call for indigenization of sociology in Africa and Asia would be perceived as an affront to western sociology, in general,

►► *and Anthropology: The British School 1922–1972* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1973).

1 - See Jack Stauder, “The Functions of Functionalism,” Paper presented at a meeting of the American Anthropological Association held in, New York, in November 1971.

Jack Stauder, “The ‘Relevance’ of Anthropology to Colonialism and Imperialism,” *Race* 16, No. 1 (1974), pp. 29-51, accessed at: <https://doi.org/10.1177/030639687401600102>.

2 - See M. N. Srinivas and M. N. Panini, “The Development of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India,” *Sociological Bulletin*, 22, No. 2 (1973).

3 - M. N. Srinivas, “Practicing Social Anthropology in India,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 22 (1997).

4 - Cited in: Margaret A. Coulson and Carol Riddell, *Approaching Sociology: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 2.

5 - Donald G. MacRae, “Karl Marx (1818–83),” in Timothy Raison, (ed.), *The Founding Fathers of Social Science* (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p. 59.

6 - Margaret A. Coulson and Carol Riddell, *Approaching Sociology: A Critical Introduction*.

7 - Henri Lefebvre, *The Sociology of Marx, Norbert Guterman*, (trans.) (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 1968), p. 22.

and American sociology, in particular¹.

Sociology in India², as in many other countries in Asia and Africa, was a western transplant and the discipline has far too long developed and expanded as an imitative social science³. Yogendra Singh observes:

The uncritical acceptance of most social science values inherent in concepts, tools and techniques developed for the study of the Western society by us, introjects a kind of methodological individualism and social system ideology in our theories and researches, which may be false and irrelevant for our society⁴.

This methodological individualism tends to alienate sociology from history and “by distorting the construction of concepts and categories it also vitiates our understanding of problems”⁵. This raises questions about the relevance of a sociology that articulates and expresses “borrowed consciousness”⁶. According to Shyama Charan Dube (1922–96), “Indian sociology” is facing a crisis as “it has opted to function within a framework of dependency, as a satellite system rather than an autonomous one”⁷; the crisis has to do with the subject being an “uncertain transplant”⁸.

At a more general level, Immanuel Wallerstein writes, “if social science is to make any progress in the twenty-first century, it must overcome the Eurocentric heritage which has distorted its analyses and its capacity to deal with problems of the contemporary world”⁹. In this context, the central question is: “How does an intellectual tradition, arising out of a civilization with particular kinds of intellectual and social habits and resources become domesticated in another civilization whose intellectual habits and resources have been very different?”¹⁰ This paper discusses the problems and prospects of domesticating sociology in India by reviewing its history over the last 100 years.

1 - See Yogesh Atal, *Indian Sociology from Where to Where: Footnotes to the History of the Discipline* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2003), p. 117.

2 - Although “Sociology in India” and “Indian Sociology” are semantically different, for the ease of usage, I use them interchangeably.

3 - Yogendra Singh, “The Role of Social Sciences in India: A Sociology of Knowledge,” *Sociological Bulletin*, 22, No. 1 (1973b), p. 23.

4 - Yogendra Singh, *Image of Man: Ideology and Theory in Indian Sociology* (Delhi: Chanakya Publications, 1984), p. 162.

5 - *Ibid.*, p. 162.

6 - Yogesh Atal, *Indian Sociology from Where to Where: Footnotes to the History of the Discipline* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2003), p. 100.

7 - S. C. Dube, “Indian Sociology at the Turning Point,” *Sociological Bulletin*, 26, No. 1 (1977), p. 11.

8 - Satish Saberwal, “Uncertain Transplants: Anthropology and Sociology in India,” in T. K. Oommen and Partha N. Mukherji, (eds.), *Indian Sociology: Reflections and Introspections* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1986).

9 - Immanuel Wallerstein, “Euro-centrism and its Avatars: The Dilemmas of Social Science,” *Sociological Bulletin*, 46, No. 1 (1997), p. 22.

10 - Satish Saberwal, “Uncertain Transplants: Anthropology and Sociology in India”, p. 214.

II- Sociology in India: An Uncertain Transplant

Sociology as an academic discipline was originally transplanted in India during the British colonial era. In 1914, the University of Bombay (now Mumbai) received a grant from the Government of India to start the teaching of sociology and, in the same year, the University began offering a course of lectures in sociology and economics to post-graduate students¹. The first full department of sociology (and civics) was set up in the University of Bombay in 1919 with the eminent Scottish sociologist and town planner, Sir Patrick Geddes (1854–1932), as its founding head². In 1924, this department initiated a full master's programme in sociology, a doctoral programme in 1936, and the first PhD degree in sociology was awarded in 1938³.

Although academic sociology is only a hundred years old in India, attempt at obtaining sociological knowledge about the country goes back to the late 18th century. Three broad motivations for seeking such knowledge can be identified: (i) the scholarly interest of the *Orientalists* to understand Indian civilization; (ii) the evangelical enthusiasm of the *Christian missionaries*; and (iii) the administrative need of the *British officials*⁴. By the beginning of the 20th century, two distinct lines for sociological understanding of society and culture in India were discernible: the Indological – “which relied heavily on the early literary sources, and in particular, the scriptures, epics and law books”⁵ – and studies based on empirical investigation and census and other official reports⁶. Both these traditions have had a lasting imprint on the practice of sociology in India.

Indians who early on took up sociology as a vocation were strongly influenced by Indology, or what came to be called by Srinivas as the “book view” (textual perspective) of society in India, as different from the “field view” derived from empirical investigation⁷. Govind Sadashiv Ghurye (1893–1984), a Sanskritist, who later became the head of the sociology department at the University of Bombay, was an ardent follower of the Indological approach. He encouraged

1 - M. N. Srinivas and M. N. Panini, “The Development of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India,” p. 187.

2 - The first department of anthropology was established in 1924 at the University of Calcutta.

S. C. Dube, “Indian Sociology at the Turning Point,” p. 7.

3 - Monorama Savur, “Sociology: The Genealogy of the Discipline in Bombay,” in Sujata Patel, (ed.), *Doing Sociology in India: genealogies, Locations, and Practices* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 3-28.

4 - Bernard S. Cohn, “Notes on the History of the Study of Indian Society and Culture,” in Milton Singer and Bernard S. Cohn, (eds.), *Structure and Change in Indian Society* (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Co., 1968), pp. 3-28.

See also Yogendra Singh, *Indian Sociology: Social Conditioning and Emerging Concerns*, xi–x.

5 - India has an old tradition of reflection and writing on human beings and society, a tradition that encompasses metaphysical as well as materialist contents. Manu's *Dharmashastra*, Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, and Ajit Kesamkambalan's Indian materialism (*Lokāyata* or *Cārvāka*) are few examples of such reflections.

6 - M. N. Srinivas and M. N. Panini, “The Development of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India”, p. 185.

See also Bela Dutt Gupta, *Sociology in India: An Enquiry into Sociological Thinking and Empirical Social Research in the Nineteenth Century – with Special Reference to Bengal* (Calcutta: Centre for Sociological Research, 1972).

7 - See Surinder S. Jodhka, “From ‘Book-view’ to ‘Field-view’: Social Anthropological Constructions of the Indian Village,” *Oxford Development Studies*, 26 (1998), pp. 311-31.

his students who were well versed in Sanskrit – K. M. Kapadia (1908–67), Irawati Karve (1905–70), and S. V. Karandikar – to extend his approach in analyzing the sacred texts and other literature available in that language¹. Other eminent sociologists who were strongly influenced by Indology included Radhakamal Mukerjee (1889–1968), who headed the sociology department at the University of Lucknow, and Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar (1891–1956), the architect of independent India’s constitution and a leader of the downtrodden caste groups. Of course, Radhakamal Mukerjee (as also B. N. Seal and B. N. Sarkar) was critical of western Indologists’ interpretation of Indian reality through the evolutionary reductionist matrix². As regards, the early fieldwork-based sociological studies conducted in India by English-trained Indian sociologists as well as the British administrator-cum-sociologists were heavily influenced by theoretical propositions and methodological strategies then in vogue in the discipline in the West.

An important aspect of the transplantation of western sociology, especially British social anthropology, in India was that the Indian pioneers of sociology were trained in the West or strongly influenced by the western sociologists or social anthropologists or both. For example, Geddes had a lasting influence on his students, Ghurye and N. A. Toothi; the latter, in fact, extended Geddes’ line of research. Radhakamal Mukerjee, too, was influenced by Geddes through his association in the latter’s urban surveys. More importantly, the early generation of Indian sociologists were mostly trained in England. Ghurye was a student of Hobhouse at LSE for a year before he went to Cambridge for training under W. H. R. Rivers (1864–1922). Toothi obtained his doctorate from Oxford. After his early training with Ghurye, Srinivas was trained at Oxford; he was greatly influenced by Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown (1881–1955) and obtained his doctorate under Evans-Pritchard. D. N. Mazumdar of the Lucknow department went to Cambridge and obtained his doctorate in cultural anthropology under Thomas Callan Hodson (1871–1953). Ambedkar obtained doctorates from both Columbia University (New York, USA) and LSE. C. Parvathamma, the first dalit (a member of the lowest caste) woman sociologist and head of the department at the University of Mysore, was trained in the University of Manchester under Ian George Cunnison (1923–2013) and, later, Victor Witter Turner (1920–83) and Frederick George Bailey (b. 1924) and Herman Max Gluckman (1911–75) were her external and internal examiners respectively.

After independence in 1947, the point of reference for sociology in India gradually shifted from England to USA, consequent upon the changes that took place in “the worldview of sociology in the West”, following World War II, and shifting of “the center of gravity in sociology”³

1 - It must be clarified that, Ghurye, though himself was “an armchair scholar”, encouraged his students to do intensive fieldwork; he was “catholic in his interests as well as methods”, too.

See M. N. Srinivas and M. N. Panini, “The Development of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India”, p. 188.

2 - Yogendra Singh, *Indian Sociology: Social Conditioning and Emerging Concerns* (New Delhi: Vistaar Publications, 1986), p. 7.

3 - *Ibid.*, p. 9.

from Europe to America. Douglas Ensminger, director of the Ford Foundation in India (1951–70) and a trained rural sociologist himself, was hugely successful in making “sociology popular with the Indian government and with Jawaharlal Nehru [the first prime minister of independent India]”¹. American cultural anthropologists and sociologists began taking a keen interest in the study of South Asian countries, and their work found political support in India. Under the “Fulbright Programme” of the United States Cultural Exchange Programme, many American sociologists found placements in sociology departments in Indian universities and several Indian sociologists have gone to USA for visits of varying duration. Among the Indian sociologists who went to USA for doctoral or post-doctoral training, mention may be made of Pratap C. Agarwal, A. Bopagamage, Yashwant Bhaskar Damle (1923–2006), Madhav Sadashiv Gore (1921–2010), Ravindra S. Khare (1936–), Narmadeshwar Prasad, Satish Saberwal (1934–2010), B. V. Shah, Surajit Chandra Sinha (1926–2002), and Lalita Prasad Vidyarthi (1931–85).

More importantly, with the expansion of sociology in the 1960s and the persistence of English as the medium of higher education, there came a great demand for sociology textbooks in English. Both Britain and USA provided foreign aid for the production of textbooks in India. It is noteworthy that the Indo-American Textbook Programme, started in 1961, involved mainly the reprint of American textbooks at a subsidized (and absurdly low) cost under the “PL 480” funds. Hans Raj Dua notes that “by the end of 1984–85, 1,620 titles were published in India and about four million copies were sold to college and university students”². These books determined the curriculum of what was taught as sociology to students in India. Satish Saberwal views the American interest in the development of sociology and social sciences in general, as “... the cognitive edge to post-war American political expansion in the wake of Europe’s colonial withdrawals”³.

Although the sociological study of village, caste, and tribe acquired rigor and sophistication since the 1960s, they were all guided by western theoretical frameworks and methodological strategies. As will be discussed in the next section, those sociologists seeking “a path cautious of western ethnocentric bias” could not influence the course that sociology took⁴. As Singh rightly observes:

The emphasis on methodology, research techniques and operationalization of research

1 - M. N. Srinivas and M. N. Panini, “The Development of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India”, p. 198.

2 - Hans Raj Dua, “The Spread of English in India: Politics of Language Conflict and Language Power,” in Joshua A. Fishman, Andrew W. Conrad, and Alma Rubal-Lopez, (eds.), *Post-Imperial English: Status Change in Former British and American Colonies, 1940–1990* (Berlin and New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1996), p. 582.

Similarly, under an agreement signed between India and Britain in 1962, the English Language Book Society (ELBS) brought out inexpensive university-level British books. “An average of a million copies of ELBS editions were printed in England each year [and] ... about 60 per cent of the total books were sold in India” (Dua 1996, 582).

3 - Satish Saberwal, “Uncertain Transplants: Anthropology and Sociology in India”, p. 217.

4 - Partha N. Mukherji, “Sociology in South Asia: Indigenisation as Universalising Social Science,” *Sociological Bulletin*, 54, No. 3 (2005), p. 313.

tools became, under the influence of American sociology, the pre-eminent concern in sociological studies. This generated, on the one hand, rich data, but on the other, took sociology towards a narrowly instrumental and a-historical path of development¹.

Nevertheless, since the 1950s, the transplanted western sociology expanded considerably as part of a larger boom in the number of colleges and universities and of enrolments therein. Sociology is now taught widely in universities and colleges, and a large amount of sociological research is carried out in universities and institutes. The Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the University Grants Commission, as some academic foundations, sponsor and fund research projects in sociology. There is a large professional body of sociologists – Indian Sociological Society (established in 1951) – with a life-membership exceeding 4,500; it has to date held forty-four gatherings under the banner of the All India Sociological Conference. In 1986, it even hosted, the XI World Congress of Sociology in New Delhi². Its flagship journal, *Sociological Bulletin*, has been published uninterruptedly since 1952³, and is archived by JSTOR⁴. *Contributions to Indian Sociology* is another journal of international repute published in India⁵. Indian sociologists have also been routinely publishing their work in *Economic and Political Weekly* (earlier *Economic Weekly* [1949–1965]), a social science weekly published from Mumbai by Sameeksha Trust; *Social Scientist*, a Marxist monthly published by the Indian School of Social Sciences and Tulika Books, New Delhi; and *Social Action*, a quarterly from the (Roman Catholic) Indian Social Institute, New Delhi.

However, even as academic sociology celebrates its centenary in India, it has not been able to overcome the tendency to imitate the West and continues to adhere to the standards of a social science peddled as universal. If in pre-independence times, sociology was subject to academic colonialism, it has been a willing partner in the post-independence period. As T. K.

1 - Yogendra Singh, *Indian Sociology: Social Conditioning and Emerging Concerns*, x.

No wonder, in India, sociology and other social sciences, not only lagged behind in responding to the challenge of colonialism, or the advent of freedom, but, in fact, evaded it for long.

S. C. Dube, "Indian Sociology at the Turning Point", p. 10.

See Yogendra Singh, *Image of Man: Ideology and Theory in Indian Sociology*, pp. 64-65.

The two sociologists, who critically engaged with colonialism, namely, Akshay Ramanlal Desai and Ramkrishna Mukherjee, approached it from the Marxian political economy perspective.

2 - The hosting of this Congress, for the first time in Afro-Asia, is regarded as "a recognition of the maturity the discipline has acquired and the vitality which it has demonstrated over the decades" (Oommen and Mukherji 1986a, vii).

3 - From 1952 to 2003, *Sociological Bulletin* was published biannually; since then it is published thrice a year – January–April, May–August, and September–December.

4 - Two other journals – *The Indian Journal of Sociology* started in Baroda (now Vadodara) in 1929 by Albert Widgery, and *The Indian Sociological Review* started in 1934 under the auspices of Lucknow University with Radhakamal Mukerjee as editor – were short-lived. See M. N. Srinivas and M. N. Panini, "The Development of Sociology and Social Anthropology in India", p. 194.

5 - *Contributions to Indian Sociology* was founded by Louis Dumont and David Pocock in Paris in 1957, but ceased publication in 1966. A new series commenced publication in 1967 at the initiative of T. N. Madan from the Institute of Economic Growth, Delhi, with the support of Louis Dumont, Adrian C. Mayer, Milton Singer, and M. N. Srinivas. Published annually till 1974, it became a biannual publication in 1975, and it is now published thrice a year – in February, June, and October.

Oommen notes, “the knowledge industry operates in a free-market situation. The academic entrepreneur of the West ... would want to sell his products wherever he can. However, the transaction can take place only if there are willing buyers”¹. These “willing buyers” have sought endorsement of their work from their western counterparts. This is not to deny the significant contributions that some Indian sociologists have made on their own terms.

It can hardly be denied that there is a growing sense of cynicism among those doing sociology in India, as they seldom see in it any purpose beyond career advancement. This is matched by misgivings among both the policy-makers and the general public about the practical use of sociology. Not surprisingly, the number of students taking up sociology has been dwindling, even as the gross enrolment ratio in higher education is increasing; and, even for most of those taking up sociology, the subject is not their first preference. In the Indian academia, there is a growing concern about the decline in the quality of the products of the discipline, both human and knowledge.

III- Introspection on a Relevant Sociology

Not that the lack of an ontological and epistemological fit between a universalizing (read, westernizing) social science and a historically conditioned socio-cultural reality of diverse India has gone unnoticed. In the very first presidential address of the newly born Indian Sociological Society in 1955, Dhūrjaṭiprasāda Mukhopādhyāya (1894–1961) (known by his anglicized name as D. P. Mukerji and popularly as DP) castigated the sociological knowledge of his times: “As an Indian”, he said, “I find it impossible to discover any life-meaning in the jungle of the so-called empirical social research monographs”². He frankly admitted that, “I am not a sociologist as sociologists would like me to be”³.

DP argued that our first task is “to study the social traditions [parampara] to which we have been born and in which we have had our being ... [as] traditions have great powers of resistance and absorption”⁴. This task, he clarified, “includes the study of changes in traditions by internal and external pressures”⁵ and “the thing changing is more real and objective than change per se”⁶. According to him, “unless sociological training in India is grounded on Sanskrit, or any such language in which the traditions have been embodied as symbols, social research in India will be a pale imitation of what others are doing”⁷. “... it is not enough for the Indian

1 - T. K. Oommen, “Sociology in India: A Plea for Contextualization,” *Sociological Bulletin*, 32, (2) (1983), p. 119.

2 - D. P. Mukerji, “Indian Tradition and Social Change,” in T. K. Oommen and Partha N. Mukherji, (eds.), *Indian Sociology: Reflections and Introspections* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1986), p. 4.

3 - Ibid.

4 - Ibid., p. 5.

5 - Ibid.

6 - Ibid., p. 15.

7 - Ibid., p. 6.

sociologist to be a sociologist. He must be an Indian first”¹.

It pained him “to observe how our Indian scholars succumb to the lure of modern ‘scientific’ techniques imported from outside as a part of technical aid and ‘know-how’ without resistance and dignity”². Therefore, “in the intellectual transactions which are taking place, it seems that we have no terms to offer, no ground to stand upon”³.

DP emphasized that, unlike for the westerner:

... Action for the Indian is not individualistic ... it is “inherently structured on a normative, teleological” but not on a “voluntaristic system of coordinates or axes” with the result that the failure to attain it does not lead to “frustration” ... the common “individual’s” pattern of desires is more or less rigidly fixed by his socio-cultural group-pattern, and he hardly deviates from it except under severe economic duress⁴.

Thus, “the Indian sociologist”, DP averred that “the Indian sociologist will have to accept the group as his unit and reject the individual.”⁵

DP influenced a few young scholars at Lucknow to question the positivist approach to sociology and to work out an indigenous sociology based on India’s traditional social thought. The most notable among these young scholars were Awadh Kishore Saran (1922–2003)⁶ and R. N. Saksena⁷. Saran took the extreme view that “sociological cognition and the world-view is fundamentally alien to the Indian tradition, hence any attempt towards its indigenization or adaptation into an Indian cognitive system is bound either to fail or to turn imitative”⁸. As Yogesh Atal summarizes, DP and his disciples believed that Indian social reality cannot be interpreted through “an evolutionary perspective that puts societies of the West on a higher pedestal”; they found the western sociological categories “to be too parochial to be applicable to the Indian situation”; and that the western theories are not universally applicable⁹.

Astonishingly, though the views of DP and his disciples on western sociology in the Indian context attracted the attention of many, they hardly found any takers. It was only in the 1970s, that “introspection and reflections started appearing with determined persistence”¹⁰. Some of

1 - D. P. Mukerji, “Indian Tradition and Social Change,” p. 6.

2 - Ibid.

3 - Ibid.

4 - Ibid., p. 7.

5 - Ibid., p. 9.

6 - See Awadh Kishore Saran, “Sociology in India,” in Joseph S. Roucek, (ed.), *Contemporary Sociology* (London: Peter Owen Limited, 1959).

7 - See R. N. Saksena, *Sociology in India* (Agra: Institute of Social Sciences, 1965).

8 - Yogendra Singh, *Indian Sociology: Social Conditioning and Emerging Concerns*, p. 6.

9 - Yogesh Atal, *Indian Sociology from Where to Where: Footnotes to the History of the Discipline*, p. 131.

See also Ibid., p. 19.

10 - Oommen, T. K. and Partha N. Mukherji, “Editorial Introduction,” in T. K. Oommen and Partha N. Mukherji, (eds.), *Indian Sociology: Reflections and Introspections* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1986), ix.

these introspections and reflections are put together in *Indian Sociology: Reflections and Introspections*¹. While most contributors invariably referred to the concern articulated by DP, they had their own interpretations about sociology in India. Thus, Ramkrishna Mukherjee blindly dismissed the view that the approach of the Indian sociologist towards the appraisal of social reality was imitative in any way². Evaluating “the content, methodology and value premises in the sociological writings of 1920–1948”, Singh finds “their concern with western sociology or social science” to be “dialectical and interactive rather than imitative”³.

P. C. Joshi finds sociology sharing the predicament with other social sciences. In his opinion, “What appears as intellectual dominance of western world from one point of view should also be seen as the lack of adequate intellectual independence among the social scientists of the underdeveloped world”⁴. He finds social scientists often grappling with problems considered important in the West and “not with issues agitating their own national community”⁵. “This inadequate responsiveness to the challenges of their society”, according to him, “is at the root of insufficient release of the creative spirit among the social scientist in India”⁶. Thus, agenda setting appears to Joshi as the primary problem⁷.

Joshi is critical of the work of Indian sociologists in that it does not adequately reflect “... the processes of the emergence of a new India through social conflicts and movements and through the release of creative energies of the Indian people after independence ...”⁸. He also bemoans that “they have not so far even evolved a language of the discipline which is their own”⁹.

Dube castigates the sociologists in India for “imitating the western pattern under the guise of cultivating “international science” without any sense of guilt or even qualms of conscience”¹⁰. Writing three decades after independence, he finds “both teaching and research in sociology” in India continuing “to be cast in the colonial mold”: “Ours was (and to an extent continues to be) largely a sociology of borrowed concepts and methods”¹¹. This has led to distortions in the

1 - T. K. Oommen and Partha N. Mukherji, (eds.), *Indian Sociology: Reflections and Introspections* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1986).

2 - Ramkrishna Mukherjee, *Sociology of Indian Sociology* (Bombay: Allied Publishers, 1979), p. 29.

3 - Yogendra Singh, *Indian Sociology: Social Conditioning and Emerging Concerns*, p. 6.

4 - P. C. Joshi, “Reflections on Social Science Research in India,” in T. K. Oommen and Partha N. Mukherji, (eds.), *Indian Sociology: Reflections and Introspections* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1986), pp. 139-140.

5 - Ibid.

6 - Ibid.

7 - As early as 1973, an Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) Committee had observed: “Much of the current research effort has no relevance to the contemporary social and national problems... It is not yet emancipated to develop research tools, designs and models of its own appropriate to the Indian situation” (cited in Oommen 1983, 113).

8 - Joshi, “Reflections on Social Science Research in India”, p. 142.

9 - Ibid.

10 - S. C. Dube, “Indian Sociology at the Turning Point”, p. 10.

11 - Dube, *Indian Sociology at the Turning Point*, p. 10.

perspectives of Indian sociology and also to its stunted growth¹. As a consequence of “the oppressive influence of foreign models, native categories of thought [e.g., varna and jati] have had to undergo transfers of meaning and, in the process, they now represent something [e.g., caste] which is far removed from their original intent”².

Dube also finds our research priorities distorted and that “a significant part of our work [is] addressed not to the people or even professional colleagues in India but to peers and mentors abroad”³. One continuing problem about the teaching of and research in sociology, that Dube draws our attention to, is the use of English, a language which hardly 10 per cent of the country’s population can speak⁴ and the percentage of those with proficiency for doing sociology in that language being still less⁵. No doubt, in most regional universities, there is a gradual shift to the vernacular as the medium of instruction in higher education, but the availability of good quality reading materials in that language remains a problem⁶. No wonder, there is “a visible unease within Indian sociology about its direction and purpose”⁷ and the subject is “yet to establish its credibility with the people and the policy makers”⁸.

While recognizing the dominance of western theory and methodology in sociology since it was implanted in India, Oommen argues why sociology in India cannot “develop mainly based on analysis of texts, ancient or contemporary”⁹. To the extent, the texts to be studied are Hindu texts, what one would get is in effect “Hindu sociology”. Even as Hindus constitute an overwhelming majority, India is home to the second largest Muslim community in the world, and other small minorities – Buddhists, Christians, Jains, Parsees, and Sikhs. Of course, it would be a worthwhile exercise to see where the texts of different religions meet and how do they differ. However, it would be wrong to conflate India with Hinduism. Moreover, we cannot mistake the ideal portrayed in the texts as real, and ignoring the phenomenal oral traditions would be peril to Indian sociology.

In conclusion, Oommen argues that academic nationalism, as implied in the idea of indigenization, is not the answer to academic colonialism. Academic nationalism, he cautions,

1 - Dube, *Indian Sociology at the Turning Point*, p. 10.

2 - Ibid., pp. 10-11.

3 - Ibid., p. 11.

4 - This makes India the world’s second-largest English-speaking country, next only to USA. See Zareer Masani, “English or Hinglish: Which will India Choose?,” *BBC News Magazine*, 27 November 2012, accessed on 22 October 2019, at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-20500312>

5 - See N. Jayaram, “Challenges to Indian Sociology,” *Sociological Bulletin*, 47, (2) (1998), pp. 237-241.

6 - Yogesh Atal, *Indian Sociology from Where to Where: Footnotes to the History of the Discipline*, pp. 106-109.

7 - S. C. Dube, “Indian Sociology at the Turning Point”, p. 1.

8 - Ibid., p. 12.

9 - T. K. Oommen, “Sociology in India: A Plea for Contextualization”, p. 115.

This comment of Oommen is in reaction to Louis Dumont’s claim that “... a sociology of India lies at the point of confluence of sociology and Indology”. See Louis Dumont, “For a Sociology of India,” *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, Louis Dumont and David Pocock, (eds.), 1 (April 1957), 7.

“contains within it seeds of academic communalism and academic feudalism” and academic parochialism¹. To get out of the impasse, he makes a plea for contextualization of sociology in India. This involves (a) “recognition of the fact that tradition/past contains both assets and liabilities viewed in terms of the present needs and aspirations”; (b) “adopting appropriate values and institutions from other societies and cultures” and “judiciously craft[ing] them on to our own society”; (c) taking into consideration “gradual adaptation and reconciliation” as the central tendency in our society; and (d) “social engineering” in India – involving “the selective retention of our tradition, informed borrowing from other cultures and the judicious mutation of the two” – will have to be “a process peculiar to India”². He rightly emphasizes that, “if sociology is to be relevant for India ... it should endorse and its practitioners should internalize the value-package contained in the Indian constitution, the differing interpretations of these values notwithstanding”³.

IV- The Alternatives

It must be clear from the preceding section that, since independence, Indian sociologists have been sensitive to the challenges of a Euro-centric discipline being transplanted in their academic system. This sensitivity has been mainly reactive in nature, though some proactive initiatives have been made. Singh’s review of the presidential addresses delivered at the successive sessions of the All India Sociological Conference from 1970 to 1983 reveal the deep concern with the issue of relevance of sociology in the context of a changing India and an acute sense of national self-consciousness⁴. A clear indication of this is revealed in the debate on “sociology for India” initiated by Indophile sociologists like Louis Dumont and David Pocock in the very first issue of the first series of *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. This debate has been continued, though intermittently, in the New Series of the journal published since 1967. The preposition “for” in the caption of the debate clearly indicates the perceived need for postulating a set of concepts and theories suitable to study social reality in India⁵. Singh⁶ provides a succinct summary of the key highlight of this debate. In addition to this debate, a notable contribution addressing this theme was Ramkrishna Mukherjee’s *Sociology of Indian Sociology* (1979).

One alternative for addressing the quest of the fit between sociology and its existential subject matter was the Marxian approach. In India, this approach in sociology is chiefly

1 - T. K. Oommen, “Sociology in India: A Plea for Contextualization”, p. 123.

2 - Ibid., pp. 130-131.

3 - Ibid., p. 130.

4 - Yogendra Singh, *Indian Sociology: Social Conditioning and Emerging Concerns*, pp. 17-22.

5 - This is often contrasted from such captions as “sociology *in* India”, which focuses on the state of the craft in India and the professional activities of Indian sociologists, and “sociology *of* India”, which concerns itself with approaches to the study of society in India as a “space-time chunk” (see T. K. Oommen, “Sociology in India: A Plea for Contextualization”, p. 111).

6 - Yogendra Singh, *Indian Sociology: Social Conditioning and Emerging Concerns*, pp. 23-25.

associated with DP, Akshay Ramanlal Desai (1915–94) and Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1917–2015). Of course, Marxism is also an alien theoretical/methodological framework, though India had its own brand of materialism in *Lokāyata* or *Cārvāka* philosophy. Atal remarks that it is interesting that “the advocates of indigenization somehow spared the Marxist approach from their criticism; the campaign for indigenization appeared as a campaign against capitalist social science”¹. After all, DP himself was a critique of colonial implantation of sociology, but he invoked Marxian dialectics and called his approach “Marxology”.

Desai (1981) puts forward a robust case for the Marxist approach to the study of Indian society. He reminds us of a significant observation made by Don Martindale about the origin and function of sociology as a discipline:

Sociology was born as a conservative answer to socialism ... Only conservative ideology was able to establish the discipline. The linkage between science and reformist social attitudes (e.g., Scientific Socialism) was served. In renouncing political activism, sociology became respectable into the ivy-covered halls of universities. It was received as a scientific justification of existing social order ... as an area of study for stable young men (rather than as a breeding ground for wild-eyed radicals)².

Desai advocates “the Marxist paradigm [as] the most relevant framework that can help in comprehending properly the transformation that is taking place in the Indian society and its various sub-systems. ... [it] can help one to locate the central tendencies of transformation with its major implications”³. His analysis of Indian nationalism from a Marxist perspective is regarded as novel and insightful⁴. Ramkrishna Mukherjee (1955) applied the same perspective in analyzing the rise and fall of the East India Company, a classic episode in the history of capitalism and British colonialism in India. That these contributions came quite contrary to the state of sociology in the heyday of pioneers is remarkable, indeed.

Approaching the Indian society through the Marxian methodology has yielded rich insights⁵, but this methodology has not taken deep roots in Indian sociology, as one would have expected it to. Ramkrishna Mukherjee, who was an earlier proponent of this methodology, later shifted

1 - Yogesh Atal, *Indian Sociology from Where to Where: Footnotes to the History of the Discipline* (Jaipur: Rawat Publications, 2003), pp. 117-118.

2 - Martindale cited in: Akshay Ramanlal Desai, “Relevance of the Marxist Approach to the Study of Indian Society,” *Sociological Bulletin*, 30, (1) (1981), p. 19.

There are, however, scholars like Thomas Burton Bottomore (1920–92) in England and C. Wright Mills (1916–62) in USA who view sociology as “social criticism” and assign “sociological imagination” a radical function.

See Thomas Burton Bottomore, *Sociology as Social Criticism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1975); Charles Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959).

3 - Akshay Ramanlal Desai, “Relevance of the Marxist Approach to the Study of Indian Society,” pp. 10-11.

4 - See Akshay Ramanlal Desai, *Social Background of Indian Nationalism* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1949); Akshay Ramanlal Desai, *Recent Trends in Indian Nationalism* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1960).

5 - Yogendra Singh, *Indian Sociology: Social Conditioning and Emerging Concerns*, pp. 51-62.

to survey analysis and quantitative approach to social reality, at the cost of consistent contribution to Marxian sociology. Towards the end of his career, he became a staunch advocate of “unitary social science” and a strident critic of qualitative anthropological research¹.

Inspired by the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), Ranajit Guha, an Indian, set in motion in the University of Sussex in 1979–80 what has come to be known as “Subaltern Studies”. These are postcolonial studies and they approach history from below, focusing more on what happens among the masses than among the elite. Although some Indian scholars have contributed to this genre of studies, it has not taken roots in Indian academia. Internationally, too, its influence is on the wane.

Of course, there have been quite a few active proponents of indigenization of sociology in India; Yogesh Atal (2003), Partha N. Mukherji (2005), and Yogendra Singh (1984) being prominent among them. To Singh, the main issue in this regard is that of “integrating the conceptual and methodological structure with the Indian worldview ... and existential conditions” and of “operational adaptation of tools and techniques of social research, which cannot be simply borrowed from other cultures”². His well-known book, *Modernization of Indian Tradition: A Systemic Study of Social Change* (1973a) contains many insights into the indigenization of Indian sociology. But in Ramkrishna Mukherjee’s assessment, this and such efforts of Indian sociologists to “Indianize” were doomed to be failures as they commit some major fallacies regarding the “why” question of social reality³.

As discussed earlier, Oommen⁴ sees in the call for indigenization of sociology the danger of academic nationalism or even academic communalism; he, therefore, recommends contextualization of sociology wherever it is practiced. Partha Mukherji, thinks that we need to go beyond contextualization. He, in principle, does not see a contradiction between “indigeneity” and “universality”, and argues that “when concepts and theories originating elsewhere pass the indigeneity–generalizability test, that is, if the general explained the particular, efficiently”, the “indigenization of concepts and theories developed elsewhere” will have “a universal import”⁵. He also advocates “disciplined eclecticism” in social research⁶.

1 - See Ramkrishna Mukherjee, *Why Unitary Social Science?* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

2 - Yogendra Singh, *Image of Man: Ideology and Theory in Indian Sociology*, p. 19.

3 - Ramkrishna Mukherjee, *Sociology of Indian Sociology*, p. 97.

4 - T. K. Oommen, “Sociology in India: A Plea for Contextualization”, p. 123.

5 - Partha N. Mukherji, “Sociology in South Asia: Indigenisation as Universalising Social Science”, pp. 319-320.

6 - T. K. Oommen and Partha N. Mukherji, (eds.), *Indian Sociology: Reflections and Introspections*.

V- Conclusion: Whither Indigenization?

Sociology, from its inception, has been a self-reflecting discipline. In most of the developing world, many of these have been former colonies of European countries; there was no indigenous tradition of sociology, though they may have their own traditions of social philosophy. As such, wherever it has been transplanted from Europe or America, its practitioners have, eventually, reflected on the ontological and epistemological fit, or lack of it, between what is transplanted and the social reality of the host country¹. This has invariably led to a discussion on indigenizing sociology in those countries; some sociologists in these countries have even practiced what they thought was a sociology relevant for understanding their social realities.

With reference to India, the efforts at indigenizing sociology have not been entirely successful. “The lead given by the pioneers [has been] overtaken by the paradigmatic power of social science crafted in the West”². Hence, sociology in India largely remains a mirror image (distorted though, as all mirror images are) of its primary counterparts in Europe and America, it is a mimic social science even in its hundredth year of formal existence. The habits of what the Malaysian sociologist Syed Hussein Alatas (1974) calls the “captive mind”³ appear to die-hard.

What then are the prospects of indigenization of sociology in India, and what are the problems in its way? First, the problems. With the initial efforts of the pioneers not resulting in a sustained indigenized sociology, over the last fifty years or so, sociology has been on a drift. The theoretical concerns and methodological orientations of western sociology are, if only a bit late, incorporated into the sociological agenda, both teaching and research, in the country. The revolution in information and communication technology has made surfing for ideas on the internet an easier option than serious cogitation and discussion, and one finds more of western sociology than Indian sociology on the internet. The Indian academic administration also lays premium on intellectual endorsement by western universities, journals, and scholars there. This engenders an inferiority complex among Indian sociologists about their own scholars and journals.

1 - Yogesh Atal provides details of earlier meetings where the need for indigenization was discussed, not only in sociology, but also in other social sciences. See Yogesh Atal, *Indian Sociology from Where to Where: Footnotes to the History of the Discipline*, pp. 10-96, 19-117.

With reference to sociology in South Asia, this was discussed at the South Asia Workshop on “The State of Sociology: Issues of Relevance and Rigour” at Surajkund, Haryana, India on 23-25 February 2005. The proceedings of this Workshop are published in a special issue of *Sociological Bulletin* (Journal of the Indian Sociological Society).

See N. Jayaram, Ravinder Kaur, and Partha N. Mukherji, (eds.), “The State of Sociology: Issues of Relevance and Rigour” (Special Issue on South Asia), *Sociological Bulletin*, 54, (3) (2005).

2 - Partha N. Mukherji, “Sociology in South Asia: Indigenisation as Universalising Social Science”, p. 316.

3 - The “captive mind”, according to Alatas, is “the product of higher institutions of learning, either at home or abroad, whose way of thinking is dominated by Western thought in an imitative and un-critical manner”; it is “uncreative and incapable of raising original problems”; “incapable of devising analytical method independent of current stereotypes”; it is “alienated from the major issues of society” and “from its own national tradition, if it exists, in the field of its intellectual pursuit”; it is “unconscious of its own captivity and the conditioning factors making it what it is”; and it is “a result of the Western dominance over the rest of the world”. See Syed Hussein Alatas, “The Captive Mind and Creative Development,” *International Social Science Journal*, 26, (4) (1974), p. 69. Accessed on 24 October 2019 at: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000011363>.

Moreover, the great diversity of India would make it extremely difficult to define the Indianness of sociology in India. Independent India inherited many institutions – parliamentary democracy, legal system and penal code, education system, etc. – as colonial legacy. In the absence of any revolutionary agenda following independence, these institutions have been undergoing evolutionary adaptive changes since then. Sociology, too, will have to undergo gradual adaptive indigenization. This would entail many questions. How to ensure indigenization does not result in Parochialism or dominance of the majoritarian view, marginalizing the different minority views? How to ensure that the academic agenda of indigenization is different from its political counterpart? From whose point of view is the relevance of sociology to be established or judged? There are no easy and categorical answers to these questions.

Krishna Kumar¹ has identified three aspects of indigenization: structural, substantive and theoretic. “Structural indigenization” refers to the country’s institutional and organizational capabilities for the production and diffusion of sociological knowledge. “Substantive indigenization” refers to the content of sociology being focused on the country’s people, society, and institutions. In addition, “theoretic indigenization” refers to the development of distinctive conceptual frameworks and metatheories which reflect the country’s worldviews, social and cultural experience, and perceived goals. Of these, sociology in India seems to be well placed with reference to the first two, but has a long way to go as regards the third one.

Obviously, sociology in India cannot shut its door to advancements in western sociology. It is neither possible nor desirable. What we need to develop, as Oommen points out, is “a critical capacity to discern what is good and relevant for us”². In fact, “to produce knowledge that is rooted in the indigenous”, Partha Mukherji observes, “it is important that we engage seriously with knowledge emanating from the West and elsewhere in a comparative frame”³. Saberwal puts this pithily:

“The sociologist in India has to approach that Western tradition seriously – not with apprehension, for it is more than merely a source of our historic difficulties, but as a foil, a particular historical experience, which we may hold to ourselves as a mirror much as Max Weber, Louis Dumont, and others have tried to recognize the West for themselves in the Indian mirror.”⁴

1 - Cited in: Yogesh Atal, *Indian Sociology from Where to Where: Footnotes to the History of the Discipline*, pp. 104-105.

2 - T. K. Oommen, “Sociology in India: A Plea for Contextualization”, p. 119.

3 - Partha N. Mukherji, “Sociology in South Asia: Indigenisation as Universalising Social Science”, p. 320.

4 - Satish Saberwal, “Uncertain Transplants: Anthropology and Sociology in India”, p. 228.

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