

## South Asia Workshop

Surajkund, Haryana, India

23-25 February 2005

### *The State of Sociology: Issues of Relevance and Rigour*

The first of its kind, the South Asia Workshop held at Surajkund (Haryana, India) on 23-25 February 2005 provided an opportunity to South Asian sociologists and social anthropologists to meet and exchange information, views and perspectives about the science and craft of sociology in their respective countries. Considering the vicissitudes of sociology, and more generally of higher education, in South Asia during the last three decades or so, the Workshop specially focussed on the issues of relevance and rigour vis-à-vis sociology as it is practiced in different countries in the region.

The need for a common regional platform for the practitioners of sociology and social anthropology in South Asian countries to meet face-to face to share their experiences and express their views and concerns has for long been felt. Thanks to the initiative of the International Sociological Association (ISA), the Indian Sociological Society (New Delhi), in collaboration with the Department of Sociology, University of Colombo (Sri Lanka) and the Department of Sociology, University of Pune (India), took the first step to provide such a platform by organising this Workshop. The idea of this Workshop could have hardly become a reality but for the generous sponsorship of the International Sociological Association, the Indian Council of Social Science Research, and the Ford Foundation; the Organising Committee is beholden to them. A number of other organisations and individuals extended their support for the successful conduct of the Workshop; the Organising Committee conveys its grateful thanks to them.

In all, (38) participated in the Workshop. They came from different countries: Bangladesh (5), Bhutan (1), Pakistan (2) and Sri Lanka (6), though India, as the host country, had the largest contingent (22). In view of the political developments in Nepal, no representative from that country could make it to the Workshop. The Workshop was further enriched by the presence of Professor Staffan Lindberg of the Lund University, representing the Swedish South Asian Studies Network (SASNET) and Dr Tina Uys of the University of Johannesburg, representing South Africa, the country to host the 2006 World Congress of Sociology in Durban. Each participant had a specific role—as a paper presenter, discussant, chairperson of a session, and/or a special panellist—and this contributed to active involvement of the participants in the proceedings of the Workshop and resulted in high quality discussion.

The objective of the Workshop was modest, but of immense import: to debate on the theoretical-methodological and substantive issues that confront sociology in South Asian countries, not via the West, but through direct scholar-to-scholar interactions. It was expected that the Workshop would give the practitioners of sociology an opportunity to explore how we, as sociologists, have been dealing with what kinds of issues, with what effect; what factors come in the way of our professional excellence and how we can circumvent them through regional cooperation. A long journey, as the saying goes, begins with a first step. Going by the proceedings of the Workshop,

which often took on a missionary zeal, the participants as well as the organisers could justifiably feel that the outcome has been the welcome first step in the direction of regional academic cooperation.

The proceedings began with an Introduction to the Workshop Programme by Ravinder Kaur (India), Convener of the Workshop. Siri Hettige (Sri Lanka), on behalf of the Organising Committee, welcomed the delegates. Sujata Patel (India) (Vice-President, National Associations, International Sociological Association) presented a brief background to the Workshop. The Workshop concluded with a vote of thanks by Jacob John Kattakayam, Secretary of the Indian Sociological Society.

In his Welcome Address, Partha Nath Mukherji, Chairperson of the Organising Committee and President of the Indian Sociological Society, described the meeting as 'a momentous meeting of minds of the sociologists of South Asia' and outlined the scope and objectives of the Workshop. Calling for a free and frank discussion and debate that follows the norms of scientific temper, he drew attention to the urgent need 'to gain from each other and advance the cause of an indigenously routed search for the universals of sociology and social science, so that through social science we are able to serve our people to move in the direction of a just and fair society'. The appositeness of this call for discussion and debate must be understood in the light of the paradoxical fact that, by and large, we have been hitherto trying to grapple with South Asian regional social realities with methods, concepts and theories mainly developed in the West. If this discussion and debate focuses on the question of *relevance* of what goes by the name of sociology in the region, the way we practise it raises the question of *rigour*.

The Workshop was divided into five thematic sessions and a concluding panel discussion. In the first session (*Theoretical models in sociological research in South Asia: Scope for indigenous interventions*), which was chaired by T.N. Madan (India), three papers were presented: Sasanka Perera (Sri Lanka) provided a personal narrative on the (non) existence of critical sociological knowledge production in Sri Lanka; Rowena Robinson (India) reflected on the sociology of Christianity and conversion in India; and Satish Deshpande (India) examined the old predicaments and new anxieties in the practice of sociology in a globalised South Asia. Rajni Palriwala (India) and Anupam Sen (Bangladesh) initiated the discussion.

The second session (*Substantive problem areas of sociological research in South Asia: Neglected/priority areas of research*), chaired by Nazrul Islam (Bangladesh), had four papers: Karma Ura and Dorji Penjore (Bhutan) explained their research on 'gross national happiness'; examining the crisis in Indian sociology, Hetukar Jha (India) made out a case for according priority to 'regional' studies; Gulzar Shah (Pakistan) provided an overview of the challenges and opportunities for sociology in Pakistan; and, taking the case of North East India, C. Nunthara (India) brought to focus the idea of 'frontier areas'. Mahbub Ahmed (Bangladesh) and N. Shanmugalingam (Sri Lanka) initiated the discussion.

From theoretical models and substantive areas, the focused shifted to questions of methodology in the third session (*Methodologies in sociological research in South Asia: Scope for innovative research*). This session, chaired by Partha Nath Mukherji (India) had three papers: Focussing on voice, event and narrative, Roma Chatterjee

(India) outlined the methodological strategy she has employed in studying everyday life in a Mumbai slum; Pradeep Jeganathan (Sri Lanka) presented some notes on categories and methods in some recent social science research in Sri Lanka; and Vinod Jairath (India) compared three different discourses and representations of inter-community relations in India. N. Jayaram (India) and J.P.S. Uberoi (India) led the discussion.

Sociology is more than a sum of theory, method and substance; it has ideological orientations. Thus premised, the fourth session (*'Ideological orientations in sociological research: Values and objectivity revisited'*), chaired by Chaudhary Inayatullah (Pakistan), carried three papers: Darini Rajasingham-Senanayake (Sri Lanka) reflected on globalisation and the remaking of the sociological imagination; dealing with environmental and disaster perspectives in sociology, Mahbuba Nasreen (Bangladesh) made a case for 'paradigm shifts'; and Vivek Kumar (India) critiqued Indian sociology from the vantage point of dalits. Paramjit Singh Judge (India) and S.M. Dahiwalé (India) led the ensuing discussion.

The four papers in the last of the thematic sessions (*'Institutional contexts and state policy towards research and teaching'*), chaired by Rangalal Sen (Bangladesh), dealt with the impact of institutional contexts on the practice of sociology: Nadeem Omer Tarar's (Pakistan) paper on the state of anthropology in Pakistan during 1975-2002 was presented in absentia by Chaudhary Inayatullah and Gulzar Shah (Pakistan); Nasreen Fazalbhoy (India) discussed the directions, trends and prospects of the sociology of Muslims in India; Jani de Silva (Sri Lanka) analysed the impact of collective violence on sociological and anthropological research in post-colonial Sri Lanka; and Ravinder Kaur (India) examined the predicament of the humanities and social sciences in institutes of technology in India. Satish Saberwal (India) and Arun Bali (India) initiated the discussion.

The deliberations at the Workshop threw open a number of general issues and concerns. Admittedly, these issues are not new; their persistence, however, calls for not only wider deliberation, but also concerted action:

1. The need for indigenisation of sociology for making the discipline contextualised and relevant: Does indigenisation mean parochialism? How do we look for the universal in the particular? Is a researcher's searching for the indigenous contingent on the circumstances he or she is placed in? How do we distinguish the academic agenda of indigenisation from its political counterpart? How do we resist the temptation to adopt ideologically charged conceptual tools, ignoring critical judgement?
2. The value connotation of the question of relevance: From whose point of view is relevance to be established or gauged? Are not what we choose to research, and how we formulate research questions and how we seek to answer them value-determined? How do we address the inevitable merging of the researcher and the researched in social research? Does indigenisation exhaust the question of relevance?
3. The misplaced opposition between quantitative and qualitative methodologies, and the tendency towards methodological fundamentalism of respective practitioners or the uncritical attempts at blending the two. Those entering social sciences are

generally weak in mathematics, and their training in quantitative techniques is obviously ineffective. The adoption of qualitative methodology is, thus, by default, without a serious consideration of the ontology or epistemology underpinning it. It is expectedly of a spurious quality. How do we address these issues in our teaching and training programmes in research methodology?

4. Be it quantitative or qualitative, rigour is missing in much of sociological research: Have we become extremely tolerant of the declining rigour and allowed methodology to be ritualised? How do we bring rigour back into methodology in both teaching and practice of sociological research?

5. The importance of interdisciplinary approach: How imperative is it to transcend disciplinary boundaries for better understanding of the issues? How important is the historical perspective—'a sense of the long-term'—to understand social phenomenon?

6. The problems and prospects of teaching of sociology in the vernacular/local/non-English languages and the place of English in the system of education: What are the problems of teaching sociology in the vernacular? How do we address these problems? How important is it to translate sociological writings in South Asian languages into English? What is the place of English in sociological training in South Asian countries?

7. The inadequacy of facilities for research in social sciences, especially as compared with the West: How can we augment the facilities for sociological research, and the share the limited facilities that we have? Can we think of a regional resource centre for sociological research? How do we go about lobbying for such a resource centre? How do we address the problem of lack of publishing avenues in some South Asian countries? How can we broaden the channels of publication and dissemination currently available?

The Workshop was also host to a few related activities: Dr K.R. Narayanan, former President of India, released the fifth volume of 'Themes in India Sociology' series and addressed the participants; Staffan Lindberg (Director, SASNET) introduced the scope and activities of Swedish South Asian Studies Network extending his cooperation in building a South Asia network of Sociologists and social scientists, and Tina Uys (Treasurer, Local Organising Committee and South African Sociological Association's Representative for the National Associations Council, South Africa) presented a paper on the 'History of South African Sociology' and talked about the 2006 World Congress of Sociology in Durban.

The Workshop concluded with a panel discussion on *sociological perspectives* chaired by T.K. Oommen (India). The panellists included Chaudhary Inayatullah (Pakistan), Nazrul Islam (Bangladesh), Siri Hettige (Sri Lanka) and Sujata Patel (India). The discussion wove together the key issues that emerged in the five substantive sessions and sought to arrive at a consensus on the future course of action.

Considering the constraint of resources and the need for a more focussed deliberation, the Workshop could not be larger than it was. However, the deliberations at the Workshop need to be disseminated among the practitioners of sociology in South Asian countries, and that too, without loss of time, as we can ill afford to lose the zeal

and consensus ensuing from the Workshop. Accordingly, it was decided to bring out the revised versions of the papers presented at the Workshop initially in a special issue of *Sociological Bulletin*, the official journal of the Indian Sociological Society. This special issue of the *Bulletin*—Volume 54, Number 3, September-December 2005—will be guest-edited by Partha Nath Mukherji, Ravinder Kaur and N. Jayaram. Arrangements are in place to release this issue as soon as it is ready. So as to reach a wider audience beyond South Asia, explorations will be made for a republication of this issue as an independent volume.

With this Workshop, South Asian sociologists have begun a meaningful dialogue. To carry forward this dialogue, to facilitate the networking of sociologists in the region, and eventually to form a South Asia Association of Sociologists, a Steering Committee was set up. Nazrul Islam (Bangladesh) was entrusted with the responsibility of convening this Committee, which will have Chaudhary Inayatullah (Pakistan), Karma Ura/Dorji Penjore (Bhutan), Ravinder Kaur (India), and Siri Hettige (Sri Lanka) as its members; a member from Nepal will be co-opted. If the resolve of the participants at the Workshop was any indication, the formation of this association as a forum for regional cooperation in sociology will take place sooner than expected. The Workshop could not have hoped for anything more!

The Indian Sociological Society and its collaborators - the Departments of Sociology, University of Colombo (Sri Lanka) and Pune (India) - extend their most grateful thanks to the International Sociological Association; the Ford Foundation (New Delhi) and the Institute of International Education (USA); and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (New Delhi) for their generous support, without which this landmark workshop by sociologists would not have been possible. We look forward to their continued support for establishing a durable network of South Asian sociologists and social scientists.

Subject: South Report  
From: "Michael Burawoy" <[burawoy@socrates.Berkeley.EDU](mailto:burawoy@socrates.Berkeley.EDU)>  
Date: Sun, October 3, 2004 1:17 am  
To: International Public Sociology;;  
Cc: "Sally T. Hillsman" <[Hillsman@asanet.org](mailto:Hillsman@asanet.org)>

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Dear All, I'm attaching the report of the South African delegation to San Francisco. It will be published in their journal Society in Transition. If others should write up their papers or present reports on public sociology I encourage them to circulate them to the entire group. Best wishes, Michael.

Sujata Patel  
Professor  
Department of Sociology  
University of Pune  
Pune 411 007 India  
Tele No.s 91-20-2569 0389 and 91-20-2560 1294 (O) 91-20-2560 1295 (Fax)  
91-20-2569 3625 (H)

## South Asia Workshop

### The State of Sociology: Issues of Relevance and Rigour

February 23-25, 2005, Surajkund

#### *Final Programme*

#### **Feb. 22, 2005, Tuesday**

7:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.      Registration followed by Dinner

#### **Feb. 23, 2005, Wednesday**

8:30 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.      Registration

9:20 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.      Introducing the Workshop Programme: **Ravinder Kaur, Convener SAW 2005, India**

9:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.      Welcome on behalf of the Organising Committee: **Siri Hettige, Sri Lanka**

9:45 a.m. – 10:15 a.m.      Welcome address: **Partha Nath Mukherji, Chairperson Organising Committee, and President, Indian Sociological Society.**

10:15 a.m. – 10:30 a.m.      Tea

## Session 1

10:30 a.m. – 12:45 p.m.

### ***Theoretical Models in Sociological Research in South Asia: Scope for Indigenous Intervention***

**Chairperson:** T.N. Madan (India)

#### **Paper Presenters and Paper Titles**

1. Sasanka Perera (Sri Lanka): *Dealing with Dinosaurs and Reclaiming Sociology: A Personal Narrative on the (non) Existence of Critical Sociological Knowledge Production in Sri Lanka.*
2. Rowena Robinson (India): *Sociology of Christianity and Conversion in India: Some Reflections.*

**Discussant:** Rajni Palriwala (India)

#### **Paper Presenters and Paper Titles**

3. Chaitanya Mishra (Nepal): *The 'Maoist Conflict' in Nepal: Lessons for Social Research.*
4. Satish Deshpande (India): *New Anxieties and Old Predicaments: Sociology in a Globalized South Asia.*

**Discussant:** Anupam Sen (Bangladesh)

12:45 p.m. – 1:40 p.m.

**Lunch**



## Session 2

1:45 p.m. - 4:00 p.m.

### ***Substantive Problem Areas of Sociological Research in South Asia: Neglected/Priority Areas of Research***

**Chairperson:** Nazrul Islam (Bangladesh)

#### **Paper Presenters and Paper Titles**

1. Karma Ura and Dorji Penjore (Bhutan): *Gross National Happiness: Establishing Happiness as a Dominant Value, Compared to GDP*
2. Hetukar Jha (India): *Indian Sociology in Crisis: The Need for According Priority to "Regional" Studies.*

**Discussant:** Mahbub Ahmed (Bangladesh)

#### **Paper Presenters and Paper Titles**

3. Gulzar Shah (Pakistan): *An Overview of Sociology as a Discipline in Pakistan: Challenges and Opportunities.*
4. C. Nunthara (India): *Peace and Conflict situation in India's 'Frontier' areas of North East India.*

**Discussant:** N. Shanmugalingam (Sri Lanka)

4:30 p.m.

**Release of 5<sup>th</sup> Volume of Themes in Indian  
Sociology Series**

*"Tribal Communities and Social Change"* edited by  
Pariyaram.M. Chacko, Series editor B.S. Baviskar,  
Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2005.

Address by **Chief Guest, Dr. K.R. Narayanan**,  
*Former President of India*

5:30 p.m.

Tea

7:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.

Introduction to Swedish South Asian Studies Network,  
(SASNET) by **Staffan Lindberg**

*Note: The duration of each session on the first day (February 23, 2005) is for 2.15 hours with each sub-session for 1:07 hours.*

**Feb. 24, 2005, Thursday**

**9:00 a.m. – 9:15 a.m.**

Brief background to the Workshop: **Sujata Patel** (Vice-President, National Associations, International Sociological Association)

**Session 3**

**9:15 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.**

***Methodologies in Sociological Research in South Asia: Scope for Innovative Research***

**Chairperson:** P.N. Mukherji (India)

**Paper Presenters and Paper Titles**

1. Haris Gazdar (Pakistan): *Pandora's Laundry Basket: Unpacking "the Community" in Pakistan*
2. Roma Chatterjee (India): *Voice, Event, Narrative: Towards a Sociology of Everyday Life.*

**Discussant:** N. Jayaram (India)

**10:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.**

**Tea**

**Paper Presenters and Paper Titles**

3. Pradeep Jeganathan (Sri Lanka): *Looping the Loop: Notes on categories and method in some recent Sri Lankan Social Science Research.*
4. Vinod Jairath (India): *Communities, Paradigms and Methods.*

**Discussant:** J.P.S. Uberoi (India)

**12:15 p.m. – 1:15 p.m.**

**Lunch**

## Session 4

1:15 p.m. – 4:15 p.m.

### ***Ideological Orientations in Sociological Research: Values and Objectivity Revisited***

**Chairperson:** Chaudhary Inayatullah (Pakistan)

#### **Paper Presenters and Paper Titles**

1. Darini Rajasingham (Sri Lanka): *Globalization and the Remaking of the Sociological Imagination: Neoliberalism, Conflict and Development.*
2. Krishna Bhattachan (Nepal):

**Discussant:** Paramjit Judge (India)

2:30 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.                      Tea

#### **Paper Presenters and Paper Titles**

3. Mahbuba Nasreen (Bangladesh): *Need for Paradigm Shifts: Environmental and Disaster Perspectives in Sociological Study.*
4. Vivek Kumar (India): *Critiquing the Indian Sociology through Dalit Literature.*

**Discussant:** S.M. Dahiwale (India)

5:00 p.m. –                                      **Recreation Trip (Chandni Chowk, Jama Masjid)**

**Dinner at Karims Restaraunt**

*Note: The duration of each session on the second day (February 24, 2005) is 2.30 hours, with each sub-session for 1:15 hours.*

**Feb. 25, 2005, Friday**

**9:00 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.**

**Chairperson:** Uttam Bhoite (India)

**Talk on Durban Congress by Marthina Uys** (Treasurer, Local Organising Committee and SASA representative for the National Associations Council, South Africa)

"History of South African Sociology and the significance of the Durban Congress"

**Session 5**

**9:30 a.m. – 12:30 p.m.**

***Institutional Contexts and State Policy Towards Research and Teaching***

**Chairperson:** Rangalal Sen (Bangladesh)

**Paper Presenters and Paper Titles**

1. Nadeem Omer Tarar (Pakistan): *Anthropology in Pakistan: The State of Discipline (1975-2002)*.
2. Nasreen Fazalbhoi (India): *Sociology of Muslims: Directions, Trends, Prospects*.

**Discussant:** Satish Saberwal (India)

**10:45 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.**

**Tea**

### **Paper Presenters and Paper Titles**

3. Jani de Silva (Sri Lanka): *Collective violence and its impact on sociological & anthropological research in post- colonial Sri Lanka.*
4. Ravinder Kaur (India): *Locating or 'Disciplining' the Humanities and the Social Sciences in Institutes of Technology.*

**Discussant:** Arun Bali (India)

**12:30 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.                      Lunch**

### **Session 6**

**1:30 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.**

**Panel Discussion on “Peace, Conflict and Development: Sociological Perspectives”**

**Chairperson:** T.K. Oommen (India)

**Panelists:** Siri Hettige (Sri Lanka), San̄a Bahadur Gurung (Nepal), Sujata Patel (India), Chaudhry Inayatullah (Pakistan), Nazrul Islam (Bangladesh)

**4:00 p.m.**

**Vote of Thanks:** **J.J. Kattakayam** (*Secretary, Indian Sociological Society*)

**Tea**

*Note: The duration for Session 5 on the last day (February 25, 2005) is for 2.30 hours, with the duration of each sub-session being 1:15 hours. Session 6 on the same day is 2.30 hours long.*