



Beyond Binaries

A Case for Self-Reflexive Sociologies

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abstract: This article examines the evolution of sociological traditions within India in the context of colonization and assesses their continuation in its contemporary practices. It evaluates two new perspectives, indigenization and postcolonial studies, that have emerged to reorganize these traditions. The author argues that the divisions of knowledge and power represented within the disciplines of sociology and anthropology structure the ways in which distinct traditions of sociology have evolved and continue to play a major role in defining theories, perspectives and methods of doing sociologies in the world. How can these perspectives take the challenge of globalization that is reorganizing the distribution of world power, its knowledge and that of its institutions in new and seminal ways? The globalization of knowledge can have two possible effects. It can reconstruct earlier binaries in new ways, refashioning them to maintain the structure connecting knowledge with power. Alternatively, global processes can distil and uncouple these binaries, thereby allowing for the play of plural perspectives, so that all traditions of doing sociology are placed at equal levels and given equal significance. We have to decide the path that we travel.

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Stefan Molund: You are a professor of sociology, but in Scandinavia most people would probably think of you as a social anthropologist. There seems to be some confusion here. What is the relationship between sociology and anthropology in India?

Andre Beteille: I think it is true that I am regarded mainly as an anthropologist, not just in Scandinavia but also elsewhere in the west. That is partly because of the fact that in the western world the study of society and culture in general is partitioned in the following way: the study of other cultures is anthropology and the study of ourselves is sociology. Anyone who studies India, Africa or Melanesia is an anthropologist, whereas to be a sociologist one has to be a specialist in western industrial societies. (Beteille, 2002: 236)

Andre Beteille's remarks quoted above highlight the disciplinary and hence power divisions that surround the construction of academic knowledge about contemporary societies. These disciplinary divisions are related to other academic practices, those associated with theories and methods together with notions of science. These in turn become norms that create these divisions as a profession. Sociology has asserted a universalistic position regarding its knowledge, and thus of modernity, while anthropology was considered a cultural and particularistic social science studying premodern societies. Over time, these have become gatekeepers creating further power divisions between groups of academics. No wonder the Gulbenkian Commission report titled *Open the Social Sciences* argues that these practices are related to the division of the world into the North and South power blocs and are organically related to the distribution of world power.

It is hardly surprising that the social sciences constructed in Europe and North America in the nineteenth century were Eurocentric. The European world of the time felt itself culturally triumphant, and in many ways it was. Europe had conquered the world, both politically and economically. Its technological achievements were an essential element in this conquest, and it seemed logical to ascribe the superior technology to a superior science, a superior worldview. It seemed plausible to identify the European achievement with the thrust toward universal progress. (Wallerstein, 1996: 51–2)

The recognition of these divisions has led many to contend that there should be sociology of and for the South. This contention draws our attention to the binaries, in this case, the South against the North and to that body of literature, postcolonial studies, that has argued that these binaries are part of a matrix of other binaries, such as, the other against the I, the East against the West, the Orient vs the Occident, the colonized against the imperialist, the traditional against the modern, the particular against the universal and are part of an episteme that represents the project of modernity. This episteme structures the construction of academic knowledge regarding societies in the West and the East and the division of this knowledge into two disciplines, that of sociology and anthropology. It also informs perspectives and practices of these disciplines together with the placement of individuals in distinct academic traditions with its own sets of research questions, methods and methodologies.

If social science is an exercise in search of universal knowledge, then the 'other' cannot logically exist, for the 'other' is part of 'us' – the us that is studied and the us that is engaged in studying. Universalism and particularism, as other binaries, are not and should not be necessarily opposed, nor should they be categorized as binaries, as metatheorists have been wont to do. Rather, all universalisms are generalizations that are made of

particular empirical processes, in history of region(s) and/or group(s). Given sociology's basis as an empirical social science, it is imperative that it acknowledges the role played by the distribution of power in the world and its implications on knowledge construction and not merely assert its foundations through ontological explorations (Alatas, 2004).

This article examines as a case, the evolution of sociological traditions within India in the context of colonization and assesses their continuation in its contemporary practices. It then evaluates two new perspectives, indigenization and postcolonial studies, that have emerged to reorganize these traditions. I address these divisions of knowledge and thus of power as they are represented in the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, and argue that not only do these structure the ways in which distinct traditions of sociology have evolved but also continue to play a major role in defining theories, perspectives and methods of doing sociologies in the world.

I conclude by asking how these perspectives can take the challenge of globalization. Globalization is reorganizing the distribution of world power, its knowledge and that of its institutions in new and seminal ways. Such globalization of knowledge can have two possible effects. It can reconstruct earlier binaries in new ways and thereby refashion them to continue the structure that connected knowledge with power. Or alternatively, the global processes can make for distilling and uncoupling these binaries thereby allowing for the play of plural perspectives, so that all traditions of doing sociology are placed at equal levels and given equal significance. We have to decide the path that we travel.

The I and the Other: Sociology and Anthropology in the Imperialist-Colonial World

If in the late 19th century, sociology found its distinct identity in Europe, the same was true in India, as in many other parts of the colonized world. However, in the case of India, sociology found its representation as anthropology. British officials and later trained anthropologists initiated the study of India as the premodern civilizational society. Their initial tasks were to categorize and classify the groups and communities so that rule can be facilitated. Simultaneously, there was an effort to document social behaviour, customs and mores of some individual communities and also to make region-wise analysis of these communities thereby creating spatial-cultural zones (Cohn, 1987b).

Two assumptions came to be implicated immediately – the first relating to the distinction and disjunction of those groups living in India from the spatial-cultural structures of the West and simultaneously creating within India spatial-cultural zones. The second was the assertion of the

boundedness of these groups (now called castes and tribes constructed in an internally structured hierarchy) by a cultural attribute of 'spirituality' emanating from Hindu civilization. A territory was given a religious attribute: India and Hinduism now collapsed into each other.

British civil servants and anthropologists and later Indian anthropologists placed the debate of identifying and designating these as 'caste' or 'tribes' within the discussion of 'stocks' or 'races' in relation to other 'stocks' and 'races' in the western world. In order to formulate these categories, they took the help of evolutionary theory, but also Victorian social thought associated with 'race science'. In this they were aided through a theory of the 'Aryan' (white or fair-skinned) invasion of India, which grew out of the discovery of the Indo-European language family in the late 19th century. Hence linguistic classification merged with racial classification to produce a theory of the Indian civilization formed by the invasion of fair-skinned, civilized, Sanskrit-speaking Aryans, who conquered and partially absorbed the dark-skinned savage aborigines (Robb, 1995).

This theory was critical in producing the basic division of groups in India into Aryan and non-Aryan races, now termed 'castes' and 'tribes'. What is of interest is the fact that while 'castes' were defined in the context of Hinduism, as groups who cultivated land, had better technology and a high civilizational attribute, 'tribes' were defined in contrast to castes, who practised primitive technology, lived in interior jungles and were animistic in religious practices. Such classifications and categorization were not peculiar to India. They also found manifestation in the African continent, as British officials used this knowledge to construct categories of social groups in Africa and retransferred these newly constructed classifications back again to India, as happened in the case of the term 'tribe' as a lineage group based on a segmentary state.¹

In the process, 'caste' (and 'tribe') was made out to be a far more pervasive, totalizing and uniform concept than ever before and defined in terms of a religious order, which it was not always so. In fact, ancient and medieval historiographers now inform us that those whom we identify as castes and tribes were groups that were shaped by political struggles and processes over material resources. In precolonial India, multiple markers of identity defined relationship between groups and were contingent on complex processes, which were constantly changing and were related to political power. Thus we had temple communities, territorial groups, lineage segments, family units, royal retinues, warrior subcastes, 'little as opposed to large kingdoms', occupational reference groups, agricultural and trading associations, networks of devotional and sectarian religious communities, and priestly cables. Those who came under the name 'caste' as defined by the colonial powers were just one

category among many and one way of representing and organizing identity (Dirks, 2001).

These categories, that of caste and tribe, were further refined once the colonial authorities organized the revenue settlements to facilitate an agrarian taxation system. British officials searched for a new classification to understand and assess the material conditions that organized groups within the Indian subcontinent. On one hand, the rulers needed to create spatial units, for the maintenance of law and order as well as for the regular collection of taxes once these were assessed. Simultaneously, on the other, they needed to ensure proper collection and thus created new positions, which they did based on their knowledge of the way taxation worked in England (Bremar, 1997: 15).

Three units were created in India: villages, estates and properties with positions such as zamindars, patels, chaudhuris, talukdars chiefs, rajas, nawabs and princes; while in Africa, the spatial units were hamlets, lineages, clans and tribes and the positions were headman, elders and chiefs (Cohn, 1987a: 206). The village was given a boundedness, making it almost like an 'island society' (first theorized by Radcliffe-Brown) in which communities of castes lived in harmony. This perception came to be firmly embedded as it resonated in many ways in and since colonialism both in nationalist thought and in the sociological imagination. Thus when empirical social science developed in the 1950s and 1960s, sociologists made the village the locale for understanding the caste system (Bremar, 1997).

No wonder Dirks (2001: 13) has argued that the colonial conquest was sustained not only by superior arms and military organization, nor by political power and economic wealth, but also through cultural technology of rule. Colonial conquest and knowledge both enabled ways to rule and to construct what colonialism was all about – its own self-knowledge. The British played a major role in identifying and producing Indian 'tradition' that is the belief and customs, of those living in the region. Thus Cohn states that:

In the conceptual scheme which the British created to understand and to act in India, they constantly followed the same logic; they reduced vastly complex codes and associated meaning to a few metonyms. . . . [This process allowed them] to save themselves the effort of understanding or adequately explaining subtle or not-so-subtle meanings attached to the actions of their subjects. Once the British had defined something as an Indian custom, or traditional dress, or the proper form of salutation, any deviations from it was defined as a rebellion or an act to be punished. India was redefined by the British to be a place of rules and order; once the British had defined to their own satisfaction what they constructed as Indian rules and customs, then the Indians had to conform to these constructions. (Cohn, 1997: 162)

This form of categorization and classification, if it created 'norms' for rule, also benefited one indigenous group, the Brahmins, who were now given enhanced status, that of the 'indigenous intellectual'. Other political entities that had had authority, such as that of region, village or neighbourhood communities, kinship groups, factional parties, chiefly authority, political affiliations, all got superseded, deleted from knowledge frameworks and silenced.

As anthropology moved beyond classification, ethnographic studies that assessed racial stocks through physical anthropomorphic studies, were slowly replaced by the indological approach, that is, the study of India through scriptures. This position now dominated Indian sociology/anthropology. G. S. Ghurye, known as the 'father of Indian sociology', who headed the first Department of Sociology in India, at Bombay, exemplified this approach. Many of the assumptions outlined in the preceding paragraphs were incorporated in his work and later that of his students – the fact that the groups that reside in India are all Indians and are integrated in a cohesive Indian identity, defined by Hindu religion, that this religion has a civilizational canvass, whose attributes can be located in the ancient Indian past of the Vedas, the first scriptures, and that the Indian society is structured by the institutions of caste, kinship and family.

These attributes now justified a study of India as a preliterate and premodern society. Henceforth in India, as in other ex-colonized countries, sociology carved out an arena of knowledge for itself, by asserting its differences from modern, western societies and using an anthropological lens to assess these differences. The binary regarding the study of western societies as modern societies being the main focus of sociology as against that of non-western societies, or preliterate, premodern societies being the domain of social anthropology now came to be further legitimated.

From the preceding argument, it becomes clear that many of the categories do not approximate, either empirically or theoretically, the varied nature of social experience that inhabited the region, or represent the identities carried by groups that lived in India.² This categorization instead homogenized these experiences in new ways and standardized behaviour patterns through the construction of law, thus creating potentialities for conflicts and frictions in society. Additionally, these legitimated the authority of one group, the Brahmins, as knowledge constructors, thereby creating conditions for domination of and by this group in Indian society. No wonder issues of identity and violence remain integral to the subsequent history of the subcontinent.

It is in this context that one has to assess the alternate positions that emerged in India as in other ex-colonial regions. In the subsequent section,

I argue that the binaries put into practice during the colonial period were refashioned in the context of the tradition-modernity thesis. I evaluate these against the background of power distribution in the post-world war period, and the efforts to institutionalize the discipline of sociology through university education and the relative success (and failures) of the nationalist agendas for creating new knowledge structures.

The First and Third Worlds: Nationalist and Indigenous Sociologies

Post the Second World War, the discipline of sociology was institutionalized both in the USA and in Europe as a separate subject to be studied and learnt. However, it was the sociology taught in the USA that came to dominate the world of sociological knowledge. The study of sociology came to be coterminous with the Parsonian school, which elaborated generalized concepts, gave little respect for the study of social change and instead emphasized social integration and consensus. Many theorists have considered this school to represent a conservative ideology that wished to ensure a stable world order and represent aspirations of the American state that sought to establish its hegemony over the new world (Holton, 2001).

This new sociological language came to be diffused through universities and other academic institutions from the USA to the rest of the world. Theories, concepts and methods of this perspective came to be accepted as disciplinary practices, as textbooks and journals, conferences and seminars legitimized these and created around them a body of 'professional' values, in turn legitimized through the professional association. This body of knowledge was exported to the newly emerging nation-states, through the diffusion of university structures; syllabus and curriculum; textbooks and reference books, and transmitted through the induction of foreign students, who returned home to establish and legitimize these practices.

There were variations in the way this sociological knowledge was received and reorganized within new nation-states in ex-colonial countries. The institutionalization of sociology within nation-states related to structural issues germane to ex-colonial countries, such as their own strength as a state, the nature of the higher education system and its relevance in the project of nation building, and the role to be played by social sciences and particularly sociology/anthropology in this project. In many parts of the world, the state and the regime did not support the growth of sociology; instead, they gave a premier role to economics, especially in its policy orientation. In these situations, sociology/anthropology had a weak articulation. Where the nation-state did support the

growth of universities, sociological research and teaching, there were other issues and problems, such as lack of availability of human resources, access to intellectual infrastructure, comprehension of language, together with overwhelming organic dependence on the imperialist countries. However, in both cases, it became easy to import the American version of the new institutionalized sociology.³

It is in this context that the modernization theory came to find legitimacy as a way of doing sociology. In the process, this theory recreated the earlier binaries in new ways, albeit with the presumption that there was a common path of all peoples/nations/areas. However, in some cases, some nations/peoples/areas found themselves in different stages, and hence were not quite the same level. These nations/peoples/areas, it was suggested, needed to be studied in order to assess how these could 'become modern', and how these can change their 'backwardness', 'tradition' and 'cultures' and induct new values of modernity. In some cases, it was suggested that 'nations', 'peoples' and 'areas' needed to incorporate modern values through diffusion and/or establishment of modern institutions. And where there were such institutions, it was argued that these be made modern in order to inaugurate the process of 'modernization of tradition'. No wonder sociologists/anthropologists in the ex-colonial countries initiated research on the many dimensions of modernity (Deshpande, 1999).

Orientalist binaries were now reframed to incorporate the tradition-modern dichotomies and legitimize the colonial project of modernity that divided the peoples of the world into two groups, the traditional and the modern. As university structures were established and teaching of sociology popularized, Indian students were introduced to the study of their own society as traditional, as a society moving towards modernity. Courses argued that the traditional structures were embodied in the institutions of religion, caste, kinship and family and were changing as these encountered the processes of industrialization and urbanization (Patel, 2002).

Generations of students were taught the way modernity in India would mirror the processes as they occurred in the West. No wonder sociology/anthropology promoted specializations such as industrial and urban sociology or sociology of professions, despite the fact that agriculture remained the main and dominant activity and urban life was heavily dependent on First World metropolitan economic investment rather than on indigenous capital, and thus urbanization occurred without industrialization. Students learnt about industrial organizations, assembly line production and urban social problems through textbooks written by Wilbert Moore and Kingsley Davis, without assessing the very specific ways the processes were organized in these countries.⁴ No wonder there

was little to no reflection on the application of these positions. And where applications were attempted, sociologists tried to 'fit' the data into these positions.

Alatas (2004) has called this kind of work a consequence of the 'captive mind'. He argues that this is characterized by 'domination of western thought in an imitative and uncritical manner' (Alatas, 2004: 83). Not only is it uncreative and incapable of constructing independent analytical methods without stereotyping them, but it is also imitative, and cannot distinguish between the particular and the universal in sciences and has no internal criteria to apply universal characteristics to the particular social situation. Such lack of critical exactness and non-reflexivity make this knowledge fragmented, alienated and representative of the colonization of the mind.

The growth of nationalist thought in India and its critique of colonization has led to the development of alternative knowledge frames to comprehend Indian social reality (Sarkar, 1997). Generally termed indigenous perspectives or indigenization of knowledge, it incorporated two broad perspectives.⁵ The first is embodied in the thought of D. P. Mukerjee, who argued that sociology needs to be understood as a unified discipline that is culture-specific, i.e. it represents theories that capture particular experiences. These experiences relate to specific values, and the indigenization of social sciences should then be based on understanding these values (Joshi, 1986).

Mukerjee not only argued for the growth of new theories and perspectives that reflect particular experiences, he also called for the development of new methodological and epistemological precepts to assess these experiences. Mukerjee's approach was soon eclipsed by the growth of a new indigenous approach that was developed by M. N. Srinivas, who used social anthropological tools to fashion an indigenous theory of social change.⁶ Given Srinivas's bias towards social anthropology, the method of ethnography became the key tool to assess the traditional social structure of India. Orientalist bias towards scriptures as sources was now replaced by 'field view'. A new indigenous sociology/anthropology emerged in the context of the growth of nation-state.

Srinivas's theory of indigeneity is related to two features. First, he understood social change as incremental and the history of India as a history of coping with exogenous changes. Unlike other Indian sociologists/anthropologists who represented the 'captive mind' syndrome and who perceived modernity as the major fault line defining contemporary Indian society, Srinivas argued for an indigenous theory of change based on the caste system, which he considered a system that was always open to social change via the means of social mobility. While examining mobility in modern India, he highlighted the continuous adaptive character of the

caste system and its ability to adjust to new processes. In this fashion, Srinivas introduced a civilizational perspective to doing sociology.

Second, his theory of indigeneity is related to a methodological position that privileges the role played by 'insider' over the 'outsider'. Srinivas emphasizes cultural values that an 'insider' is privy to, which makes her or him a privileged social scientist. Arguing against Edmund Leach's contention that anthropologists who study their own society 'do not do it well', he contends that a sociologist/anthropologist studying her or his own society, does it very well, being well versed in its language, culture and in the Indian context, its diversity.

Both these positions are related to two other assumptions. In the post-independence period, the organizing principle for constructing sociological knowledge had become the nation-state. In a similar vein to colonialism, which collapsed cultural and territorial attributes, and simultaneously created new hierarchies between groups living in one space, sociological knowledge naturalized all differences between these groups and areas through the concept of 'nation'. In the colonial period, orientalist knowledge had made religion a marker of the groups living in India. Now this was substituted by the 'nation' and more particularly the 'nation-state'. Sociologists/anthropologists argued that a national community organized in terms of caste represented the nation-state. Inequalities that structured relationships between and within tribes and caste as also between classes, were now considered a thing of past. Instead, caste was perceived as a system that unified the whole nation, best understood when it is studied in the village.

Srinivas's sociology created a theory and methodology that carved it out from the discourses of economics and politics (both of which emphasized classes together with notions of power and domination in the context of democratic processes). The village acquired in Srinivas's oeuvre a spatial, territorial and structural significance. A localized setting became representative of a whole nation, a whole society. The microcosm came to represent the macrocosm. Not only does the social collapse into the spatial but also such a collapse makes it possible for the author to exclude those groups and communities within the nation-state whose culture and practices cannot be explained by the caste system. Tribes, religious and ethnic groups (other than caste), as well as the emerging interest groups that did not conform to the caste principles in their ways of living and functioning, did not figure in his work. The problem in this perspective is not merely a conservatism of approach, but also the exclusion of a large number of groups that constitute the sociological space habituated by the nation-state (Patel, 1998, 2005).

No wonder Srinivas's sociology/anthropology in its functionalist framework and its conservatism made it difficult to make a critical

historical assessment of colonialism and the post-independence processes that were structuring new forms of inequalities and redefining old ones. Nor could this perspective be self-reflexive and critically evaluate the received theories and concepts and understand its relation with the project of modernity. This perspective could not recognize the fact that the so-called 'traditional' features of Indian society were mere attributes constructed by modernity to mask Indian society's modern and colonial character. Thus despite the fact that India was modern, social anthropologists in India did not study this modernity, rather they studied its traditions, itself a construct of dominant modernity.

Does using the indigenous perspective solve the problems that we have inherited through the colonial construction of knowledge? Can it give us an alternative epistemic basis for the reconstruction of knowledge? Critics have argued that the indigenous knowledge perspective essentializes indigeneity and reworks the binaries by postulating a nativism (Alatas, 2005).⁷ Additionally, it also leads to the essentialization of the 'nation' and the 'nation-state'⁸ and moves our gaze away from the inequalities that structure contemporary societies as they relate to each other in the globalized world.

Such a position refracts any attempts to locate the varied networks that bind the village(s) to regions, the country and the global system, which colonialism inaugurated and which contemporary processes are enhancing. If we enlarge our imaginative boundaries to incorporate these networks, it will become apparent that our concerns will then shift to three networks: labour, capital and communication, which inter-cross and interconnect the villages in the global system, changing thereby the entire set of principles that make the frame of reference for contemporary sociological/anthropological theory (Patel, 2005). What is the way to go forward?

Beyond Knowledge–Power Binaries

I have argued earlier in the article that it is important we reflect on this inheritance and lineage, and intervene to create alternate and different traditions so that we break away from the binaries that influence academic practices and their perspectives and which are related to the distribution of world power. This is particularly true in the present historical moment, which is defined by the processes of globalization.

Though it is difficult to come to an agreement as to what globalization implies, most would agree that the openness inherent in this process subsumes a free flow of ideas, information and knowledge, goods, services, finance, technology and even diseases, drugs and arms. Contemporary globalization has opened up possibilities of diverse kinds of

transborder movements, widened the arenas of likely projects of cooperation, conflicts and brought about change in the way power is conceived and consolidated.

These processes combine the trends towards global integration of the erstwhile nation-states in the form of a region, such as the European Union, and at the same time underscore trends towards its disintegration, such as that of the erstwhile federations of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, due to assertion of ethno-national identities. Also, the nation-state, which was the crux of all political theory, is witnessing a political and existential crisis. On one hand, it is being pressurized from above by international regimes such as the World Trade Organization and on the other hand, by subnationalist processes inspired by ethno-nationalist movements. Globalization entails multiple, complex and contradictory processes that incessantly continue to unfold with the passage of time. It also creates opportunities to reflect on these processes because it has uncoupled the concepts of territory from its location in the dynamics of knowledge–power and its binaries (Delaney, 2005).

No wonder we have in this epoch the growth and spread of a new perspective called postcolonial studies that tries to confront the binaries on which sociological and anthropological knowledge has been constructed. This field focuses on the study of interactions between the European nations and the societies that they colonized in the modern period. The focal point of these studies thus is not the colonizers or the natives, rather the interrelationship between them. It also recognizes the differences that structure these encounters; these differences are related not only to time and space, that is, when and in which regions colonialism occurs, but also to the nature and character of this colonialism, that is, whether it is settler or non-settler and whether it was organized by the English, French, Portuguese and now the American. Postcolonial studies thus have displaced the Eurocentricism that inhabited the colonial encounter and the construction of binaries. This is very evident in the text titled *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* by Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) and other texts that study the West from the perspective of the 'other'.

The attention of postcolonial studies is towards power and domination in its complex, colonial, neocolonial, patriarchal, discursive and material manifestations – so as to unsettle its epistemology, its claim to truth and its strategies of representation. In order to understand it, theorists do not concentrate on nations and nation-states; rather they focus on the margins and discuss the subalterns who have been silenced (Chatterjee, 1993). In describing contemporary society as ephemeral, fugitive, fleeting and contingent, it has questioned the need to produce an episteme that counters earlier western universalist assumptions of time–space.

This work has brought in the social experiences of the 'silent' continents of Latin America, Africa and Asia, as it explores the way distribution of power has constructed subject positions in a large part of the world. Its search is to find authentic voices of 'others'. Such a narrative captures the multiplicity of differences and diversities of the subaltern. Postcolonial critique has been expressed in terms of a 'third space' or 'borderland' epistemologies that recognize and highlight the experiences and practices of sexism, racism and classicism within the context of cultural, historical, geographical, national, political, economic and social differences at local, regional and global levels.

I would argue that the postcolonial critique gives us a window, a first step to enter the new world of constructing new sociologies. Self-reflexive sociologies need to break open the binaries on which they were constructed, interrogate the divisions embodied in the construction of knowledge of society, move away from the universalisms of classical theorists of early modernity and assess the many different ways to understand the consequences of this modernity both in terms of social processes and their knowledge systems. This self-reflexivity needs to be extended to sociological/anthropological knowledge produced in ex-colonial countries from orientalist and nationalist-indigenous perspectives. These remain trapped in elite representations and occlude the understanding of the diverse ways in which new forms of modernities are emerging from the margins and from those who are excluded.

This article argues for a need to historicize and spatialize these sociological traditions through the construction of new theories and methodologies regarding a world divided by inequalities and its knowledge systems. It implies a need to change the vocabulary of sociology from its peculiar particularistic variant disguising itself in universal principles to a comparative internationalist positions. Can sociology and sociologists take up this challenge?

Notes

1. Today, this term represents groups that constitute nearly 8 percent of the historically and regionally diverse population in India, and who have very little relationship with each other, except the fact that they were categorized by the colonial state as 'tribes'. One set of these groups lives in northeast India and has demographic and cultural continuities with the communities based in Burma, some of whom are matrilineal while others patrilineal, and there are others located in the heartland of India and are forest dwellers as well as peasants.
2. On the issue of relevance, see Mukerji (2004).
3. Most universities of Europe or the USA do not float courses on sociology of development except within the field of area studies.

4. Prentice-Hall India published a series of books such as *Social Change* by Wilbert Moore and *Social Stratification* by Kinsley Davis. These became textbooks for students during the 1960s.
5. In this article, I am ignoring a possible third trend, that of sociological knowledge produced in Indian languages.
6. After the 1960s, sociology in India became synonymous with the work of M. N. Srinivas, who headed the Department of Sociology at the University of Delhi. In the 12 years that Srinivas headed the department, the discipline saw the growth of a new paradigm to study Indian society, and because this paradigm was enunciated when there was a rapid expansion of college and university education in India it became popular and recognized as *the* sociology approach. Srinivas is the author of more than 10 books and innumerable articles. His views are best represented in a recent anthology titled *Collected Essays* (2002).
7. Indigenization has sprouted a new perspective, like that of Indian ethnosociology. This position essentializes Hindu traditions and demands that these values become the basis for creating new epistemologies. This sociology has recently become identified with the Hindu right and related identity movements redefining nation and nationhood in religious and chauvinist terms.
8. In different ways, those who argue the case for the theory of alternative modernities, initially theorized by Eisenstadt (2000), also reflect this essentialism.

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