

An Anthropologist in his Own Country*

by

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The main concern of this paper is with the identity of anthropology, and with continuity and change in it since 1946 when the Association for Social Anthropologists was founded. There are two aspects of this identity. The first has to do with anthropology as an intellectual discipline, the definition of its subject as a particular field of enquiry and investigation, and its orientation to that field. The second has to do with anthropology as a profession, its composition and organization. When I look at developments in the subject since the end of World War II and the beginning of decolonization, I am struck as much by the continuity in the basic preoccupation of anthropology as a discipline as by changes in the composition and organization of anthropology as a profession.

It is far from my intention to suggest that as an intellectual discipline anthropology has stood still in the last 60 years. New fields and topics have been explored, and there has been no lack of innovation in concepts and in procedures of enquiry. But through all these changes, the basic identity of anthropology as the study of other societies and cultures, or of societies and cultures that are different, not to say distant, from one's own has remained intact. It has influenced even those anthropologists who in fact study their own society and culture in the countries outside the west. The continuity of anthropology as a discipline stands out most clearly when we examine its identity in relation to that of the sister discipline of sociology.

In the meantime, the composition of the profession has undergone major changes. When the ASA was founded, the overwhelming majority of anthropologists were Europeans or

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Americans. There were a few Indians, such as M N Srinivas and a few Africans such as Kofi Busia, but their presence was small and limited. Today there are large numbers of Asian, African and Latin American anthropologists, many if not most of whom work in their own countries but within an intellectual tradition whose defining feature has been the study of other societies and cultures. The long-term implications of this development have not been widely discussed, but they demand some attention from the profession. Another important development, with somewhat similar implications but which I will not be able to discuss at any length here, has been the entry of large numbers of women, including women from Asia and Africa, into the profession.

In an entertaining talk broadcast by the BBC more than fifty years ago, the pugnacious American sociologist George Homans (1962: 113-9) set out to explain why the British were mistrustful of sociology while they seemed quite well disposed towards anthropology. At that time the great universities at Cambridge and Oxford had chairs in social anthropology but not in sociology. Cambridge was making hesitant moves to have a chair in sociology. Out of prudence the university decided to try out a succession of visiting professors from the United States. The first two, Lloyd Warner and Talcott Parsons were both made to face rough music. Homans, who was the third, had come prepared and gave back as good as he got.

After patiently pointing out that the British had shown considerable enthusiasm and success in the study of the social lives of medieval serfs and villeins, of natives in their far-flung empire, and even of birds and animals, he asked why they showed such great reluctance to studying people of their own kind. Sociology was little more than the study of social interactions and social relations. So why should those who had such a keen aptitude for studying those very phenomena as historians, as anthropologists and as ethnologists be so averse to the discipline of sociology?

Homans answered his own question in the following words: 'Faced with these facts, elementary scientific method suggests that one should ask what characteristics the medieval villein, the native, and the robin possess in common. I have been able to

discover only one: they cannot read sociology, or, what amounts to the same thing, they cannot talk back – or not much’ (Ibid.: 115). As an American who had been irked by the academic atmosphere of Cambridge, Homans exaggerated its singularity, and British attitudes have no doubt changed since he gave his talk fifty years ago. But the line of division between anthropology and sociology continues to be more or less clearly drawn, and, if anything, it is drawn even more clearly in the United States than in Britain. Part of the reason for this is the emphasis placed in the American tradition from Kroeber to Schneider and Geertz on culture at the expense of social structure and social institutions, an emphasis sharply questioned by Radcliffe-Brown (1957: 92-109) in his famous Chicago seminar of 1937.

I do not wish to enter into the merits of Homans’s argument as a whole. What concerns me here is that Homans took it for granted that sociologists and anthropologists study different subjects and that their orientations to their subjects of study are different. In this respect he was expressing the common sense among students of society and culture in both Britain and the United States at the time. Sociologists studied their own kinds of people in the advanced industrial societies; anthropologists studied other kinds of people in villages or camps or reservations. Homans did not question the common sense underlying the distinction; he was only arguing that the British did not regard their own contemporary society as a proper subject of study. How far has this common sense changed since Homans’s time?

For Radcliffe-Brown, the first President of the Association of Social Anthropologists, the unity of sociology and social anthropology was an article of faith. He sought to develop a common approach and a common body of concepts for the systematic and comparative study of all human societies everywhere. He never tired of repeating that social anthropology was only another name for comparative sociology (Radcliffe-Brown 1960). Like Durkheim before him, Radcliffe-Brown believed that the comparative method was not a special branch of social anthropology but its defining feature. The question naturally arises as to how effectively the comparative method can be used where a radical

separation is maintained between the study of one's own society and the study of other societies.

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If we examine how the study of society and culture is organized in Britain and the United States today, we will have to concede that it is Homans's common sense that has prevailed over Radcliffe-Brown's intellectual agenda. Ironically, the division of subject matter between anthropology and sociology began to harden as the two disciplines acquired more secure empirical foundations. Frazer, Durkheim and most others of their generation were armchair scholars, relying for their analysis and speculation on information collected from a variety of sources. This gave them a kind of freedom in writing about social institutions and processes in all parts of the world, and in the past as well as the present.

Things began to change after World War I. Students of society and culture became more mindful of the quality and reliability of the data they used in their studies. Both intensive fieldwork in small communities and survey research on population samples began to grow in the twenties and thirties of the last century. It is not that students of society and culture ceased to use official statistics or documents and archival materials, but they began to rely increasingly on data collected through procedures and techniques they themselves devised, refined and standardized. By the end of World War II, training in the collection of data had become a requirement of entry into the profession for both sociologists and social anthropologists but again the training tended to differ in the two cases.

Anthropologists and sociologists chose not only different settings for their studies but also different methods and techniques for the collection of data. Anthropologists went to remote, unfamiliar and exotic places for their fieldwork, learning a new language and enduring the hardships of an alien environment. They emphasized and sometimes exaggerated the peculiarities of the people among whom they had lived and worked.

Sociologists, on the other hand, stayed at home and investigated populations of the kind to which they themselves belonged. I have been told by many anthropologists in Britain that sociology is rather a dull subject. It is difficult for a sociologist in Britain to feel about black-coated workers or suburban housewives the same kind of thrill that an English anthropologist might feel about encounters in the New Guinea highlands or the Brazilian rain forests.

What were the defining features of the communities that anthropologists went out to study in the field? Until well into the 20th century, they did not feel shy about describing as 'primitive' the people about whom they wrote. The text-books on which I had cut my teeth as an undergraduate student of anthropology had such titles as *Primitive Culture* (Tylor 1871), *Primitive Society* (Lowie 1920) and *The Mind of Primitive Man* (Boas 1911). Truth to tell, it was the enchantment of the world of the primitive that drew me to the study of anthropology even though I was studying the subject in a country that had just ceased to be a colony of the British empire.

Old ways of perceiving and describing the communities typically studied by anthropologists continued for some time after anthropology was given a new turn with the development of intensive fieldwork. Malinowski, who pioneered the new kind of anthropology, chose such titles for his books as *Crime and Custom in Savage Society* (1926), *Sex and Repression in Savage Society* (1927) and *The Sexual Life of Savages* (1929). A distinguished British anthropologist published books with titles such as *The Naked Nagas* and *Himalayan Barbary* (Füerer-Haimendorf 1933, 1955). I can say from personal knowledge that Füerer-Haimendorf greatly enjoyed his association with the people he studied and they no doubt enjoyed their association with him. The denigration, if it was that, was by no means the result of any conscious desire to offend.

The term 'primitive' came in course of time to be replaced by 'pre-literate' and other euphemisms. Intensive fieldwork brought about a change of attitude and orientation towards the people the anthropologists studied. Also, important changes in the political climate began to take place after decolonization. Gradually, terms suggestive of

disparagement came to be considered unprofessional. It is now no longer possible to call a text-book of anthropology *Primitive Culture*, although it is acceptable when called *Other Cultures*.

Some changes did indeed come about in the course of the 20th century in the attitudes and orientations of anthropologists towards the people they study. But continuity was also maintained. A major new development that began around the time of World War II was the entry by anthropologists into the study of peasant communities in Latin America, Asia and elsewhere. This development gathered momentum with decolonization, and American universities established departments and centres of area studies in which anthropologists had a prominent place.

As anthropologists began to study peasant communities in the different parts of the world – in Mexico, in India, in Indonesia – some change became inevitable in their approach and orientation, and in their feel for their subject matter. For one thing, while there were no primitive or preliterate tribes in western Europe, there were peasants in Spain, Italy and France. Some anthropologists, such as F G Bailey who had begun with the study of tribes and peasants in South Asia, undertook the study of peasant communities in Europe. This brought the field of the anthropologist closer to that of the sociologist, but differences between the two disciplines remained. In the United States, in whose departments of anthropology peasant studies had begun, anthropology and rural sociology remained distinct disciplines. Anthropologists studied peasants outside the United States whereas rural sociologists studied farmers within it.

Decolonization brought in its wake an interest in the Third World and the Less Developed Countries. While anthropologists became hesitant to speak of the world of primitive man, they became experts on the Third World and in the social and cultural aspects of development and underdevelopment. Area studies and development studies grew hand in hand in the United States but, again, while many social and cultural anthropologists were prominent in these related fields, American sociologists were generally not attracted to them (Béteille 1999).

Robert Redfield (1956), who was a pioneer in the anthropological study of peasantry, described peasant communities as ‘part-societies’ and ‘part-cultures’. Unlike the tribal community of classical anthropology, the peasant community was not complete in itself. As an anthropologist, Redfield himself took an interest in towns and cities and encouraged those who worked with him to do so. Anthropologists brought something new into studies of civilizations, if only because their studies grew out of field-based research on little communities. But the civilizations to which anthropologists devoted their attention were mainly non-western ones.

The anthropological study of civilization did not efface the distinction between western and non-western societies as subjects of study. It was no doubt an advance of some kind to move from the study of primitive and preliterate or even peasant communities to that of civilizations, but the line of division separating the West from the rest refused to disappear. Even when the same anthropologist compared a non-western civilization with the western, the difference in orientation and approach became immediately apparent. Louis Dumont’s comparison between India and the West is one of the most ambitious of its kind (1966, 1977). At the same time, the data employed to characterize the two remained disparate. The Indian case was built mainly on ethnographic data, illuminated by the study of classical texts; the western one was based on an exercise in the history of ideas (Béteille 1987: 676).

More than forty years ago, the Chinese-American anthropologist Francis Hsu (1963: 1) had pointed out how western scholars had misrepresented the reality by treating all civilizations other than the western as ‘Oriental’. They were certainly interested in difference, but their primary interest was in the difference between western and all other civilizations, and not in the differences among those civilizations themselves.

Jack Goody (1990: 11) is undoubtedly right when he says, ‘Many anthropologists have tended to regard their generalizations, their concepts, their procedures as applying to “elementary” structures – to use the phrase incorporated in the title of Lévi-Strauss’ book

– which are seen to range from Australian aborigines to the inhabitants of China and India. ... The result is a tendency to primitivise the Oriental civilisations’. The fascination for the primitive, the exotic and the alien is too deeply rooted in the traditions of anthropology and the work habits of anthropologists to be exorcised by a mere change in the climate of political opinion. Although they have made occasional forays into western society, western anthropologists have not felt fully at ease about studying their own society by the methods and techniques characteristic of their discipline.

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In modern anthropology, the celebration of the primitive found its most eloquent exponent in Claude Lévi-Strauss. No other anthropologist of his generation has influenced students of society and culture in the way in which he has, and his influence has extended far beyond the boundaries of his discipline. Among his predecessors only the name of Malinowski had the kind of magic that came to be associated with his. Malinowski spoke freely of savages and primitives but also sought tirelessly to show that they were, at bottom, the same as civilised people. Lévi-Strauss, on the other hand, trained his eyes on the discovery of difference and otherness.

From *Tristes Tropiques* to *The View from Afar*, Lévi-Strauss (1973, 1985) has argued consistently for the privileged standpoint of the anthropologist as outsider and distant observer. The vocation of the anthropologist, in this representation, is that of the explorer who travels to distant lands in order to discover the limits of difference and otherness. This exploration is both an intellectual and an aesthetic experience.

The contrast between sociology, or the study of ourselves, and anthropology, or the study of others, has figured repeatedly in the writings of Lévi-Strauss, and he has been by preference an anthropologist and not a sociologist. Contrasting sociology with anthropology, he wrote, ‘Sociology is concerned with the observer’s society or a society of the same type’ (Lévi-Strauss 1963: 362). The context makes it quite clear that here the author had in mind western, i.e., European or American society. By contrast, ‘*The*

anthropologist is the astronomer of the social sciences: His task is to discover a meaning for configurations which, owing to their size and remoteness, are very different from those within the observer's immediate purview' (Ibid: 378, italics in original). No doubt anthropology, sociology and indeed all the human sciences aim ultimately at a deeper understanding of the human condition, but their proximate aims and tendencies have often been divergent. Here, I am concerned more with the proximate than the ultimate aims of the discipline; and not just with what their proponents say their aims are but also with the procedures by which they pursue those aims.

As I have already indicated, the distinction between the two disciplines became clearer as each of them acquired its own particular empirical focus. The distinction between sociology and anthropology (or ethnology) was not made as clearly in the *Année sociologique* as it was by later scholars, although there is a telling passage in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Durkheim 1976: 93-4) in which it is made clearly enough. So long as they continue to be organized as different disciplines and different professions, the need to provide an intellectual justification for the difference will remain. The Association of Social Anthropologists remains different from the British Sociological Association, and in the British Academy, social anthropology and sociology are placed in different sections, the former with geography and the latter with demography and social statistics.

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Even while Lévi-Strauss was confidently describing anthropologists as the astronomers of the social sciences, a slow, steady and irreversible change had begun in the composition of the profession about which he was writing. At the end of World War I, the vast majority of anthropologists were Europeans or Americans. Today, anthropologists in countries outside the West are numerous, and in a few decades they may well outnumber their western counterparts.

A change in the composition of the profession is bound to have consequences for a discipline which defines itself as the study of other societies and cultures. When most anthropologists were Europeans or Americans, the study of other cultures and the study of primitive or less developed societies were much the same. But from the standpoint of an Indian or Sri Lankan student of society and culture the situation is replete with contradictions and tensions. When an Indian student goes to the United States to do a PhD, if his work is on social stratification in America, he will be placed in a department of sociology even though he is studying a society that is different from his own. If, on the other hand, he wishes to come back to study family and kinship in his home town in India, he will be counted in his American university as an anthropologist even though he is writing a thesis on his own society and culture. Indians are now in demand in American universities, but in departments of anthropology, not of sociology. The Indian sociologist or social anthropologist working in his own country may be forgiven if from his standpoint the distinction between the study of 'the observer's society or a society of the same type' and that of 'other cultures' appears disingenuous.

The situation in countries such as India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka is in a state of flux. Although in intellectual matters the distinction between centre and periphery has now become a little faded, it is still of some significance if only because of the great superiority of the former over the latter not only in material but also in intellectual resources (Shils 1975: 3-16). The United States continues to act as a magnet for some of the most talented scholars from the poorer countries. There they acquire an intellectual orientation and a sense of the division of labour between disciplines that does not fully harmonize with the intellectual landscape of the countries from which they come and to which some of them return. Because India is a very large country with some independent intellectual resources, those who return to it with training and experience in the universities of the centre do not always find it easy to overturn established ways of thought and work when they come back.

The change in the composition of the profession is complicated by the presence of a diaspora of anthropologists of non-western origin in the universities of Europe and America. In the last two or three decades American universities have attracted Indian anthropologists, first as doctoral students and then as faculty members. They are not numerous, but they are very influential. Where they have acquired important positions in American universities, they act as conduits for the passage of Indian scholars to the United States for either training or employment or both. But of course Indian anthropologists in the USA are, numerically, a small proportion of the total number of anthropologists whether in India or in the United States.

Without insisting on a clear or direct relationship between the social situation of a scholar and his intellectual orientation or standpoint, it would be reasonable to presume that a person who studies a subject in the tradition of a discipline that defines itself as the study of other cultures is likely to arrive at a different view of it from the one taken by someone who investigates it as a part of the study of his own society. We have known since Max Weber (1949) that the standpoint of the intellectual matters, although it is not the only thing that matters. Those who sought to separate the study of other cultures from the study of one's own society were Europeans or Americans, and they obviously gave little thought to the way in which the distinction might work in universities and other centres of study and research in India or Indonesia or Nigeria.

The systematic empirical and comparative study of human societies of every kind began in the West in the middle of the 19th century. As a discipline and a profession, anthropology is not much more than a hundred years old. Till the end of the 19th century it was largely a pursuit of amateurs. But by the beginning of the 20th it was being taught in the universities, and associations of anthropologists with their own periodicals had come into being. All of this was then still largely, if not entirely, confined to Europe and North America.

In the initial phase of the comparative study of human societies and cultures worldwide, those who undertook the studies were all Europeans or Americans. The first and perhaps

the most successful venture of this kind was the work done by the scholars associated with the *Année sociologique* between 1898 and 1914 under the leadership of Durkheim. This small group of scholars undertook the study of all societies and all cultures ranging from the Australian Aborigines through the Pueblo Indians, the Indians of India, the Chinese and the Europeans with the application of a common body of concepts, methods and theories. As is well known, the venture did not last very long. It was halted by the outbreak of World War I, and after that the explosive growth of systematic empirical investigations into both 'primitive' and 'advanced' societies made its revival difficult.

A hundred years ago those who studied human societies comparatively were all Europeans or Americans. There were no Asians or Africans among the anthropologists or sociologists of the time, or at least none who would be recognized as one by the *Année sociologique*. While Durkheim saw the merit of bringing every possible type of society on the same plane of observation and analysis, he took it for granted that the observation and the analysis would all be made by scholars from one type of society, i.e. the type to which he himself belonged.

Weber sought to develop what he called a 'Sinnverstehendesozologie', or a sociology of the understanding of meanings. He was more acutely aware than Durkheim of the influence of the standpoint of the investigator on the course of his investigation. He acknowledged the existence and also the legitimacy of a plurality of standpoints. But when he spoke about this, he had in mind mainly the standpoints of different classes, different parties and different ideologies within the same political order (Béteille 2002: 98-120). He did not consider in a serious way the implications for the systematic study of society and culture of the diversity of standpoints arising from different national or civilizational traditions. Even for him, the study of society and history had a kind of unity of approach which cannot any longer be taken for granted.

Ethnographic studies began to be made in India from the second half of the 19th century onwards. The first ethnographers were missionaries and administrators from Britain and other western countries who sought to catalogue the social customs of the natives and the

innumerable social divisions among them. They soon began to train and use Indian assistants for the conduct of their studies. Colonial administration played an important part in laying the foundations of anthropology in India. The Anthropological Survey of India, whose origins go back to colonial times, continues its existence as one of the largest organizations of its kind in the world.

The practice of anthropology did not remain confined to administrators, missionaries and their assistants for very long. It came to be adopted as a university subject not very long after its first adoption by the western universities. The first post-graduate department of anthropology was established in the University of Calcutta in 1920, and the first professional journal devoted to the subject, *Man in India*, was started in 1921. Unlike in many other colonial countries, post-graduate departments in Indian universities were from the very beginning staffed almost entirely by Indians. By the end of the 1920s, there were professional anthropologists who had received academic training either abroad or at home in Calcutta, but until the time of independence they were very few in number.

Not surprisingly, Indian anthropologists began by collecting the same kinds of data that were being collected by British and other western ethnographers in India, and, by and large, they adopted concepts and methods developed in the West. There was a strong emphasis on the study of 'primitive' tribes, and, since the native anthropologists were almost all upper caste Hindus, there was a kind of social and cultural distance between the observer and the observed. At the same time, the more sensitive among the Indian anthropologists quickly realized that there were similarities as well as interconnections between the customs of the primitive tribes and their own customs (Bose 1975, Karve 1968).

While it is undeniable that anthropology came to India in the wake of colonial rule, it is by no means the case that Indian anthropologists, including those who were trained in Britain or by the British in India, followed blindly and mechanically the intellectual agenda of colonial rule. Many of them were acutely conscious of being the bearers of an ancient intellectual tradition that had become ossified but that they hoped could be

rejuvenated by exposure to new methods, new concepts and new theories. If one can speak of the standpoint of the colonial or the missionary anthropologist, one can speak also of the standpoint of the nationalist anthropologist, and the two came into contention from almost the very start.

The defining feature of the standpoint of the nationalist anthropologist was the postulate of the unity of India. Indian anthropologists such as G S Ghurye and N K Bose argued that in India tribal and non-tribal communities were parts of a single civilization. Colonial anthropologists, on the other hand, were inclined to stress the distinctiveness of tribal culture and the separateness of the tribes from the rest of the Indian population. The divergence between the two standpoints came out in the acrimonious debate in the mid-forties between G S Ghurye, the first professor of sociology at Bombay University but trained by the anthropologist W H R Rivers at Cambridge, and Verrier Elwin, the self-trained anthropologist who came out to India to work as a missionary but adopted Indian citizenship after independence (Guha 1999; Seminar 1960). It will not be too great an exaggeration to say that the natural tendency in India is to stress the unity of sociology and social anthropology whereas in the West the natural tendency is for them to stay apart.

Radcliffe-Brown's disciples and successors in Britain and the United States did not pursue very seriously his agenda for the unity of sociology and social anthropology. Anthropologists in the United Kingdom continued to concentrate on tribal communities worldwide, adding peasant communities in Asia, Africa and Latin America, and then in the Mediterranean countries and eastern Europe to their repertoire while sociologists mainly studied Britain and neighbouring industrial societies. The one person who continued to promote Radcliffe-Brown's agenda was M N Srinivas. It is no accident that Srinivas was an Indian who after a brief sojourn in England, returned to India where, as I have said, the natural tendency is for the unity of sociology and social anthropology, although I am not unmindful of the currents that act against this natural tendency.

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I shall first explain in what sense the natural tendency in India is for the unity of sociology and social anthropology, and then discuss some of the forces that act against this tendency. The systematic study of society and culture in India was from the start influenced by the framework of concepts, methods and theories developed in the West. The first professor of sociology, G S Ghurye in Bombay, and the first professor of anthropology, K P Chattopadhyay in Calcutta, were both trained in Britain and they both studied under the same person, W H R Rivers at Cambridge. Both of them and in fact that whole generation of social scientists in India were also influenced by the nationalist movement in a way and to an extent that the founders of anthropology and sociology in Europe and America were not.

While prominent Indian sociologists such as G S Ghurye and M N Srinivas were greatly influenced by social anthropology, others were influenced as much by other disciplines such as classical studies, history, political theory and economics. As a result, the development of sociology and social anthropology and the relations between them have not been uniform in the different centres of study and research in the different parts of the country. In some centres sociology has had a closer relationship with economics and political science and even history than with anthropology.

The engagement with the nationalist movement had two consequences for the development of disciplines such as social anthropology, sociology, political science and economics in their formative years in India. The first was a concentration of attention, particularly in research, on India: Indian society and culture, politics in India and the Indian economy at the expense of general and comparative concerns. The second was the representation of India, and particularly Indian society, with all its divisions and subdivisions, its currents and counter-currents, as a single entity or at least a single field of study.

A fact that is frequently emphasized by Indians who study their own society and culture is the great size and diversity of the Indian population. From small and isolated tribal

communities to modern professionals in metropolitan cities, one can investigate every kind of social field by whatever method appears feasible and appropriate. My own PhD students in the department of sociology at the Delhi School of Economics have worked in villages and cities and in a tea plantation; among rural peasants and urban artisans; in a major South Indian temple and an important scientific research laboratory in Delhi. The anthropologist or sociologist in such a department might work in a middle-class urban setting much like his own or in a remote tribal setting quite unlike anything he would ordinarily experience.

Teaching and research are organized in various ways in Indian universities. The same university often has a department of anthropology as well as one of sociology. In the former, the social anthropologists work with biological anthropologists and prehistoric archaeologists and not with sociologists who work in a different department and even a different faculty of the same university. Disciplinary boundaries have to be defended and justified because, for historical reasons, teaching and research have come to be organized separately. In Indian universities, much like in other universities, each department tends to be jealous of its own turf.

While social anthropologists do much the same kind of research as sociologists, teaching tends to have a different focus, and this is particularly true where the emphasis is on cultural rather than social anthropology. It is only in their research, which is confined largely to India, that their own country becomes the common object of attention for both sociologists and anthropologists. But teaching in the two disciplines cannot be only about India particularly where the two disciplines aim to be general and comparative. Sociology and social (or cultural) anthropology are taught very differently in the major metropolitan universities of Europe and America, and this difference influences directly the teaching of these subjects in India.

How a subject is taught in the classroom influences the kind of research undertaken by those who study it, but not always directly, or at least not in India. It is by tolerating only a very loose connection between teaching and research and confining empirical research

largely to their own country that Indians are able to accomplish the extraordinary feat of upholding the unity of sociology and anthropology in research while maintaining their separation in teaching.

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As I have indicated, in India the real expansion of the profession of anthropology took place only after independence. Has the change in the last sixty years been only a quantitative one, or has there also been a change of orientation and direction?

There was a massive expansion in universities and centres of research after independence. As the number of anthropologists increased, their activities began to diversify. The relationship between Indian anthropologists and anthropologists from the West became more rather than less close after independence. Until the time of independence, the few anthropologists who went to the West went there as students; when they came back they moved into teaching or research positions in India. This changed to some extent after independence, and Indian anthropologists began to occupy faculty positions in Europe and America, very slowly at first but now on an increasing scale.

The flow of western scholars into India increased after independence. Apart from senior scholars who came to teach or do research, there were students working under the supervision of Indian professors and a few even took degrees from Indian universities. Thus a kind of reciprocity of relations between scholars of different provenance and with different orientations came into existence. But this reciprocity was by no means complete. Exchanges of views between Indian and western anthropologists did indeed take place at seminars and conferences. But the latter came mainly to do fieldwork and to collect data rather than to learn about concepts, methods and theories. And for every one American scholar who came to study in India, there were at least ten Indians who went to complete their studies in America.

A notable feature of the exchange of scholars was that those who came from the West to study society and culture in India were mainly anthropologists; hardly any American or British sociologist came to do research in India. This was in conformity with the established division of labour among students of culture and society in America and Britain: anthropologists studied other cultures whereas sociologists studied their own society. But the situation is, to put it mildly, anomalous from the point of view of the Indian university where many of the best students of society and culture are in departments of sociology rather than anthropology.

I have had the experience of preparing students for the M.A. and M.Phil. degrees in the only centre of advanced study in sociology in India at the Delhi School of Economics, and then writing references for them for admission for graduate studies in American and British universities. In nine cases out of ten they seek admission in departments of anthropology and rarely in departments of sociology.

The best Indian sociologists are in demand in American universities and the demand for them has grown in the last couple of decades, but it comes from departments of anthropology and not sociology. So the Indian sociologist who travels regularly to the United States has to be something of a quick-change artist: a sociologist at home but an anthropologist abroad. There is, as I have indicated, now a growing diaspora of Indian scholars, or scholars of Indian origin, who are engaged in the study of Indian society and culture. It is not easy to judge how they negotiate the gap in approach and method between the study of other cultures and the study of one's own society.

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Students of society and culture in India sometimes say that they should proceed with their own studies in their own way and not lose their sleep over the ways in which the disciplines are divided in the West between the study of one's own society and the study of other cultures. That would be to take a narrow and unhistorical view of their intellectual aims and objectives. My view has always been that Indians must take the

achievements of western science and scholarship seriously even if their own achievements are not taken equally seriously on an intellectual plane in the West.

The systematic study of society and culture in India is bound by strong umbilical ties to the disciplines concerned with the same kinds of study in the West. Indian students continue to read books by John Beattie, Clifford Geertz, Robert Merton and David Lockwood among others, and it is good that they do so. Nothing would be more retrograde than to turn away from this body of work in the expectation of creating a new framework for the study of society and culture that will be authentically Indian. Hence no matter how embarrassing the established division of labour between the study of one's own society and the study of other cultures may be for the Indian sociologist, it is a social fact that he cannot wish out of existence. And it is a fact that is tacitly acknowledged in the organization of disciplines in the Indian universities.

When Indians go for study and research to the centres of learning in Europe and America, they cannot but engage with ideas about disciplinary identities and disciplinary boundaries currently in vogue. When they return they naturally bring back with them new ideas about the study of society and culture that they then seek to apply in their teaching and research. Where there is a conspicuous lack of fit between those ideas and the demands of research in Indian academic institutions, there is bound to be some disorientation.

New ideas, concepts and methods have to be related to the existing social and cultural reality which differs from one country to another. They have also to be related to the existing practices of scholarly work which also differ among countries. In the development of academic disciplines, the second is no less important than the first. Indians who return after long exposure to a European or an American academic environment may pay attention to the distinctive features of Indian society and culture in their empirical research, but they tend to show scant regard for the traditions of work established in the centres of study and research in India. I have surprised some of them by pointing out that there are indeed such traditions, no matter how weakly developed.

Sociology and anthropology have been taught in Indian universities, in some cases continuously, for more than three quarters of a century.

While sociology aims to be a single discipline, it is undeniable that different traditions of study and research have grown within it. This is a good thing so long as each tradition remains open to influences from the others. As far back as in the 1930s, Karl Mannheim (1953: 185-94, 209-28) wrote two papers, one on American and the other on German sociology in which he compared and contrasted their distinctive orientations. Some would say that there is still no distinctive tradition of sociology in India even though it has existed as an academic discipline longer there than it had in either Germany or the United States when Mannheim wrote his papers.

There are several reasons why a distinctive style of sociological study and research has failed to emerge in India of which one is of particular relevance to the present context. In each generation the most active among the younger sociologists are eager to remain in close touch with current developments in the major metropolitan centres but make hardly any effort to relate their work to that of their Indian predecessors. A healthy tradition of research cannot grow unless there is some sense of continuity with the work done in one's immediate environment along with openness to influences from outside.

Of special significance here is the small but growing number of anthropologists in the Indian diaspora. Their outlook, not unexpectedly, is shaped by work practices prevalent in Europe and America rather than India even though most of them choose India as the site for their fieldwork. No doubt they bring to the study of Indian society and culture new methods and techniques of study, but they come to India to do fieldwork rather than to establish meaningful dialogues with their Indian counterparts. They are too comfortable to move out of the division of intellectual labour established in the metropolitan centres of learning, and they find little in the Indian academic environment to tempt them to look at their work from a different angle. In my experience they show even less interest in the work being done in the Indian universities and research centres than their native born European and American colleagues do.

So far at least students of society and culture in the Indian diaspora have not thrown their weight in favour of work practices and habits that are conducive to the development of a single discipline devoted to the study of all societies by a common body of concepts, methods and theories. By and large, their basic intellectual approach remains one that takes for granted the separation of the study of other cultures from the study of one's own society.

* * *

I would like to emphasize that whether one calls oneself and is called a sociologist or an anthropologist is not just a matter of professional organization or career advancement, but raises important questions of intellectual orientation. It will be disingenuous to try to brush these questions aside by invoking the mantra of globalization. Globalization does not erase all distinctions but obscures certain important ones.

Until the 1950s, students of Indian society, whether native or foreign, did not seriously think through the implications of viewing the same subject of study from more than one standpoint. I believe that the first person for whom this became a serious concern was M N Srinivas. When he decided to include a chapter entitled 'Some Observations on the Study of One's Own Society' in his book *Social Change in Modern India* (Srinivas 1966), he had obviously given considerable thought to the predicament of the anthropologist in his own country. An anthropologist is what Srinivas was in the Institute of Social Anthropology at Oxford, and he carried that badge to some extent throughout his life, particularly when he travelled abroad. Evans-Pritchard, who was instrumental in creating the position, must have thought about it too for he designated it as 'Lecturer in Indian Sociology'.

Although Srinivas taught only briefly at the Institute of Social Anthropology, he maintained close personal as well as professional ties throughout his life with anthropologists in Britain and America. At the same time, in India he came to be

regarded as the country's foremost sociologist. He began his observations on the study of one's own society by referring to comments on his work by three leading British anthropologists, A R Radcliffe-Brown, Godfrey Lienhardt and Edmund Leach. Radcliffe-Brown took the simple view that his knowledge of the language and culture of the region gave Srinivas a great advantage in his study of the Coorgs. Lienhardt, once his fellow student and colleague at Oxford, wrote, on the other hand, that he was perhaps at his best when he ceased to feel that he must write in the language of social anthropology and expressed himself as a cultivated Indian (Srinivas 1966: 148). This must have rankled with Srinivas, for whatever he might have wanted to be, he thought it important to write in the language of social anthropology.

Leach drew attention more pointedly to the disadvantage of the anthropologist who undertakes to study his own society. Srinivas was provoked into saying, 'Whatever the disadvantage, it has certainly not been so great as to prevent the emergence of the discipline of sociology. Marx, Weber, Mannheim and several other sociologists have been continuously preoccupied with the study of their own societies' (Srinivas 1966: 153). I must confess to a feeling of frustration whenever I hear British anthropologists say that their work shows greater depth and insight than the work done by their colleagues in departments of sociology.

The dilemmas arising from the study of one's own society have troubled many Indian anthropologists, particularly those who have studied or worked in the United States or Britain. Considering their large and growing numbers, few Indian anthropologists do fieldwork outside India. But then India is not like Holland or England. It is a very large country where the anthropologist can easily find for study a community that is different from his own in language, religion and culture. Indian anthropologists in fact began with the study of tribes in Jharkhand and the North-East whose customs were very different from those of the anthropologist even where he was an Indian. But, as I have pointed out, this is largely a matter of perspective. Most Indians would say that they are studying other Indians even when they study regions or communities other than their own. At any rate, I do not know many anthropologists in Delhi or Calcutta who would regard

themselves as the astronomers of the social sciences when they are studying tribal communities in India. And, besides, there are today many Khasi, Munda and Oraon anthropologists who study their own as well as other communities.

Srinivas spoke and wrote endlessly on the issues raised by Lévi-Strauss and Leach. In the study of society and culture, who has the advantage, the insider or the outsider? In a paper entitled 'The Insider *versus* the Outsider in the Study of Cultures', Srinivas (2002: 553-60) sought to present a nuanced view in response to Leach's categorical assertion of the advantage of the outsider. He acknowledged that the outsider enjoyed certain advantages, but he insisted that the insider too had his own advantages.

There are very few European or American anthropologists who would assert as strongly now as Leach did that the study of one's own society and culture, at least of the kind that anthropologists make, is inherently flawed. For one thing, there are now many anthropologists outside the West who study their own societies, i.e. the same societies their western counterparts study, and it would not be politically correct to be openly dismissive about their work. But what they say may not be quite the same as what they think. Despite the entry of a few European anthropologists into the study of European communities, the self-image of the discipline is that it is the study of other cultures.

The view of the anthropologist as the astronomer of the social scientists may appear as a harmless pose in Europe or America, but it puts the Asian or African anthropologist working in his own country on the wrong foot with his countrymen. There are other reasons too, including a few, disagreeable ones, why anthropology is viewed with suspicion in the ex-colonial countries. Some believe that the Indian anthropologist enjoys a natural advantage in the study of his own society and culture. The question is then asked as to why, when there are so many able scholars within the country, anthropologists from abroad should come to undertake studies in India when their initial knowledge of language and society can never be on a par with that of the native scholar. Such studies no doubt advance the professional careers of those who undertake them, but

do they add anything of value to India's own intellectual capital? Here I would like to say that my own view is that it very certainly does.

Although he himself did not study systematically any society outside India, Srinivas maintained consistently that research by anthropologists from other countries contributed something of inestimable value to the understanding of Indian society and culture. He wrote in his discussion of the insider versus the outsider, 'I must hasten to add that I am not only not against studies of a culture by outsiders but on the contrary *I am positively for them*' (Srinivas 2002: 560, emphasis in original). He concluded, 'There cannot be a single correct or all-embracing view. One view ought to be that of the insider and various views can be complementary even when – or especially when they differ from each other' (Ibid.).

Clearly, Leach was being provocative in asserting that a valid account of a society can be provided only by one who views it from outside. It will not be very sensible to respond to the provocation by saying that true insight into a society can be attained only from within and that the outsider's account is doomed to remain shallow and misleading. Just as many theologians believe that a religion can be fully understood only by a true believer so do many nationalists believe that their society can be understood only by someone born and bred in it. Such a view I consider to be misleading and intellectually sterile. I would plead for recognition of the validity of a *multiplicity* of viewpoints, and thus try to reach beyond the dichotomy of insiders and outsiders, or ourselves and others.

* * *

Anthropology, or what was then called ethnology on the continent of Europe, was closely associated in its early phase with the exploration of distant lands and alien communities. Not all anthropologists were themselves explorers or even travellers, but they were more dependent than other social scientists on the writings of explorers and travellers. Even before World War I, anthropologists such as Boas, Haddon and Rivers went on expeditions. In this they were more like geographers than economists, political scientists

or sociologists. Perhaps this explains why the British Academy, when it reorganized its Sections in 1993, placed social anthropology with geography and separated it from sociology.

Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown played an important part in redefining anthropology as a field science in which anthropologists themselves went out to distant places and collected their own data in conformity with professional standards instead of relying on accounts by explorers, travellers and missionaries. Hence going out to do fieldwork, 'being there' (Geertz 1988) became a mark of distinction among anthropologists, particularly in Britain. Anthropologists who lived away from the city sought to evoke the atmosphere of the bush and the camp, and some of them cultivated what Evans-Pritchard (1951: 96) disparagingly called 'the rustling-of-the-wind-in-the-palm-trees kind of anthropological writing for which Malinowski set the fashion'.

No anthropologist in our time has evoked the enchantment of distant lands more vividly than Lévi-Strauss. It is unlikely that another book such as *Tristes tropiques* can be written today, at least not by an anthropologist. The world has changed in the last sixty years, and in some ways irreversibly. No matter how much the anthropologist – or his reader – might yearn for the charm of faraway places, 'being there' cannot mean the same thing today as it did in Malinowski's time, or even in the time of Evans-Pritchard and Lévi-Strauss. The places where anthropologists might like to do fieldwork have now been invaded by tourists, and they are likely to find that reporters and travel writers with a smattering of anthropology have been there before.

Intensive fieldwork brought the anthropologist into direct and often close relationship with the native, but, as I have said, it did not change everything. Malinowski, Radcliffe-Brown and their pupils, who laid the foundations of intensive fieldwork among anthropologists in Britain, worked during the closing decades of colonial rule and under its shadow where the line between Europeans and natives was well recognized on both sides. No doubt there were close, even intimate relations between European anthropologists and some of their native informants, just as there were between European

officers and some of their native soldiers. In fact, some of the best fieldwork by British anthropologists was done during war time, and Evans-Pritchard has left a vivid account of his work in east Africa as officer and anthropologist (Geertz 1988: 49-72).

While there is no doubt an element of caricature in Homans's account, it is by and large true that those anthropologists who laid the foundations of intensive fieldwork undertook research among natives who did not talk back. It is not difficult to establish close relations with people who do not talk back, or talk only on cue. If there was reciprocity between the anthropologist and his informants, it was at best on an emotional rather than an intellectual plane.

Anthropologists who did fieldwork in the second quarter of the last century in Melanesia, Polynesia and Africa generally took for granted the vast disparity between the intellectual resources of their own civilization and those of the pre-literate societies they undertook to study. No doubt they discussed the intellectual puzzles thrown up by Trobriand culture or Azande culture with the bearers of those cultures. It is doubtful though that the anthropologist discussed the intellectual puzzles embedded in his own culture with his native informants. There is nothing in the literature to suggest that he did so in a serious way. Anthropologists not only went out to study others, the others they chose to study were without conscious or recorded traditions of intellectual debate and discussion. In these circumstances, reciprocity of intellectual perspectives is scarcely possible.

With decolonization, the terms of the relationship between anthropologists and those they studied began to gradually change. For one thing, anthropologists could no longer operate through the old colonial system for access to the people whom they went out to study. For another, they began to enter the study of civilizations which themselves had old and elaborate intellectual traditions. The line of distinction between the anthropologist and the native, which had been clear in the days of Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown and even of Evans-Pritchard and Fortes, began to be blurred. The natives were themselves producing anthropologists, and they certainly could talk back.

When anthropologists from the United States and Europe began to come in large numbers to do research in countries such as India, Sri Lanka and Turkey, their first interest, naturally, was in the tribal or peasant communities in which they did their fieldwork. If the orientation of your discipline is towards the other, when you come to India, you naturally seek out Indian peasants rather than Indian social scientists. It is not easy to tell how much this contributes to a true reciprocity of perspectives.

With the rapid increase in the size of the profession in countries such as India, anthropologists who came from overseas to do fieldwork there were made increasingly aware of the presence of native anthropologists. The relationship between visiting and native anthropologists is not always smooth and easy. The visitor prefers a direct and unmediated relationship with the tribals or peasants he has come to study, and sometimes finds that his native counterpart is a nuisance. Anthropologists from overseas find their Indian counterparts ignorant and ill-informed, which many of them are. Indian anthropologists feel that their western counterparts try to use them as informants, which some of them do, instead of treating them as colleagues. Sometimes the theories of colonial and neo-colonial hegemony that well-meaning western anthropologists have constructed for their own amusement backfire on them.

Perhaps by the very nature of their vocation western anthropologists feel more at ease with African or Asian tribals and peasants than with African or Asian social scientists. This may be a very good thing for their research, but I doubt that it broadens their outlook on the human condition.

What about Indian social scientists? Does the comparative study of society and culture broaden their outlook? I believe it does, whether or not they travel far and wide, but only if they reject the idea that the line between ourselves and others can be drawn once and for all, and must be drawn in the same way by everyone. Today no Indian can hope to be a serious student of society and culture without engaging with concepts, methods and theories that originated largely outside his country and have their roots in intellectual traditions other than his own.

Social scientists in India agonize endlessly over the adequacy of the existing framework of study and research, developed mainly outside their country, to the understanding and explanation of their present reality. No existing body of ideas, of no matter what provenance, is ever wholly adequate to the task of understanding a complex and changing reality. To be faithful to the spirit of comparison in the understanding of societies is to be open to ideas irrespective of their provenance and to be willing to engage with those who view the world from standpoints other than one's own. But one can do so effectively and meaningfully only if one has a standpoint of one's own and knows what that standpoint is.

The practice of sociology and social anthropology in India has taught us that whether one studies one's own or some other society, keeping an open mind is more important than travelling to distant places. It has taught us that there is no one unique or privileged standpoint in the study of society and culture. It does not help very much if we acknowledge only two standpoints, those of the insider and the outsider, in place of one. Even within the same society there generally are a plurality of standpoints, varying according to religion, class, gender and political or ideological predilection, and, besides, different outsiders may view the same society from different standpoints. Sociology and social anthropology cannot move forward unless the plurality of standpoints is accepted as a fundamental condition for the study of society and culture.

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