I.P. Desai Memorial Lecture: 26

THE CHALLENGE OF DOING SOCIAL SCIENCES TODAY

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PREFACE

The Centre for Social Studies has created an endowment fund to honour late Prof. I.P. Desai, the founder Director of the Centre. As part of the programme, we have instituted the I.P. Desai Memorial Lecture series. So far, 25 lectures have been delivered by illustrious scholars from across social science disciplines. Prof. Sujata Patel delivered the twenty-sixth lecture entitled '**The Challenge of Doing Social Sciences Today'**. It gives us great pleasure to make this lecture available to a wider academic community.

We are indeed grateful to Prof. Sujata Patel for having readily agreeing to deliver the lecture upon our invitation. For Sujataben, Centre is her second academic home as she has been associated with Centre academically since its inception. Keeping the grim status and prospects of social science research in country and particularly in Gujarat in mind, we have requested her to speak on topic related with contemporary crises in doing social science research. She readily agreed to deliver the same.

Prof. Patel, in her insightful and thought provoking lecture, focused mainly on question of does the legacy of doing sociology in India have the intellectual resources to access existing and potential group formations across local, regional and global spaces? While analysing this question further Prof. Patel argued that sociologists study how new society evolve from the deadwood of the old, while anthropologists study a 'static' culture that could not transcend its internal structures to become modern. Contending that this binary and its methodologies became the leitmotif of the organisation of anthropology/sociology in all former colonies, including India. The lecture points out efforts being undertaken since the 1970s to displace the social science from its colonial episteme, such as those provided by feminist perspectives.

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Satyakam Joshi

THE CHALLENGE OF DOING SOCIAL SCIENCES TODAY

Sujata Patel

It is with great pleasure that I stand before you today to deliver the I.P. Desai Memorial Lecture and I want to thank the Centre for giving me this honour. I knew IP for a very long time but my first exact memory is of a day in August 1976 when I met him to seek a job. I had just come back from Canada doing a Masters in Sociology and I was informed that IP had started a research institute in Surat and that this Centre might want to recruit researchers. That time, the Centre was located at his home and this is where I met him. I recall his enthusiasm about the Centre as an institution, a vehicle through which he wanted to create a small community of researchers that could explore and study the various dimensions of Gujarati life. IP's commitment was reinforced with a passion for doing social sciences, and more particularly for sociology which he had studied at the University of Bombay and whose tenets he had practised as a teacher at the MS University. In Baroda, he was a participant with others members of the academic community that envisioned a novel role for social sciences and its teaching institutions in modern India; there was a hope that these could help to change the map of intellectual consciousness of contemporary India. This paper attempts to reflect these concerns: the passion for sociology, the commitment and hope for Indian social sciences.

Since that time and a few years earlier, when both the ICSSR and this Centre were established, that is, in 1969,

there has been a massive investment in building physical infrastructure and human resources in social sciences. In 1947, India had 18 universities. These were dominated by the sciences, but there was, a small presence of social sciences: most of these universities taught history and some economics and it was rare to find the presence of political science, psychology, sociology and anthropology (only three universities were teaching the latter subjects). The next 5-6 decades have seen a phenomenal growth of institutions of higher learning and research: in 2008, there were 431 universities and 20,677 colleges in the country, which included around half a million teachers and 11.61 million students (Thorat, 2008). Again the subjects that dominated these universities were mainly the sciences and their applications. This was particularly true of the private universities which started growing since the 70s and which train by now more than 59% of the total students[1]. But even here, there is a growing presence of social science subjects.

Thus if one's looks at numbers and not proportions, it is possible to note a significant expansion of social science education; between 2005 and 2006, 45.13% of the total of 11.028 million students in India were studying arts and social sciences (Krishna and Krishna, 2010: 4) with economics showing a consistent increase in student enrolments. But even a soft subject such as sociology had increased student intake; the UGC report of 2001 for sociology states that by 2000, the students numbers increased; nearly 100,000 undergraduates, 6,000 post-graduate and 200 doctoral students received degrees in sociology in 2000 (UGC 2001). These figures testify to the fact that India has started

producing a significant proportion of social science graduates who were trained to do social science research. Thus, there was hope that this capacity growth would generate the potential for the development of social sciences.

This supply of human resources was enhanced by the financial investment made by the government. By 2007, in 27 ICSSR institutes[2], 67 government research departments, in 500 social science departments of 72 universities, together with 17 agricultural universities, 62 management institutes and 32 institutes of engineering and technology, there was active promotion of social science research (Krishna and Krishna, 2010:5). And yet in spite of this trend, commentators have continued to highlight the dismal state of social science research. The UNESCO's 2010 study titled *The World Social Science Report* has confirmed this when it indicated a dearth of publications from India having international citations. It is possible that this may be due to the fact that a large number of research studies, mainly in the field of economics using quantitative methodologies are sponsored by the government and its various ministries. Focusing on specific policy issues, these in-house studies are generally not published making it difficult to assess their scientific value.

However, Chatterjee (2002:3606) has argued that with the establishment of ICSSR, there was an expectation that research of all kinds (including sponsored ones) would be debated, defended and made accountable to the larger scholarly community. Additionally today a reinterpretation of

quantitative analysis has allowed for some very ‘big questions’ to be posed and analysed, such as the data on the missing girl child, or that which interprets domestic violence through National Family Health Survey data (John, 2008) or the collaboration of the University of Maryland with the National Council of Applied Economic Research that has and is undertaking a panel survey on human development with particular emphasis on age, caste and gender.

In spite of these encouraging trends, there remains a constant feeling of despondency among social scientists in India about their future. This is particularly true for those who use qualitative information and multi methods analysis. In spite of a significant number of journal and book publications, these social scientists not only highlight the lack of deliberations in theory and analysis but also bemoan an absence of a vibrant intellectual community (except in some metro centres) in different language communities that debate and discuss issues and research results. The various reports of the ICSSR have attempted to address these concerns but these reports have merely highlighted the supply side issues, such as declining grants for physical infrastructure and posts, or implications of corporate and international funding on social science research, or the effect of institutional dependencies on the government for autonomous scholarship.

In this paper, I am addressing a completely different issue. I am asking whether the epistemic assumptions that structure social sciences in India have any relevance to the above mentioned debates and discussions. I am interrogating the

disciplinary reservoirs of knowledge (as we have received them in India) and am enquiring whether these allow us to do a social science that can grasp the complexity and diversities of experiences that organise social relationships as these interface with social processes. The specific questions that I ask are: do we have a language to examine empirical trends (both casual and consequential) that concern itself with the matrix that organise processes, structures, institutions and sociabilities such that a comparative analysis across, within and crisscrossing localities, regions and supra regions is made possible? Does our legacy of doing social sciences have the intellectual resources to frame the formulations that such theories and practices demand? Or has this legacy restricted itself to delimit our imagination and our visions to an approach that cannot transcend its own episteme? What is this episteme and how does it trap and constrain social scientists? Is this the reason for the feeling of despondency that has attacked social scientists? Will recognition of this help to elevate this anxiety?

The paper links three sets of arguments which are presented in four different sections[3]. First, I outline the current discussions on Orientalism–Eurocentrism that suggest that the binaries of universal and particular have framed social science knowledge about the West against the East. Using this template, I trace how this episteme organised the discipline of anthropology, the first subject that found an institutionalised articulation in India in the late nineteenth century. As a consequence, the study of "traditions" through the themes of religion, caste, and family and kinship

organised the disciplinary study of India and became the organising structure of the discipline of sociology when it made its presence felt in the early twentieth century. In the next section, I indicate how nationalism confronted this colonial episteme and argue that the new perspective called methodological nationalism reproduced many of the tenets of colonialism in its various forms and practices within social sciences in India. In the conclusion, I wrap these arguments by mentioning some of the efforts being undertaken since the 70s to displace social sciences from its colonial episteme, such as the journey undertaken by feminist perspectives.

Reflexive Sociology and the Colonial Episteme

While the concept and theory of reflexivity has a long history in sociology[4], in contemporary social theory, reflexivity has becomes a mode of thinking, a methodology where theories in the discipline are applied to the discipline itself. Reflexivity is a perspective which uses the theories of knowledge construction in the field of sociology of knowledge and sociology of sociology and applies these to itself. Its use as an epistemic practice, that is, as the interrogation of the assumptions that govern traditions of disciplinary practices, is associated with the work of Pierre Bourdieu. Unlike his contemporaries who used reflexivity to unearth the biases of class, gender and race in the formulations of theories and perspectives or the biases related to a position occupied by the theorist in the academic field, Bourdieu has emphasised and elaborated what he has called: the intellectualist bias.

For Bourdieu, this form of reflexivity entails systemic exploration of 'unthought' in the thought and an assessment of the way this 'unthought' organises the practices and dispositions of the field, in this case, the field of social science in India. Bourdieu has asserted that what needs to be constantly scrutinised is the collective scientific unconscious "embedded in theories, problems and construction of categories" and those that organise methods of scientific judgements. Wacquant asserts that for Bourdieu, "…(t)he subject of reflexivity must ultimately be the social scientific field" (Wacquant, 1992:40). Bourdieu goes on to emphasise that this form of reflexivity is embedded in debate and deliberations and is enmeshed in democratic principles of doing social sciences. For, no scholar can do this work independently. Rather, this has to be done through public debate and mutual critique by the "occupants of all antagonistic and complementary positions in the scientific field" (Wacquant, 1992:40-41). Bourdieu's position implies that reflexivity as a tool is enmeshed in a political project of critique, debate, deliberations and interrogation and that as an intellectual resource and as a methodology, it is a characteristic and an identity of the discipline of sociology.

Michael Burawoy has thus suggested that reflexive sociology enters as "guardian of the discipline and the conscience of the profession". It suggests that the profession has to recall that knowledge is about values and that these values need to support all research programmes. Though the audience for reflexive sociology is academia, it is important for all researchers to assert that it draws its sustenance from "a culture of critical discourse. The latter often transcends

disciplinary boundaries, drawing on traditions foreign to sociology. In its concerns with values, reflexive sociology has an elective affinity with public sociology" (Burawoy, 2004: 105).

Which theories in the field of sociology of knowledge and/or the sociology of sociology do I use to understand and comprehend the 'unthought' of assumptions in the social sciences in India? I am engaging with a perspective called the coloniality/modernity theories. This perspective is associated with a group of Central and Latin America scholars who have been debating and critically assessing a range of positions such as dependency theories, liberation philosophy and autonomous social science, modernity and post-modernity, subaltern theories and cultural, feminist and environmental perspectives. (Escobar, 2007)[5]. In addition to the work of modernity/coloniality theorists, I am also drawing from an aligned position elaborated by some Marxist social scientists on the history, sociology and philosophy of what is now known today as 'Eurocentrist-Orientalist episteme.

Samir Amin (2008) was the first to provide us with an historical argument regarding the growth of the Eurocentric episteme in the 18th century when he suggests that the Eurocentric episteme is entwined in the twin processes of crystallisation of the European society and Europe's conquest of the world. Eurocentrism, Amin argues, clothes these twin processes into one by emphasising the first that is the crystallisation of the European society and disregarding the second, Europe's conquest of the world.

Amin's argument is presented at three levels: First, he contends that in the pre-Christian era, Europe was the periphery of the Mediterranean tributary states whose centre was at its eastern edge. These tributary systems created four systems of scholastic metaphysics: Hellenistic, Eastern Christian, Islamic and Western Christian. While all of these contributed to the formation of culture and consciousness of Europe, it was the contribution of Egypt and later of medieval Islamic scholastics, which was decisive in changing Europe's culture from being metaphysical to scientific (Amin, 2008:38). Second, his analysis moves towards the medieval period. Here, he documents how since the period of Renaissance, Europe's memory of its history being embedded in Egyptian metaphysics and medieval Islamic scholastics, slowly died out to be replaced with another history, now self-consciously created, that narrated Europe's growth as the consequence of its birth within the Hellenic-Roman civilisation. Third, through the means of what the Latin American philosopher, Enrique Dussel (2000:465) has called 'semantic slippage', Amin argues, that this new European narrative made Europe the centre of the world and of modern 'civilisation', whose distinctive characteristic was science and 'universal reason'. The rest of the world was perceived to be its periphery which, it was argued could not or did not have the means to become modern.

Immanuel Wallerstein (1997, 2006) has elaborated this historical argument and extended it to suggest that the theory of Eurocentrism is not only a theory of history and a methodology of historiography but also an episteme of the social science. In the nineteenth century, Eurocentrism

became associated with social sciences through five attributes: (a) the mode of historiography; (b) the parochiality of universalism; (c) the analysis of (Western) civilisation; (d) its Orientalism and (e) its attempts to impose a theory of progress (Wallerstein, 1997:94). These trends gave social sciences an ‘original epistemology’ (Wallerstein, 2006:48). The last attribute became ‘a key element’ in managing the reproduction of modernity.

This initial statement of Immanuel Wallerstein has since then been elaborated by the Latin American thinkers of the modernity/coloniality school. First they reiterate what Amin had said earlier, that the theory of progress and the growth of modern civilisation is a theory of constructing a self-defined ethnocentric theory of history and thus Eurocentrism was a theory of the Europe in terms of ‘I’. More specifically, they argued that European modernity analysed its own birth (through a linear conception of time) and suggested that it was produced through the values and institutional system that were universalised in Europe in the last 500 years in its own backyard. It incorporated two master narratives: the superiority of Western civilisation (through progress and reason) and the belief in the continuous growth of capitalism (through modernisation, development, and the creation of new markets). These master narratives, which Charles Taylor (1995) calls a "culturist approach," are now recognised as ethnocentric in nature. This ethnocentrism assessed its own growth in terms of itself (Europe) rather than in terms of the other (the rest of the colonised world) which was its object of control and through which it became modern. Eurocentrism postulated a theory of "interiority"

(Mignolo, 2002), that is, a perspective that perceived itself from within rather than from the outside. A notion of linear time affirmed a belief that social life and its institutions, emerging in Europe from around fourteenth century onwards would now influence the making of the new world. These assumptions framed the ideas elaborated by Hegel, Kant, and the Encyclopaedists and were incorporated in the sociologies of Durkheim, Weber, and Marx.

Thus, second, they also affirm, in a manner similar to Amin, that this European narrative simultaneously makes invisible and silences events, processes and actions of violence against the rest of the world, without which Europe could not have become modern. Amin called this process Europe's conquest of the world. For the Latin American thinkers, Eurocentrism legitimised the control and domination of the rest of the world through the episteme of coloniality (Dussel, 1993; Mignolo, 2002; Quijano, 2000). Thus, Dussel argues:

> ...modernity is, in fact, a European phenomena, but one constituted in a dialectical relation with a non-modern alterity that is its ultimate content. Modernity appears when Europe appears itself as the 'centre' of *World* history that it inaugurates; the periphery that surrounds this centre is consequently part of its self-definition. The occlusion of this periphery ... leads the major thinkers of the centre into a Eurocentric fallacy in their understanding of modernity. (Dussel; 1993: 65)

Third, Eurocentrism is not only a theory of history, but an episteme of modernity, a theory of power/knowledge. If this

episteme theorised the 'I', it also theorised the 'other', the 'periphery'. Eurocentrism legitimises a theory of the separate and divided nature of the knowledge of the West and the East. It divides the attributes of the West and the East by giving value to the two divisions; while one is universal, superior and 'emancipatory', the other is particular, and non-emancipatory and thus inferior. This episteme now termed 'categorical imperative' a la Kant, simultaneously creates the knowledge of the 'I' (Europe, the moderns, the West) against the 'other' (as the peripheral, non-modern, and the East).

This discourse of modernity presented a universal set of axioms in which time as historicity defined its relationship to space. To put it differently, because it saw its own growth in terms of itself and defined it through its own specific and particular history, that which was outside itself (the place) was perceived in terms of its opposite: lack of history and thus inferior. Henceforth, all knowledge was structured in terms of the master binary of the West (which had history, culture, reason, and science) and the East (which was enclosed in space, nature, religion, and spirituality). This binary linked the division and subsequent hierarchization of groups within geo-spatial territories in the world in terms of a theory of temporal linearity: the West was modern because it had evolved to articulate the key features of modernity as against the East which was traditional.

Fourth, as mentioned above, Eurocentric knowledge is based on the construction of multiple and repeated divisions or oppositions which gets constructed as hierarchies. These oppositions, the sociologist Anibal Quijano (2000) argues are

based on a racial and gendered classification of the world population. This principle becomes the assumption to further divide the peoples of the world in geo-cultural terms, with which are attached to further oppositions, such as reason and body, science and religion, subject and object, culture and nature, masculine and feminine, modern and traditional. While European modernity conceptualized its growth in terms of linear time, it sequestered the (various) East(s) divided between two cultural groups, the 'primitives'/barbarians and the civilized as being enclosed in their (own) spaces.

The consolidation of these attributes across the West–East axis and its subsequent hierarchisation across spatial regions in the world allow social science to discover the 'nature' of the various people, nations and ethnic groups in the world in terms of the attributes of the binaries. This is conceptualised by Anibal Quijano as 'coloniality of power', a discourse of power, control, and hegemony which is founded on two myths:

> …first, the idea of the history of human civilization as a trajectory that departed from a state of nature and culminated in Europe; second, a view of the differences between Europe and non-Europe as natural (racial) differences and not consequences of a history of power. Both myths can be unequivocally recognized in the foundations of evolutionism and dualism, two of the nuclear elements of Eurocentrism (Quijano, 2000:542).

Fifth, these binary oppositions constructed the knowledge of the two worlds, the West and the East, and placed these as oppositions, creating hierarchies between them and thereby dividing them in terms of "I" and the "other". The 'I' was always a universal while the 'other' was conceptualised in particular terms such that social sciences maintained "…a difference under the assumption that we are all human" (Mignolo, 2002, p. 71). This was part of the normative project of modernity and subsequently of its sociological theory. These were the "truths" of modernity and the modern world; these truths were considered objective and universal (Dussel, 1993; Mignolo, 2802; Quijano, 2000).

These seminal assumptions were embodied in the framing of the disciplines of sociology and anthropology in the late nineteenth century. Sociology became the study of modern (European-later to be extended to western) society while anthropology was the study of (non-European and non-western) traditional societies. Thus, sociologists studied how the new societies evolved from the deadwood of the old; a notion of time and history were embedded in its discourse.

Contrary anthropologists studied how space/place organised 'static' culture that could not transcend its internal structures to become modern. It is my contention that this binary and its methodologies became henceforth the leitmotif of the organisation of social sciences in all ex-colonial countries, including India. Even when Indian social sciences were studying the social in its modern avaatar, enclosed within the crevices of these studies was an understanding of its difference from the 'real', that is, Western modernity.

Colonial modernity and the formation of Indian Anthropology

Levi Strauss famously stated: anthropology was a handmaiden of colonialism. Anthropology was the first discipline or knowledge system to be established in the subcontinent and I start my discussion with an assessment of its structuring in Eurocentric epistemic moorings.

Eurocentric frames organised the academic knowledge of the social in India. Eurocentrism gave India a cultural value: Hinduism. The discourse of coloniality collapsed India and Hinduism into each other (Patel, 2006, 2007) and this discourse was elaborated by colonial anthropologists and administrators who later further divided the East that they were studying into separate geo-spatial cultural territories and "regionally" sub-divided in terms of their relationship with Hinduism. Those that were directly related to what was constructed as Hinduism such as castes and tribes became part of the "majority" and organised in terms of distinct hierarchies (castes were considered more superior than tribes who were thought to be 'primitive'), while those that were not, were conceived as 'minorities', these being mainly groups who practised Islam, Sikhism and Christianity (Patel, 2006).

Evolutionist theories were used to make Hinduism the 'Great tradition' and anchored into a timeless civilization and its margins, the folk cultures, the 'little traditions' were contrasted from the former[6]. Anthropologists/sociologists researching on South Asian religions have oftentimes uncritically accepted this logic, and thereby become trapped

in this discourse. The geographically vast subcontinent of South Asia with its thousands of communities having distinct cultural practices and ideas have lived and experienced existence in various forms of unequal and subordinate relationships with each other. In the nineteenth century, anthropological/sociological knowledge dissolved these distinctions and re-categorised them into four or five major religious traditions, thereby constructing a master' narrative of the majority and minority (Dirks, 2001). This logic homogenized distinctions between groups, but it also naturalised the Orientalist-Eurocentric language as the only language to comprehend the unequal distribution of power and resources.

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, and 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 nineteenth 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. This theory was critical in producing the theory regarding distinctions between 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 civilisational 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 categorisation were not peculiar to India. These 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 (Cohn, 1997). In the process, "caste" (and "tribe") was made out to be a far more pervasive, totalising, and uniform concept than even 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 pre-colonial 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, there were temple communities, territorial groups, lineage segments, family units, royal retinues, warrior sub-castes, "little as opposed to large kingdoms," occupational reference groups, agricultural and trading associations, networks of devotional and sectarian religious communities, and priestly cables (Dirks, 2001).

This classificatory schema, that of use of the attribute of race to divide the peoples of the world found its own 'local' legitimation, its own articulation and a 'voice', once colonial authorities had imposed these to divided the 'natives'. Thus, this project found an expression (ironically and paradoxically) in the work of indigenous intellectuals in the subcontinent searching to find an identity against colonialism. For them, the immediate necessity was to locate 'our modernities'. Thus, unlike the Europeans who understood the modern wherein "the present was the site of one's escape from the past", for the indigenous Indian intellectuals "it is precisely the present [given the colonial experience] from which we feel we must escape". As a result, the desire to be creative and search for a new modernity was now transposed to the past of India, a past ironically constructed by orientalist colonial modernity. Thus, Chatterjee argues 'we construct a picture of 'those days' when there was beauty, prosperity and healthy sociability. This makes the very modality of our coping with modernity radically different from the historically evolved modes of Western modernity' (Chatterjee, 1997:19). This past was now rarefied to understand the present and the future; an orientalist imagination came to define the so-called indigenous expression.

In a different way, the historian, Sumit Sarkar makes a similar argument when he suggests that while modern Western history writing has generally been state oriented (with an understanding of nation as a reflection of the nation-state), the historical consciousness of the Indian intelligentsia, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

century's, was oriented to the valorisation of culture against the state. He states:

> In this period, *samaj* (society, community) came to be counterpoised to *rashtra* or *rajshakti* (state, the political domain). The real history of India, it was repeatedly asserted, was located in the first, not the second, for *samaj* embodied the distinctive qualities peculiar to the genius, culture and religion of the Indian people (Sarkar, 1997:21)

> And

> …. *samaj* was simultaneously all too often conceptualised in Hindu, high caste gentry, and paternalistic terms….(Sarkar, 1997:23).

Obviously, racial constructions of 'difference' found a new legitimacy within a Brahminical casteist ideology as these two overlapped each other to organise the study of social sciences through new reconstructed majoritarian and or/casteist positions or through rationalist and 'secular' silences of this process that in turn allowed its legitimation. Thereby, these reconstituted the binary that organised Eurocentrism and legitimised the fact that 'I" could construct the knowledge of the 'other'. It also legitimised the fact that 'I" is universal and that the 'other' has to be conceived in particular terms.

Eurocentric episteme thus became part of the 'background understandings' and 'beliefs' and have obfuscated a critical

look at knowledge production of social sciences in India and more generally in South Asia. Specifically in the case of India, this knowledge (1) was produced as part of colonial politics of rule; (2) led to a disciplinary divide between modern (economics and political science) and non-modern social sciences-sociology and social anthropology; (3) the latter came to be studied in terms of assumptions that were in opposition to modernity; (4) these used disciplinary practices such as Indology and ethnography to elaborate these positions; (5) this way of thinking was codified with the help of native intelligentsia, the savarnas; (6) it thus reflected the social order as represented by this group both in its expressed articulations and in its silences (such as in economics) and (7) it mitigated an examination of the way classification systems of the state organised new forms of inequalities in the colonial territory.

Methodological nationalism and state-sponsored social sciences

In the context of creating a global cosmopolitan theory, social theorists have recently raised some seminal questions regarding the imprint of the idiom of the nation in classical and twentieth century sociological thought. Much in the same way as the discussions on colonialism and anthropology proceeded, social theorists who have termed this 'imprint', methodological nationalism, have deliberated the ways on which it has framed and organised social science knowledge and carried with it assumptions which work to structure social science inquiry. In the context of India and other ex-colonial countries, it is also necessary to

ask whether methodological nationalism reconstituted within itself the Eurocentric-Orientalist episteme.

It has been contented by Ulrich Beck (2007) that though social sciences in Europe were structured through the prism of the nation, nation-state, and that of nationalism, reflexive theories have ignored these intellectual moorings and instead universalised its language disregarding this history. Methodological nationalism implies a coevalness between 'society' and the 'nation-state' i.e., it argues that a discussion on modern society (which social sciences do) entails an implicit understanding of the nation. Or, in other words, the nation is treated as the natural and necessary representation of the modern society. Methodological nationalism is the taken-for-granted belief that nation-state boundaries are natural boundaries within which societies are contained. Sociology, according to Beck (2007) has not criticised the fact that humanity is not “naturally divided into a limited number of nations, which on the inside, organised themselves as nation-states, and on the outside, set boundaries to distinguish themselves from other nation-states” (Beck 2007: 287). As a consequence, the social science visions of culture and politics, law, justice, and history represent that of individual nation-state's (ibid.).

In an earlier exposition (Patel, 2011), I have argued that commentators have distinguished between three trends of methodological nationalism. The first is ignorance and/or blindness in recognising that modern societies are structured in terms of the way nation and nationality are organised. As a result, social scientists have generally ignored the study of

nation and nationalism in each country have not discussed the interface between modernity and nationalism. The second strand, following the point noted above is a mode of 'naturalisation'. Social scientific theories take for granted official discourses, agendas, loyalties, and histories without problematising them. These study groups and cultures as being unitary and organically linked to territories thus reproducing the social world as bounded culturally specific spatial units. The third strand is that of territorialisation of the social science imaginary and its reduction to the boundaries of the nation-state. There is an obsession to comprehend all aspects of life in terms of territory, rather than seeing social interconnections between territorial boundaries.

As in the case of many countries, and so was it in India, social science disciplines were moored in the project of nationalism and carried the assumptions that organised these nationalist traditions. Since the early decades of the nineteenth century, most Indian leaders were convinced that their country had become decadent and degenerate, desperately needed rejuvenation, reconstruction and a renaissance. While there was little disagreement regarding the causes of this degeneration and decadence – these were related to colonialism, domination by the British, the extraction and control for imperialist purposes of India's rich material resources and the destruction of its vitality and ideas by the colonial elite, there was debate regarding the possible solutions.

As nationalism in India evolved into three different currents, we find similar trends also within social sciences. There were

the modernists, the traditionalists and modern-traditionalists. Parekh (1995) distinguishes between two groups of 'traditionalists', one whom he calls the 'real' traditionalists and the other called, 'modern-traditionalists'. The latter's goal was to intervene in the 'future' and construct a sociological language best suited to bring in transformation of the specific culture that they were studying: India. For the former the goal was and has been to create the language from the 'past' and carry it forward to the 'present' and the 'future'.

The 'modernists' wanted India to identify with the future and with progress. They argued that the problem was with the past, with Indian culture which had made the 'Indian' people passive, lifeless and non-productive. They advocated the path set by Europe earlier and wanted India to have a new industrial economy, free from agrarian dependencies. It is no coincidence that these ideas became the source for building a new discipline of economics and later of its intervention in the planning and developmental process inaugurated by independent India. This knowledge, we know has rarely engaged with the social terrain and most often been silent regarding the issues of pollution and purity and of casteism and patriarchy that structure and organise inequities in the country. It is this silence that continues to accept the Eurocentric-Orientalist episteme.

However, this perspective was countered by the 'traditionalists'. They argued for a need to draw out theories from the past – from that of India's rich histories and its civilisation. Though this civilisation had suffered a decline, it

was essentially and fundamentally sound and was embodied with much strength. These strengths had kept the 'Indian' people together over centuries and these ideas will continue to bind them together in the future. The Indian society had a distinct character and history and had evolved in interaction with its people and its agencies. Indians and its social sciences needed to mobilise their society's creative resources for its regeneration without losing its coherence and inner balance. They also cautioned Indians not to imitate the West, take its language and its values. India has to work out its own salvation in its own terms – its temperaments, traditions and circumstances. This set of ideas framed sociological language in India and can be best seen in the work of G.S. Ghurye who used an Orientalist methodology to discuss indigenous concepts and later M. N. Srinivas both of whom excavated Indian traditions such as religion, caste, tribe and the family system[7].

The third trend, the 'modern-traditionalists' framed the ideas of syncretism. The goal of modern-traditionalists was to understand the present and construct a social science language best suited to bring in transformation of the specific culture that they were studying: India. Unlike the traditionalists, they did not advocate the necessity to go back to the golden age. However, they did not abandon the traditionalist argument that India did not have glorious past, some of them even suggested that democracy has indigenous moorings, ideas which grounded the language of political sociology in the immediate post-independence years[8].

The post-independent Indian state which was ruled by the indigenous elite initiated the expansion of the system of higher education in order to redress the imbalances created by colonialism and to create pathways towards modernity. This policy drew its inspiration from nationalist thought. No wonder most Indian academics were supporters of this programme and actors and deliberators with the state in its higher education policies. It led to the institutionalisation of a close functional relationship between Indian academia and higher education and by extension between the project of knowledge creation and that of nationhood. It also institutionalised the various kinds of nationalist ideas regarding the social, the political and the economic elaborated the three kinds of nationalism, mentioned above. Thus, social scientists in India (unlike those in Europe and the United States) were neither blind nor ignorant about the significance of the nation and nation-state. Rather, they were enthusiastic supporters of the nationalist project of higher education and the particular roles that the state demanded that they play within the higher education system as social scientists.

This nationalist agenda entailed a need to professionalise the discipline and organise it within the territory of the nation-state. In this context, two strands of methodological nationalism mentioned above, that of territorialisation and 'naturalisation' became in new ways, symbiotically linked with each other to become an integral part of the traditions of social science thinking in India. The various disciplines came to be closely associated with the official discourses and methods of understanding the relationship between nation,

nation-state, and modernity. Within the overarching vision that the nation-state consists of discrete groups called castes and that diversity is the nation's signature various social sciences put together their agenda: economics focused theories of development and planning, political science on democracy and its moorings, sociology on religion, caste and the family system and anthropology on the way the 'primitive groups', the tribes were organised. Only one attribute of inequality was recognised by the new nation-state, that of income and was related to a diffuse concept: poverty[9].

It is no coincidence thus to note that contemporary social science language remained mute on the political moorings of this project, its imbrications in the colonial episteme and its close linkages with the metropolitan advanced capitalism and its embeddedness in the dynamics of capital accumulation on a world scale. It took for granted official discourses, agendas, loyalties and histories without problematising them. Additionally, methodological nationalism took-for-granted the fact that the nation-state boundaries are natural boundaries of India. Thus, social sciences territorialised the caste and gendered elite visions of the nation imbricated in the colonial episteme and used these as a lens to understand groups bounded within the confines of the nation-state.

This orientation stamped the extensive production of social science literature that took place in India after 1947. All narratives of social sciences acknowledge the fact that after independence the nation-state intervened to ensure an

extensive institutionalisation of knowledge systems and particularly that of social sciences through the expansion of the system of higher education and also through the establishment of research funding organisations such as ICSSR, ICHR and ICPR. Indian academics supported the state's programmes and became actors and deliberators of its higher education and developmental policies. This reinforced the close functional relationship between Indian academics and the system of higher education and by extension between the project of knowledge creation and the elite/upper class, male and savarna conceptions of nationhood. No wonder, what developed in India was a culture of professionalisation that equated social science knowledge to the state's policy orientations. This was unlike Europe where social sciences developed through a reflective and/or a public intervention and its professionalisation was related to the latter two orientations. In India, social sciences remained entangled with a policy orientation and an Eurocentric perspective.

Social scientists self-consciously proclaimed methodological nationalism as their project. Henceforth, the hegemonic imagined visions of the state's ruling groups and their practices and dispositions became the frames of doing social science, thereby not only silencing the recognition of marginalities of all kinds but also advocating its virtual disappearance in its language in the first few decades after independence. This nationalist perspective legitimised the idea that if Indians as citizens do research, they are rid of the colonial moorings of social science research and that nationalist regulations will constrain any further inequities in

knowledge production. However, Eurocentrism is not only an episteme, it is also a way to organise the production, distribution, consumption and reproduction of knowledge unequally across the different parts of the world.

In the following, I elaborate how this process has affected the practices of doing research. I take the example of sociology as a case.

The state demanded that sociologists together with other social scientists develop and organise systematic knowledge about contemporary society. It also commandeered them to respond to planned social change. In this context, sociologists firstly, affirmed the need to have a sociological language that can comprehend the uniqueness of Indian nation, its culture, and its civilization and analyse the impact of social change on their unique institutions. The initial quest for sociologists in India was to define the language to study one's own society (India) and to do so on one's (indigenous) 'own terms', ostensibly without colonial and now neo-colonial tutelage. Sociologists drew from the work of nationalists and institutionalised the particularistic problematique and thus started assessing the changes occurring within India's characteristic institutions-caste, kinship, family, and religion through the problematique of ‘structure and change’. As mentioned above, this particularistic problematique had much in common with the notions of India embedded within elite and mainstream nationalism. Thus, if colonial heritage was a key element that structured this effort, the need to examine how modernity and modernization (in the context of nation building) were organising the changes occurring

within the institutions of family, caste, kinship, and religion fuelled this energy. Ironically and paradoxically, these efforts also reproduced the methodological binary institutionalised within Eurocentrism. Thus, similar to the Eurocentric positions, the knowledge of the ‘other’ was constituted by the ‘I’.

If there was a critique, it was against the ‘book view’, against indology which was associated with colonialism and an affirmation of ‘field view. What was retained was ethnography. What was ultimately institutionalised as a standard and uniform language to examine and assess 'social change in modern India', was the perspective provided by M.N. Srinivas. Srinivas' perspective was extremely well-placed to be incorporated as a standard variant. It was modern, in that it promoted empirical investigations of jatis/castes. Thereby, it asserted a notion of indigenity in so far as it introduced participant observation as an 'insider's perspective' of doing sociology and as mentioned above thus remained closely affiliated to elite visions of society. The key leadership roles that Srinivas and his colleagues at the Department of Sociology of University of Delhi undertook in the various institutions mentioned above also legitimised the universalisation of his sociological vision, with other positions being pushed to the margins. Social anthropology of Srinivasian perspective was designed to represent the language of sociology.

In these circumstances, the discipline of sociology retained its Eurocentric particularistic character. This problem related itself to the methodology being used – that of participant

observation. Saberwal (1983) was one of the first to criticise the sole reliance on participant observation to study social change in India. The latter did not allow, he argued, its user to present a theoretically and methodologically challenged perspective to assess and examine the complex processes of conflict and consensus at work in India. The discipline needed a language that can study the complex macro interfaces between groups and processes which often were in a relationship of involution. Oommen (1983/2007) continued this argument by highlighting how the unit of analysis is critical in understanding contemporary modern processes. It is possible to examine family, caste, and kinship through small units of study. But this is not so in the case of critical issues of contemporary salience, such as the impact of partition on the Indian nation, or the question why untouchability continues to be practised in contemporary India. The same argument was reiterated by Dhanagare (1980: 25), who added to this debate, pointing his criticism to the functionalist theory, which he argued could not assess conflicts and contestations that are becoming part of the Indian experience of modernity. Sociology, he argued, needs to be understood as social criticism. If historical analysis is used to assess changes, then sociologists would be able to grasp the interrelationship between macro and micro processes.

For Saberwal (1983), the problem was also related to the way the method of participant observation was conceptualised and institutionalised across departments, within the teaching and learning processes. With non-trained teachers as interlocutions of the teaching process,

increasingly description rather than analysis dominated the teaching of this method. Increasingly, the sociologist/ethnographer–teacher within departments encouraged doctoral students to use 'insider' descriptive perspectives to generate monographs of 'my village' and/or 'my community', thereby affirming savarna and patriarchal positions (Saberwal 1983: 308)[10]. In these circumstances, how is autonomy of thought and knowledge possible?

Towards a Conclusion

Social sciences in India were born with colonialism and inherited the Eurocentric-Orientalist episteme. If nationalist ideas attempted to break down this episteme and confront colonial academic theories and practices, methodological nationalism ironically and paradoxically consolidated its reproduction. The consequence has been academic dependence and ‘infantilisation’ of scientific practices which have remained at an incipient stage of growth. Additionally, an intellectual culture defined by western social science is held out as a model for the rest of the world. It is backed by the sheer size of its intellectual, human, physical, and capital resources together with the infrastructure that is necessary for its reproduction[11].

Without reflexive sociology, social sciences cannot move forward; it will remain caught in discussion which relates to the supply side of the problem. Reflexive sociology, I have argued is a political project. It converts concerns of the public, critically examines these, interrogates the existing assumptions, assesses how they have been embedded in concepts, theories and perspectives that inhere within social

sciences and allow for new ways of thinking to emerge. Feminist studies had initiated a project of reflexivity; when started, it interrogated sociology's disciplinary inheritance in family and kinship studies, caste and religious studies. Feminist studies posed theoretical and methodological challenges by introducing a perspective on power at four levels: first, it argued that there are institutional but more particularly non-institutional forms of power. Systems of family, kinship and caste flow through all economic, social and cultural relationships; second given that in India, inequities were organised during the colonial period, feminist studies asserted that a historical and an interdisciplinary approach is imperative for the study of the 'social'; third, feminist studies outlined a theory of intersection that explored the way economic and cultural inequalities together with exclusions were organically connected and lastly, feminist studies suggested a need to complicate the concepts of agency and experience given that actors/agents can and do represent both dominant and subaltern positions in their life cycles. Certainly, these are large questions, but these have given direction to new research and theories and provoked debates and have allowed new research projects to be undertaken.

Reflexive sociology's outreach is not limited to a critique of the 'unthought' in terms of ideas and knowledge systems. These 'unthought' assumptions are also located in the institutional, in the practices that organise and manage research institutes and universities. Bourdieu has suggested that reflexivity needs to be reconstituted as a set of academic dispositions that should become part of our

habitus, everyday practice. It is only when this happens will it challenge the legacies of Eurocentric episteme.

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[1] In 2000, there were 250 private universities and 10,000 private colleges and by 2010-11, the number had increased to 600 private universities, 32,000 colleges and 17 million students. In 2011, 59% of India's students were studying in the private sector, while there were only 2.6% in the central and 38.5% in the state sectors, respectively.

[2] Today the number is 30.

[3] This paper is based on earlier published articles. See Patel, 2006, 2007, 2010, 2010a, 2010b, 2011, 2011a, 2013, 2013a, 2014, 2014a, 2014b, 2015, 2015a, 2016, 2016a

[4] It has been earlier defined as self-reference and self-awareness and has been part of the theories of symbolic interactionism and dramatology. Recently, Anthony Giddens has suggested that reflexivity can be used in three ways: as agency when actors are said to be reflexive, those who can reflect back and evaluate their action; as social science that is reflexive, because the knowledge it generates can be reintroduced back into society; and as society being reflexive, as it grows to organise and manage its own growth (Giddens, 1990).

[5] Escobar argues that this group "seeks to make a decisive intervention into the very discursivity of the modern sciences in order to craft another space for the production of knowledge, another way of thinking, creating the very possibility of talking about worlds and knowledges otherwise" (Escobar, 2007: 179).

[6] The colonial state, this paper is arguing codified a history of amorphous religious practices and that of conflicts and contestations regarding religious ideas and religiosities into a discourse that argued that Hinduism was a set of "philosophical ideas, iconology and rituals." In this version, Hinduism was reduced to Brahmanism (ideas and rituals practised by groups who are pure, such as upper castes, who believed that its fundamentals are elaborated in ancient scriptures and who performed sacrifices). What was ignored by this discourse was the relevance of Sramanism, groups having affiliation to non-Brahmanic religions and who practised diverse forms of

religiosities, including animism. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish between culture and religion as life worlds and practices from its association as an ideology and a discourse. Even Brahmanic religious discourses are part of everyday life of a significant section of the population of India, and of course, those cultural expressions and life worlds need to be studied as practices. Given that ideology and discourse have increasingly become part of contemporary politics of the rightist movements, it is important for sociologists to understand and examine its links with colonialism. The paper suggests that the incorporation of Orientalist thought in sociological language reduces the experience of "fluidities" and diversities of religious practices, a heritage of the Indian subcontinent and asserts only a homogenised model of Hinduism.

[7] The traditional nationalists suggested that India was a civilisation and thereby borrowed and reinterpreted orientalist knowledge to articulate an Indian version. The notion of civilisation has a long history in Orientalism. In the late 18th and early 19th century, Orientalists generalised on the basis of the Greek and Egyptian civilisations. Later with the discovery of 'Indian' civilisation, the study of India was absorbed into the existing discourse about antique civilizations. Early British Orientalists used Sanskrit texts to study this civilization and to place it within the linear theories of history. Some even argued that the high culture of Hindu civilization emerged from Greek influence. However, the traditional nationalists inverted this argument to suggest that Greek culture has learnt its science from India (Patel, 2013).

[8] See for instance, Rajni Kothari's *Caste in Indian Politics*, 1973.

[9] There were dissenting voices, such as from the Marxists to this position but these cumulatively remained weak. I have examined how D.D. Kosambi and D. P. Mukerjee were able to make the initial epistemic breaks. However, these did not change the contours of the mainstream disciplines. (See Patel, 2013, 2014a).

[10] For Saberwal, the problem thus relates to the Indian notions of modernity. In the 1950s, he stated, an idea gained currency, that modernity can be organised through the expansion of universities rather than first creating a group of professionals that can understand the strengths and weaknesses of the perspectives and methodologies

being used, who would then transmit these in professional ways (Patel, 2014b).

[11] This includes not only equipment, but archives, libraries, publishing houses, and journals; an evolution of a professional culture of intellectual commitment and engagement which connects the producers and consumers of knowledge; institutions such as universities and students having links with others based in northern nation-states and global knowledge production agencies (Patel 2014a).

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