

ABSTRACTS OF PLENARY SPEAKERS

Presidential Address

Colonial modernity and methodological nationalism: The structuring of sociological traditions of India.

Sujata Patel, University of Hyderabad

Sociology has had a long history in India. Though institutionalised when a Department of teaching was established in 1919 in Bombay, its informal history is located in colonial period when administrators collated information about and classified groups in India and used this data to rule the country. After independence, the Government of India encouraged further collection of information and established new Universities to transmit this knowledge and thereby promoted a nationalist agenda of education. The paper suggests that in these two phases, two sociological traditions were constituted as dominant traditions—that of scholars and scholarship, practices of doing sociology—through methods and methodologies and learning and teaching. Over time these were reproduced through institutions—Universities and Research Institutes and through the dissemination of knowledge in the forms of books and journals.

This address discusses the consolidation of the above mentioned traditions in sociology of India, identifies them as that of colonial modernity and methodological nationalism. It argues that these traditions had epistemic and methodological moorings that structured and organised the discipline to represent and identify itself in specific ways. In the first phase sociology presented itself as anthropology, classified various groups and using the Indological/Orientalist methods. Though University systems had a hesitant beginning in this phase, most of the reproduction of knowledge was done in and through the state, mainly through the census, gazetteers and ethnographic surveys. In the second phase the discipline represented itself as social anthropology, using ethnography and field view to examine the micro through ethnography of castes and jatis, family and kinship systems and local manifestations of Hindu practices and reproducing this identity through the teaching and learning systems operating in the many Universities established by the Indian nation-state.

Since the 80s with the unleashing of global forces and changes in global thinking of sociology, there has been a rupture of these dominant traditions. Where will it take us? The later part of the paper will elaborate the trends that dalit, tribal and feminist studies are promoting to rethink sociology of India in the context of the reconstitution of comparative global sociology.

M.N. Srinivas Lecture

History of Secularism in India

Imtiaz Ahmad

Secularism as an ideology and a framework of governance evolved in the West, but this western inheritance had no relevance to secularism in India. It was Jawaharlal Nehru who gave currency to it in India. It is not that Nehru was unaware of its western origin and development. He deliberately did not invoke it in his effort to introduce it to the Indian masses. He used it to refer to a wide variety of things, such as tolerance, social diversity

and pluralism and social harmony. Above all, he gave currency to it to emphasize communal peace.

This lecture dwells on several themes and dimensions of secularism. It examines the responses of the Hindu and Muslim communities. The Hindu masses had not the slightest notion of what secularism meant or should mean. They saw it as an invitation for social and communal harmony and peace and acceptance of diversity. Therefore, their acceptance of secularism was overwhelming. Elite Hindus, learned as they were in the history of secularism in the West, were less enthusiastic about secularism but accepted it as a concession to the minorities. Ultra Hindu groups such as the Hindu Mahasabha and the Rashtriya Swayam Sangh were hostile to the idea of secularism.

Muslim responses were even more varied. Muslim theologians rejected it on theological grounds, all the more as secularism was translated as religiousness. Muslims who were influenced by liberal and leftist ideologies espouse it and even went on to translate it in their daily lives. The large numbers of Muslims were skeptical whether the Indian state could remain secular for long. For them the presence of Nehru at the helm of affairs was a greater assurance that they would be treated fairly. Therefore, they decided to wait and watch.

The remaining part of the lecture dwells on the factors and developments which weakened the thrust towards secularism. The developments include Jaiprakash Narain's idea of non-statal politics and the legitimacy it provided to the forces who had been and were opposed to secularism from the start. The current situation is a continuation of that process. Needless to add, the lecture ends up with an evaluation of the future prospects.

Radhakama Mukerjee Lecture

Eroded Life-Worlds And Emergent Assemblages: Rethinking The Sociologies/Social Anthropologies Of The Contemporary

A. R. Vasavi

At the turn of the twentieth century, Radha Kamal Mukherjee wrote about studying 'social ecologies' that reflected the trends of his times. A century later, new definitions and understanding of our contemporary times suggest theoretical and methodological approaches which are to chart sociology and anthropology's new course. Interrogating these propositions is to assert the need for going beyond the focus on assemblages and to recognise the multiple and diverse ways in which societies are experiencing forms of erosions. Such eroded life-worlds represent, along with emergent assemblages, a range of contemporary conditions in which societies are being reconstituted. Can a plurality of anthropologies then be articulated so as to engage with and understand varied cultures and hence the state of the new 'social ecologies' of our contemporary societies?

Plenary One: : Contemporary Perspectives on Family, Marriage and Kinship

Chair: Patricia Uberoi

Contemporary concerns in Family, Marriage, Kinship: Conceptual shifts and substantive themes.

Rajni Parliwala, University of Delhi

Family, marriage and kinship studies in India were central to the development of sociology in India. Critical to this was the interface with social anthropology. More recently, the disciplinary tradition has been questioned from a number of vantage points. One has been the absence of gender as an analytical category, despite the deeply gendered nature of these arenas of social life. Second is the critique that analyses have been based on the rules of upper and middle castes and classes and have carried a double distortion – the exclusion of ‘socially marginal’ groups from the generalisations and the presentation of normative models to the exclusion of an analysis of practice. These concerns also point to the need for a historicity that moves the analysis from what ‘ought to be’ to practice and process. Following from these concerns is the question as to whether existing perspectives enable an understanding of ‘social problems’ being witnessed. Is the new research a mere accumulation of further empirical knowledge, an outcome of ‘new’ practices and social dynamics, and/or is it emerging from and leading to conceptual and theoretical shifts? These questions will be examined while outlining some recent trends in writing in this field.

The Rebellious Woman And Violence Of Consensus: Contestations Of The Domestic Space

Kamala Ganesh, University of Mumbai

The domestic, long valorised as a sealed domain of the private, of consensus, oasis-like, providing succour to its own in times of need, appears to be transforming in significant ways. Global developments in demography, technology and policy are factors triggering change. More importantly, approaches and tools of conceptualizing the domestic domain have also altered. This is precipitated by new forms of activism and theorization: queer perspectives that challenge the heterosexual and biological basis of family, liberal elaborations of citizenship that contest communitarian thrust, a foregrounding of the idea of individual agency notwithstanding constraining structures, and feminist scholarship that inserts the analysis of gender and power, intersectionality, agency, and macro-micro links into the arena of family and kinship studies.

This paper draws on feminist insights to elaborate on an emerging category: the young woman from various sections of the new middle class, who pushes the boundaries of the domestic space, overturning its norms. The contemporary dynamics of globalization is reconfiguring domestic relationships in this category: between parents and earning unmarried daughters, daughters who make their own marriage choices, between young married women and their affinal families, between natal and affinal kin. Both support and conflict are salient. The intersections between family and community honour, re-energized in the current era, reveal both proactive assertions by young women on several issues and reactive violence from families and communities especially on the issue of marriage.

Deterritorialising Family and Kinship: Hybrid existence and Queer Intimacies in Contemporary India

Pushpesh Kumar, University of Hyderabad

The paper begins with feminist and queer interventions in the field of kinship studies. Kinship has been deeply naturalized through what Butler calls 'exogamic heterosexuality' instituted through incest taboo. For Butler, the law of incest constitutes an artificial accomplishment of a non-incestuous heterosexuality extracted through prohibition on a more natural and unconstrained sexuality. Exogamy and incest taboo are accepted wisdom about beginning of culture in the universalistic theoretical schema of Levi Strauss. Under exogamous arrangements, women are like goods to be exchanged between groups of men. This masculinist imagination is exegetically re-scripted in Luce Irigaray. To Irigaray, when the goods (read women) get together' they might create a possibility of an unanticipated agency of an alternative sexual economy- a reversal of phallogocentric and Oedipalised kinship. Lacan refers to kinship as culturalization of biological sexuality; when the child leaves the Oedipal phase, its libido and gender identity have been organized in conformity with the domesticating rules of culture. The queer reading of dominant Oedipalised kinship attempts at disembedding kinship from exogamic, phallogocentric contexts towards a denaturalising and deoedipalising project. The scholarship on queer temporality questions and contests 'reproductive politics' ruled by a biological clock and through strict bourgeois rules of respectability and scheduling for married couples (Halberstam 2005). Queer time is about potentiality of a life unscripted by contours of family, inheritance and child rearing (ibid).

The second part of the paper deals with Indian and south Asian contexts and contrasts the hybrid world of queers.

Plenary Two: Class, Caste, Tribes and Exclusions

Chair: A. R. Vasavi

Why Exclusion of Tribes persists?

Virginus Xaxa, Tezpur University

Exploring tribes from the perspective of social exclusion poses certain problems. This emanates from location of tribes in relation to the Indian society. Tribes in India have been conceptually delineated as being those outside of the Indian civilization. It is only with the advent of the British that tribes became part of the same world as others. The incorporation of tribes into colonial rule integrated tribes into the same economic and political system into which the larger Indian population was integrated. However, though there was economic and political integration there was no social and cultural integration. Tribes remained as distinct social and cultural entity. The economic and political integration under the British had adverse impact on tribes. The post-independence India aimed to address those adverse aspects plus create an enabling environment for positive integration. This is evident in provisions provided in the Indian constitution plus state policies and programmes earmarked for development of tribal communities in India. Despite such provisions and policies, the tribal population remains one of the most excluded social groups in India. The presentation aims to address those issues and attempts to understand as to why the persistent exclusion and adverse inclusion continues.

How not to study Caste

Surinder S. Jodhka, Jawaharlal Nehru University

The mainstream sociological writings, as also the popular middle class narratives on caste, have largely been shaped by the orientalist constructs of Indian society. The influence of orientalism has persisted despite its extensive critiques because it permeated into the nationalist consciousness through 'the colonial forms of knowledge' that restated the so-called uniqueness of Indian culture and tradition. Even those speaking for 'Dalit liberation' tended to share several such assumptions. In the disciplinary traditions of sociology and social anthropology, such a view is best articulated in the works of Louis Dumont. Even when the social anthropologists critiqued the "book-view" of Dumont and argued for a "field-view" of Indian society, they tended to accept the naturalness of the India-Hindu-caste equation.

Focusing on the contemporary reproduction and hyper-politicization of caste, I would try to present a different perspective of caste that approaches it from a historical perspective and focuses on its materiality.

Hierarchy, Difference and Equality. Notes on Social Practice of Caste in Mumbai

Suryakant Waghmore, IIT Mumbai

In my previous research on caste and Dalit politics in rural Marathwada I have explored the dynamic nature of caste in rural spaces. The changing caste relations in political and economic fields also point to a new sociality of caste tolerance. The new forms of tolerance when analysed with occasional violence facing Dalits, points to an evolving practice of Hindu politeness in rural publics. In the present paper I extend analyses beyond rurality of caste to study of caste in the city. Urbanism affects changes in the social practice of caste and radically challenges the tenacity of caste. Based on the qualitative study of caste associations in Mumbai, this paper presents the repertoires of individuals and groups to sustain caste pride and bonds. Caste associations thus help individuals negotiate urban subjecthood and gain a sense of history and pride. The coming together of caste and urbanism however points to limits of vernacular modernity where equality is not the highest good.

Plenary Three: Faith and Religion: Contemporary perspectives

Chair: Imtiaz Ahmad

Faith and Citizenship among Christians today

Rowena Robinson, IIT Mumbai

The anthropology of Christianity has emerged as an exciting field in the last decade or so. Themes of interest for us in India and south Asia in general include issues of caste, conversion and belief, the ideas of sin and morality, commitment, community, individualism and the like. However, as O'Neill (2009) points out, the anthropology of Christianity has yet to occupy itself seriously with the question of citizenship despite the fact that Christian theology itself continually references the notion. He suggests the possibilities of looking at everyday understandings of the idea of citizenship and

engagements with it by Christians particularly in the context of democracies (or emerging ones) in the global south wherein the distinctions between state and church may not be entirely self-evident and transnational religious movements such as those of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity are increasingly spreading their influence.

This paper will address this theme and what it would mean to study Christianity and citizenship in the Indian context. For instance, if one looks at lay Christian associations within the space of civil society one finds that Christians in these organizations often take on their churches, questioning them and maintaining a position of critical and interrogative distance from them. In the process, they employ not only alternate understandings of what it means to be Christian but also terminologies and ideas of citizenship including of equality, participation, democracy, transparency and the like. Interrogation of both church and state implicates a dissolution of lay understandings of citizenship, typically along the lines of caste, class or gender. It is these fault-lines that this paper would highlight.

Some ethnographic perspectives on religion, borders and the state

Farhana Ibrahim, IIT Delhi

In 1951, some Muslim pastoralists in the Rann of Kutch presented the Indian state with a 'declaration of loyalty' pledging their lives to the nation in the event of an 'attack' from Pakistan. Muslims on India's borderlands have routinely had to contend with the state's identification of them variously as 'terrorists', 'infiltrators', 'Pakistanis' or 'Bangladeshis'. As the declaration of loyalty indicates, a heightened consciousness of being Muslims on the border is not a new development, but goes back to the very early years of the establishment of contemporary national borders in South Asia. This paper is an ethnographic engagement with Muslims who live in villages along the line of control on a sensitive national border. In so doing, it highlights the multiple modes of inhabiting a border on the part of pastoralists (*maldharis*) of the grassland ecosystem bordering the Great Rann of Kutch known as Banni. Notwithstanding the fact that they are marked out as bearers of a singular religious identity which in turn mediates their complex relationship to the state, the paper explores how the production of a unified religious identity is fraught and deeply undercut by debates internal to the community on the nature of their engagement with the state and political power.

Religion in Contemporary India: An Ethnographer's Puzzle and a Sociologist's Aporia

Sudha Sitharaman, Pondicherry University

For many decades the master narrative in the social scientific study of religion has been the secularization paradigm. Scholars firmly believed that religion would play an increasingly marginal political and social role in modern societies. However, the so-called global resurgence of religions and their politicization since the 1980s led to reconsideration of such an understanding. Thinking systematically about the contemporaneity of religion – its structures of organization and its authority, the integrative and disintegrative functions, the enactments in the name of religion and the seeming 'threat' some of these enactments pose to the project of modernity – compels us to analyze secularization and the resurgence of religion not as contradictions but as interrelated processes.

The exposition of the fallacies of linear-deterministic narratives of secularization theory, ineluctably anchored on separation of state and church and the private-public divide, foregrounds the dynamic nature of the public-ness of religious imagery and values, and particularises European experiences. There now exists a robust scholarship demonstrating the variation of forms that the separation of state and religion takes across the world. Much of this has emphasized that secularism involves less a separation of religion and politics, and foregrounds instead how religion is made an object of state's regulatory capacities of intervention in fashioning religious life and sensibility to fit the presuppositions and requirements of liberal governance.

Yet, we have not exhausted the possibilities of exploring how processes of secularization and the project of secularism may actually unfold in a multi-religious society such as India, and its unique understanding of secular neutrality and notions of equidistance from all religions. The myriad juxtaposing of state and religion in contemporary India and the secularities that it bequeaths may offer a foothold to deepen our understanding of the relationship between secularism and secularization. If we begin by problematising the idea that secularism and secularization are invariant, it becomes clear that notions of governmentality of the state tie closely to the idea of secularism. The variations in the idea of the state, particularly over the last decades of the twentieth century, along with the so-called 'globalisation' compel us to recalibrate the emphasis on the state in terms of an active remolding of religious thought and practice.

Plenary Four: Higher Education and its present crisis

Chair: J.J. Kattakayam, University of Kerala

Ritualising Reforms: Higher Education in India

N. Jayaram, National Law School University, Bengaluru

India has the third largest higher education system (behind China and the United States of America). In its long history of nearly 160 years in the country, committees after commissions have examined the structure and functioning of this system and proposed policy measures to reform it. We have often heard of the policy proposals for radical restructuring of the system; what is achieved, however, is half-hearted reform. Drawing illustrations from the history of higher education reform in India, this presentation proposes to delineate the inherent tendency in the country to ritualise reforms. While ritualising retains the *form* of the reform, it disregards the *re* in the reform. The thrust of the reform, in a way, gets subverted in the process. Drawing illustrations from a few areas of higher education reform like teacher quality/training, career advancement scheme, and curriculum development, the presentation discusses the process and consequences of ritualising reforms. It reflects on some of the factors underlying this ritualisation.

Higher Education in India – Inequalities and Anomalies

Rajesh Misra, University Lucknow

The Indian higher education system has been undergoing an appalling change for last three decades. On the one hand, there is an exponential growth of colleges and

universities, on the other, there is a conspicuous decline in the quality of education. Only about 20% of approximately 9 million graduates (estimated) passing out every session are considered employable. This situation is mainly triggered by the 'economic reforms', the concomitant educational policies being pursued by the state, and the demographic transition. Indian higher education currently the third largest in the world, is likely to surpass the US in the next five years and China by 2030 to be the largest system of higher education in the world with the largest tertiary-age population. But at the same time, India would be one of the largest economies riddled with multi-dimensional inequalities and correspondingly burgeoning middle classes requiring a robust knowledge sector. Initiatives like *Rashtriya Uchchatar Shiksha Abhiyan 2012* (RUSA) and the New Education Policy 2016 attempt to provide the solution to the problem but without appropriate social scientific considerations. It is in this context that an imperative sociological analysis of the present state of affairs of the Indian higher education system is called for. An appraisal of macro features and micro conditions of higher education in India suggests that it is riddled with structural inequalities, intrinsic contradictions and lack of ethos basic to the production and propagation of knowledge. Consequently, the majority of colleges and universities are not equipped enough to inculcate adequate knowledge in the relevant disciplines and to cultivate the capacity to think, analyze and create. It doesn't make sense to identify universities or colleges as the retainers of intellect and scholarship. Under the circumstances, it would be more appropriate to assert that the higher education system is undergoing anomie if not a crisis, both in terms structural conditions and cultural milieu.

The non-academic uses of the contemporary university
Satish Deshpande , University of Delhi

Amidst all the debates about how well or badly our universities are doing as scholastic institutions for the production of knowledge and the training of employable workers, the non-academic functions of the university tend to be neglected. As India goes through a historic transition in the broadening of access to higher education, the non-academic dimensions of the university may be as important as its more conventional aspects. Two non-academic functions that seem particularly relevant today are: a) the university as a mechanism for reducing or reinforcing the social inequalities of caste and class; and b) the university as the unique location that is both the most inclusive as well as the most egalitarian space in contemporary society. Since the university is also the space that more and more young people are able to access at least briefly, it becomes a critical site with the potential to influence the nature, pace and direction of social change. These unconventional aspects of the university may therefore offer a novel perspective on Indian higher education today.

Plenary Five: Panel Discussion on Contemporary Northeast India: Inequities, Marginalisation and Violence
Chair: Udayan Misra

Ethnic Assertion and violence in a colonial Hinterland
Apurba K Baruah

Northeast India is in the news more for agitations, conflicts, violence and insurgencies than its remarkable bio and cultural diversities which can make it a tourist destination. These agitations, conflicts and insurgencies are often sought to be dealt with as law and order problems. More understanding analyses look at them in terms of alienation resulting from a sense of deprivation which in turn is explained as the result of lack of development. However, without examining those in terms of ethnic and community identity assertion no real understanding can be arrived at. These assertions of course are related to emergence of new elite in an area that was largely, semi-feudal and tribal till recently. There indeed is a strong feeling of being exploited in colonial lines. The implications of this feeling need to be carefully examined to understand contemporary north-east India.

Crisis of witnessing: How the margin sees itself Pradip Phanjoubam

In conformity with the idea of “scientific temper” preached by the European Enlightenment, understanding and recording of unfolding events of historical significance have predominantly been about taking cognizance only of tangible factors deemed as causes and effects of the events under scrutiny. The emphasis has been on “observing”, rather than “witnessing”. In this paper I will look into some of the shortfalls of basing understanding of history on disinterested exercise of “observation” alone. I will also attempt to highlight some of the overwhelming difficulties of the more emotionally and morally committed act of “witnessing” as an alternative narrative of history. Witnessing too is not without its own shortfalls, as the rich and expanding literature on the conflict between history and memory is already alibi. While the analysts as the impersonal and objective observer is essential in any effort to size up a given social situation, the missing vantage of the analyst as subject who goes beyond observing and chooses to be a witness as well, cannot be ignored without compromises on any truth claim. Many from the Northeast, writing of the Northeast, are in this position. This paper then will explore how the margin sees itself.

Land grabbing among the tribal communities of Meghalaya H.Helpme Mohrmen

Like any indigenous people, the Pnars or the Jaintias of Meghalaya too have deep connection with land and the nature around them. Their culture and identity is entwined with their land and the community’s land tenure system constitutes their culture. But mining and to some extent commercial farming is becoming a threat to this unique culture. Coal and limestone mining in the area has not only had an adverse impact on the environment, the neo coal-rich member of the community and the owners of the cement companies are also engaged in grabbing land rendering the poor farmers landless. Peculiar land ownership amongst the tribal of the state is adding fuel to the problem of landlessness in the state.