

## **Theme of the Conference**

### **Reconstructing Sociological Discourse in India: Perspectives from the Margins**

Sociological discourse, over the years has taken many forms, both in terms of 'content' and 'genre'. It displays a great deal of diversity and has engaged in constructing and deconstructing knowledge as a socio-political-cultural construct. Since sociological discourse is essentially concerned with elucidating social reality, which in itself has many facets, there is a great deal of variation in the way it is interpreted and presented. Sociological theorists have been trying to understand institutions and individuals, and this understanding is essentially placed in the socio-historical contexts in which they live and think. However, at every point in the growth of sociological thinking, the need to create 'alternate discourses' has been expressed very strongly, and it is this need which the present Conference also wants to deliberate upon.

Sociological discourse in India has traversed a long way from philosophical-historical traditions to post-modern interpretations of social realities that surround us. New themes, discourses and counter-discourses have emerged in sociological theory and research. One of the most visible critiques of many sociological studies is that they tend to think, talk and write about reality in a particular way, and in that process both the creator of the discourse and the readers may shut themselves off to other perspectives. This is especially true of the lived experiences of groups which are left on the periphery of dominant knowledge paradigms. It is important that these narratives are brought to the foreground and given adequate cognisance especially at forums of discussion such as this conference.

The key questions, therefore, that this Conference addresses are:

- How often has sociological discourse in India engaged in bringing to the 'centre' the perspectives of those who live on the margins?
- What are the popular conceptions of marginality and what are the images of marginality being constructed by sociological discourses?
- What kind of identities are dominant discourses assigning to those on the margins?
- What are the methodological premises on which the concept of marginality is based?
- Can there be universally accepted notions of marginality in Indian society or should there be group, region and culture specific explanations for what constitutes marginality?

The Conference intends to seek answers to these and other related questions.

The conference theme will be discussed in the following three plenary sessions:

1. Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization & marginalization: Re-visiting Perspectives
2. Feminist Intersections, Women, Genders and Masculinities in Contemporary India
3. Changing Socio-Political-Economic-Cultural Landscape of Karnataka: Representations from the Margins

This conference hopes to deliver on the research objective on which it is sustained as an annual feature of the Sociological Society. It also seeks to facilitate mutual learning and knowledge exchange across academia. It looks forward to mobilising relevant and untapped research, in particular new evidence and concepts on experiences and conceptions of marginalization, as well as provide a platform for young scholars and students to discuss their research findings.

### **Inaugural Address**

#### **Contouring a Contextual Global Sociology: Situating, Shifting and Shaping from the Margins**

**Margaret Abraham, Professor of Sociology, Hofstra University, New York, USA and Past President, International Sociological Association**

Today we are confronted with complex local, national, transnational and global concerns that compel us to increasingly draw upon the diversity of sociology as a discipline to dialogue within and across societies, however disparate; and to address the social, economic, and political challenges to collaboratively contour a more just world. There is a growing body of research and action from the margins that contests assumed and imposed constructions of the sociological canon. Challenging dominant conceptual frameworks, methodologies, pedagogies and practices, the margins mobilize and contest the systematic erasure of the perspectives, socio-histories, and experiences of the marginalized. The margins become an important space for disciplinary and social transformation. This address will first draw on an intersectional lens in linking research and action from the margins as a sociologist from the Indian diaspora in the United States. This will be followed by a broader discussion that highlights an International Sociological Association initiative to build the first comprehensive *Global Mapping of Sociologists for Social Inclusion* (GMSSI) as an intellectual and organizational space to counter existing hierarchies of knowledge production in our discipline and professional associations. The challenges and possibilities of GMSSI to identify connect and enable collaborations that foster more equitable sociological knowledge production, exchange, dissemination, and action across the globe to contour a *contextual global sociology* will be discussed

### **Presidential Address**

#### **Narratives from the Margins: Towards an Alternative Discourse**

**R. Indira, President, Indian Sociological Society and Professor of Sociology, University of Mysore, Mysuru**

The pre-occupation tends with Theorizing and esoteric epistemology tends to shift attention from the lived experiences of many groups that are in the margins. Chronicling their life stories can lead to a radical scholarship of praxis that challenges many established notions of the 'core' and the 'periphery'. There has been a kind of over-emphasis on 'consistency' many sociological discourses, in the process ignoring what may be termed 'commonality'. There is an urgent need to look at the world from the perspectives of the marginalised. I argue that the narrative model humanizes knowledge and takes sociological discourse closer to reality.

One of the critiques of the narrative model is that it is 'subjective', because it tends to focus on lived experiences, which cannot really be reported, or studied with a sense of detachment, an attribute that is considered critical for sound research. This position needs to be questioned. In fact, narrative based discourses open new vistas for understanding, questioning methodological and theoretical base, but my premise is that narratives and resisting inequality. Narratives are often rejected as storytelling and without a sound methodological and theoretical base, but my premise is that narratives can provide a strong basis for reconstructing and revisiting our theories and methods. Sociological discourse on issues of subaltern identities and the challenges of those living in the margins is incomplete without using the narrative method. By taking cues from select research studies with groups in the margins, my presentation would focus on both the strengths and challenges narratives as a research model.

### **Professor Radhakamal Mukerjee Memorial Lecture**

#### **Universalism and Ecology: Anthropological Bridge between Radhakamal Mukerjee's Key Concepts**

**Prof R.K. Jain, Professor, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, JNU, New Delhi**

I have framed my thoughts in the dominant categories of Radhakamal Mukerjee's contributions. I have not spoken about his versatile yet disciplined forays in the fields of literary criticism, art, and Indian cultural heritage generally; this is because, as I say in my opening remarks, like his peers D.P. Mukerji and D.N. Majumdar, he already belongs to a Lucknow school not merely of sociology but of the humanities and the social sciences in general. Particularly, Radhakamal Mukerjee's sociology in encounter with the contemporary new anthropology reveals facets of an incipient vision that is for us neither nostalgic nor revanchist but genuinely global. It is in these terms that we may pay our tribute to the mentors and exemplars of social thought in Indic civilization.

### **Professor M.N. Srinivas Memorial Lecture**

#### **Sociological Imagination and Literary Sensitivity: A Tribute to M. N. Srinivas**

**N. Jayaram, Visiting Professor, National Law School of India University, Bengaluru**

M. N. Srinivas is undoubtedly the most readable among sociologists in India. For him, the way he wrote about a subject was as important as the subject itself. This lent a literary flavour to his writings. His writings are, in fact, imbued with a rare combination of sociological imagination and literary sensitivity; *The Remembered Village*, his masterpiece is perhaps the best illustration of this. In his Hassan Raja Rao Lecture, titled 'Social Anthropology and Literary Sensibility', he explained the relevance and importance of such sensitivity for sociologists engaged in understanding society and culture. Taking a cue from this, the instant lecture examines the mutual relations between sociological imagination and literary sensitivity. On the one hand, focussing on literature as a reflector of society, it highlights the importance of literature in sharpening the sociological imagination. On the other hand, it underscores the social conditioning of literature. Overall, it reflects on the need for and the pathways to cultivating literary sensitivity in the sociological understanding of reality.

### **Plenary I**

#### **Feminist Intersections, Women, Genders and Masculinities in Contemporary India**

##### **Feminist Sociology: How Do Patriarchy and Gender Look Like?**

**Gita Chadha, Department of Sociology, University of Mumbai, Mumbai**

The paper seeks to examine the shifts in the disciplinary canon of sociology as it encounters feminist perspectives from the women's movements and from women's studies, making way for feminist sociologies to emerge. These shifts range from theoretical to methodological to substantive domains. Deploying reflexivity, standpoint and intersectionality as analytic tools, feminist sociologies produce a fresh praxis for the discipline of sociology.

In the substantive domain of the sociology of gender, the paper identifies three major theoretical challenges that emerge from contemporary feminisms, challenges which have changed our conceptual understanding of gender and patriarchy. These are a) the emergence of multiple feminisms and the notion of intersectionality as it emerges from black/dalit feminisms largely but extends to women from other marginalities b) the destabilizing of the gender binary as it confronts us from the standpoint/location of the queer movements and how then the idea of sex and gender itself get complicated and almost overturned and c) the need to engage with men and masculinities, particularly with hegemonic and toxic hyper masculinities, leading to alliances with men ( this is of course distinguished from men's rights movements which are

more in the nature of a backlash). The paper hopes to critically look at how the intersections between sociology and feminism are producing the discourse on patriarchy and gender.

### **Turning A Feminist Eye on Gender, Caste and Kinship**

**Janaki Abraham, Department of Sociology, Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi, New Delhi**

It is now well established that feminism has influenced the contours of the discipline of Sociology. What I seek to do in this paper is to look specifically at the area of kinship – an area of study considered central to the disciplines of Sociology and Anthropology. In doing this I will look at the shifts in the approach to the study of kinship influenced by feminism and also influenced by sensitivity to power, inequality and hierarchy. In particular my focus will be on looking at the lens that feminism gives us to look at kinship and caste. This means an understanding of kinship that is not centered on biological relatedness and heterosexuality and an understanding of caste from the vantage point of those who are dis-privileged by it and one that is fundamentally gendered. Drawing from my research on matrilineal kinship and the shifting ways in which caste endogamy is defined and practiced, I will explore the way caste, gender and kinship are co-constituted.

### **Gender and Pedagogy: A Feminist Sociologist's Engagement with Process of Mentoring and Teaching-Learning in Classroom**

**Anurekha Chari Wagh, Department of Sociology, University of Hyderabad, Hyderabad**

It is an established argument that nurturing of critical perspective is challenging in exclusionary, enclosed and non-reflexive disciplinary spaces. One can observe contrary trends with regard to feminist sociology within academic institutions; one where not only the perspective but also as a discipline feminist sociology has become increasingly institutionalized and recognized. And two there is a simultaneous process of marking feminist sociology as elite, narrow and having a limited perspective. In this context the question is whether feminist sociology can sustain its wide outlook and its critical perspective with university departments, particularly in context of pedagogy and mentoring. The presentation titled, **Gender and Pedagogy: A Feminist Sociologist's engagement with mentoring and teaching-learning in classroom**', will focus on three aspects of engagement with pedagogy and mentoring, in the context of knowledge creation and dissemination: one, the process of mentoring that throws up challenges when related to mentees from varied social locations, of caste, region, language, religious affiliation; two, with students who are queer identified and three in classrooms when engaging with male students and their masculinities.

### **Men and Masculinities in the Margins**

**Sumesh S.S, Department of Sociology, Tezpur University, Assam, Assam**

Our understanding of men and masculinity in conversation with emerging feminisms and queer politics have underwent substantial changes in the last few decades. Looking at men and masculinities from the margins allow us to articulate different narratives rather than reifying hegemonic masculinities. Beyond gender, I focus on the lived body that oscillates within the spectrum of masculine-feminine axis. The fluidity of such frames within masculinity have rarely been addressed by Indian sociologies. Recent studies in the field of sexuality in India have fermented such an attempt. This fluidity is evident through my empirical engagements with the sacred bodies of *bhakats* (inmates of 15<sup>th</sup> century neo-vaishnavite monastic institution of 'Satra' in Assam) as well as profane bodies of gays in Assam. Locating such frames in its flow poses many questions to our methodologies. It also primarily questions the adequacy of social in explaining the context. My arguments are structured in four sections.

The first segment is an autobiographical journey of a young 'male' sociologist with feminism/s. It is suggested that the reflexive engagement of 'text' through autobiographical critique as a pedagogic practice allows men to question their own privileges. The insights offered by feminisms to explore embodied masculinities are discussed in the second section. Third section outlines the field experiences. Finally, my reflection on what feminisms in conversation with sexualities and masculinities offers to sociologies and sociologists!

## Plenary II

### **Liberalization, Privatization, Globalization and Marginalization: Re-Visiting Perspectives**

#### **The Developmental Process in the North-East India: A Critical Interrogation**

**D. V. Kumar, Professor, Department of Sociology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong,**

The north-east India which has been experiencing a skewed process of development since the colonial times finds itself in a more difficult position in the current context of globalisation, privatisation and liberalisation. Any developmental process, as is widely recognised, needs to build on the lived experiences of people and factor in their local resource base, needs and aspirations, cultural specificities and sensibilities. This is something which has been largely ignored in the case of the north-east India. What the colonial state did to pursue its own colonial interests was uncritically continued by the governments of the Independent India and the current processes of globalisation and privatisation continue to show lack of sensitivity to the needs and aspirations of the people of the north-east India. The loss of control over their own resources which are being taken away by the mercantile class, the growth of inequalities, the emergence of the hegemonic class of people within the north-east who find it easier to appropriate the benefits of developmental programmes are some of the issues which have gained greater visibility in the current context of globalisation. This paper seeks to engage with some of these issues.

#### **Sociology of Politics and Strategizing Inclusive Development in India**

**Abusaleh Shariff, US-India Policy Institute (USIPI), Washington D. C and Centre for Research and Debates in Development Policy (CRDDP), New Delhi.**

India a democracy of 70 years has made considerable gains in improving its economic and social development. While it boasts of being one of the largest economies rubbing shoulders with the likes of the USA, the UK, Japan and China; it still holds the largest proportion of the world's poor, malnourished, illiterate and the sick. Although the development trajectory suggests secular increase until about 2035, one expects increasing inequality. The Gini coefficient has increased from 0.32 to about 0.5 between 1990 and the present representing very high levels of uneven distribution of income.

India's 1.33 billion people is secondly only to China but with high levels of organic social diversity. Recent empirical studies highlight significant inter-community and inter-religious disparities. The public resources allocations therefore must account for eliminating such inequalities in the immediate future to ensure social justice, democratic maturity, and domestic peace and prosperity.

The following dimensions of disparity are all pervasive in India:

Income disparity, Social / Educational disparity, Disparity in employment, Disparity in political participation, Gender Disparity, Regional Disparity and Rural / Urban Disparity.

A slow but sustained demographic transition has guaranteed considerable human development gains including reduction in gender gaps in life expectancy; yet the gender equality appears a distant dream in education, nutrition, access to paid work and so on.

Another political contentious issue is with respect to marginalization and exclusion of the Muslims from the public spaces in India. Muslims of India lag in most of the human development outcome measures and seem to get excluded from the contemporary mainstream developmental scenario of India (Government of India-Prime Minister's High-Level Committee Report 2007; Shariff, 2016). Their share in the relatively poor, technically categorized as the 'below poverty line' is one of the largest, educationally disadvantaged and caught in the 'rhetorical political arguments' relating to quota reservations which were designed to overcome the deficits.

This paper highlights selected human development dimensions and estimates the rate of poverty change during the last about a decade; and traces the path of educational transition and human development according to socio-religious categories. A special empirical analysis of the contribution of English language in augmenting household incomes is also enunciated. The value added contributed by the Muslims of India will be essential to boost the fast pace of India's GDP growth during the next quarter to half century. It concludes on the note that political obstruction to the sociology of development is the main cause of large-scale deprivation of various types. The aspect of pluralism and secularization is mis-understood and the present day 'majoritism' is bound to destroy the peaceful social fabric of India.

The solution for such severer developmental impediments is in creating right type of institutions. It is imperative to promote the ability to debate and discuss issues with empirical evidence and transparency and create a platform such as an 'equal opportunity office/commission'. Note that there is hardly any transparency, even the implementation of quota system in public employment and admissions in to the higher-level educational institutions across India.

Besides creating spaces for the community organizations (as opposed to the current formats of civil society) to engage the local level policy is imperative. In this regard it is useful that all the states of India emulate a policy instituted by the erstwhile state of Andhra Pradesh which provides for nominations of gender based/religious and linguistic minorities in the 73<sup>rd</sup> and 74<sup>th</sup> amended institutions across the states of India (refer to page 188 of the Sachar Committee Report).

### **PLENARY III**

#### **Changing Socio-Political-Economic-Cultural Landscape of Karnataka: Representations Form The Margins**

#### **Changing Socio-Political-Economic-Cultural Landscape of Karnataka: Representations from the Margin.**

**Jogan Shankar, Vice Chancellor, Kuvempu University. B R Project Shimoga.**

One of the theoretical challenges before Indian sociology is to define the highly fluid and contested term, 'the margins'. Many decades ago structuralism had provided a neat framework with a stable Centre and fairly well-defined area for the margins. Then come Jacques Derrida and Post-structuralism challenging the framework arguing very powerfully that the Centre is unstable and that the Margin defines the Centre. This major theoretical disruption has had its impact on all the major disciplines including Sociology. The context in the Indian academia is far more complex and complicated. For us, the 'Margins' has not been a theoretical or abstract construct. Historically, the intervention of colonialism brought about a devastating change in the structure of the traditional Indian society. Post-colonial theory after Edward Said has focused almost exclusively on the negative aspects of colonialism describing

it as an attempt to colonise not only a territory and a polity but also the indigenous knowledge systems. It has also interpreted colonialism as leading to the creation of a native elite class, English educated, westernized in its intellectual framework and imitative in its scholarship. What it has ignored is that colonization and colonial modernity also woke up the margins from the long slumber they had been forced into. For the first time in Indian history, Dalit and backward communities were given access to modern education, literacy, rule of law and the possibility of civic rights.

For these communities, as it was for Dr. B.R. Ambedkar colonial modernity with all its hard imperial projects, brought a socio-cultural dynamism. Of course, there were also other socio-economic factors such as industrialisation, urbanization, reforms in the legal system which aided the dynamism. Unfortunately, post-colonial theories have been so caught up in the power-knowledge paradigm, that they have been blind to the lived experience of the real communities. This experience available in the testimonia and the life narratives now available in good English translations reveals to us the response of the margins to the historical changes. These communities cherished no illusions of what the Centre was and continued to be.

I would also emphasize the impact of the several progressive movements of the 1970s and 1980s as the primary propelling factor for the greater visibility of the dalit communities and dalit discourses. The Dalit Sangharsha Samiti was founded as a literary cultural movement and was less political in its actions than the dalit movement in Maharashtra by which it was influenced. It was a movement for the assertion of dalit identity and dalit pride, but quickly went on to become a large inclusive social movement addressing issues of untouchability, caste-oppression, the land question, women's emancipation and even the annihilation of the caste system. With all our reservations about identity politics, we sociologists need to revisit the period dominated by the DSS and other people's movements to understand the dynamics of the representation of the margins.

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### **Plenary III**

#### **Changing Socio-Political- Economic-Cultural Landscape of Karnataka: Representations from the Margins- From the Lens of a Survey Researcher and students of Electoral Politics**

##### **Sandeep Shastri, Pro-Chancellor, Jain University, Bengaluru**

I would want to approach the theme from the lens of a survey researcher and a student of electoral politics. Karnataka's politics often reflects the changing dynamics of socio-economic context in which it operates. The presentation would focus on two key dimensions.

Firstly, the presentation would assess the 'Ahinda' politics which former Chief Minister Siddaramaiah brought to centre-stage. Its critical role in the victory of 2013 and its impact on the process of governance during his Chief Ministership would be the focus of dialogue. How effective was it as an electoral strategy in 2018 would also form the basis of the discussion.

The second theme that the presentation would flag is the Scheduled caste vote in Karnataka. Analysts have often tried to view electoral outcomes in reserved constituencies to assess the nature and direction of the scheduled caste vote. Based on empirical evidence, one would argue that this approach presents the voting pattern among scheduled castes in a very unrealistic manner. A study over three elections in select Scheduled Caste reserved assembly seats are indicative of important trends which would be presented at the Conference.

##### **Reflecting on the Less Thought of as the Marginalised and Excluded**

**G K Karanth, Director, Karnataka State Labour Institute, Bengaluru.**

Sociologists and social anthropologists in Karnataka in particular, and in India in general have concentrated on castes as groups of people as the more frequent basis on which people are marginalised or excluded in cumulative respects. Considering the rapid social and economic changes that are occurring in the state, and an unabated rise in economic inequality, it is time we as sociologists looked also at others who are being increasingly marginalised and excluded – especially in the context of state's varying role as the provider. Of concern, indicatively, is towards the class of workers – organised or unorganised with low wages, job insecurity and above all declining role of organisations to propagate their interests – Trade Unions.