
Conversation: N. Jayaram in conversation with Manish Thakur

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[Transcript of the interview held on 30 December 2016 at Tezpur University]*

Manish Thakur (MT): Sir, first of all, I must say, we have known each other for almost eighteen years now and I have known you from much earlier, as I had seen your name in Professor Yogendra Singh's first survey of literature on sociology in India and some of your papers on education. Although we have known each other for nearly two decades now, this is the first time that we are meeting formally for a conversation. For making this formal conversation possible, on your behalf and my own behalf, I must thank Professor Chandan Kumar Sharma of Tezpur University. And I must also thank Professor Sujata Patel, President of Indian Sociological Society for encouraging and supporting this endeavour. Before we come to the bigger questions that we have, at least those I have in mind, let me begin by asking you how you chanced upon the subject of sociology, because very often we find that being viewed as a residual subject. Could you please tell us something about you having opted for the subject at your undergraduate programme?

N. Jayaram (NJ): Before I answer this question, let me also thank Professor Chandan Kumar Sharma and Professor Sujata Patel for initiating this process of a formal interview. I am happy that you are interviewing me, but that also places me in a very awkward situation because for the last eighteen years we have been interacting informally. Anyway I am very happy to engage in this conversation with you. You asked me how did I choose sociology, how did I 'chance upon' it?

MT: Yes, I used the phrase 'chance upon'.

NJ: In a way yes, it was indeed by chance. For my BA degree programme I studied three cognate subjects –economics, political science, and sociology – at St Joseph's College, Bangalore [now Bengaluru], a constituent college of Bangalore University. The subject which fascinated me most as a young BA student was political science. That was for the way it was taught by one Professor Clement Arulnathan. He was a passionate teacher of political science. He mixed political science with current politics and, at an impressionable age, you very much are taken in by that. I did study the other two subjects, but mainly for the examination.

MT: Sorry sir, but all these subjects had equal weightage?

NJ: They all had equal weightage. You had to take any three on offer and I chose these three — economics, political science, and sociology. Since I took so much interest, I earned the college prize for securing the highest marks in the university examination and I felt very happy. And when people asked me then what would I do after completing my BA, my answer was simple: ‘MA’. What subject? ‘Political science, obviously.’ But when my friends pointed out that political science was not [then] taught at MA level in Bangalore University, ‘I will go to Madras University, that is a famous centre for learning political science’, I responded. If I don’t make it there, I will go to Mysore University, I thought. So, I did go to Madras, but by then the caste politics was so strong in Madras [now Chennai] that they identified me as [a Brahmin].

MT: When was this sir, roughly if you can give us a timeframe?

NJ: It was 1970. Caste factor was so strong in the university culture of Madras that a professor there refused me admission on two grounds, one that I came from outside [the state] and the other that I was a Brahmin. For the first time in my life somebody had directly asked me for my caste. And I had to respond to him and he was not amused. Disappointed, I went back to Bangalore. Then I got admission in Mysore University; my name was in the first list there.

MT: In political science?

NJ: In political science. I wanted to take admission. They did give me admission, but they told me that I cannot get hostel accommodation...

MT: In Mysore?

NJ: In Mysore University. When I got back home, I told my family I have joined Mysore University, but I would not be given hostel accommodation. My mother did not like the idea of me staying outside the university; she refused [permission]. That meant I went back to Mysore, withdrew my admission and came back to Bangalore and looked for admission in Bangalore University where I had applied for both economics and sociology. My teachers in St Joseph’s College advised me against taking up admission in economics because the professor there was an authoritarian person. Somebody said the university sociology department has got a new reader who has come from the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi and you may find that department interesting. The subject was not interesting to me, yet I enrolled in MA programme in sociology at

Bangalore University. The very first day the person who came to teach us sociology of religion was a senior person [Shri V. Muddalinganna], a Gandhian of sorts. He asked each one of us in the class why we took up this subject.

MT: The same question I asked you about.

NJ: Yes, why did you take up this subject? The subject was not of my interest. I was sitting in the last bench. So he went one by one, everyone was telling the subject is ‘interesting’...

MT: Exciting...

NJ: ...‘exciting’, etc. and he was cross-questioning everybody. If somebody said this subject is interesting, he asked why. If somebody said it has wide scope, he would ask what you mean by wide scope. I knew I cannot be saying any of this. So, when my turn came, I simply told him, ‘Sir, I have nothing else to do and my family thinks that I should not be joining workforce immediately, I should do the post-graduate course. I could not get admission into political science [in Madras University] and hostel accommodation [in Mysore University], and economics, I did not want to do. So I am here.’

MT: So, you were honest.

NJ: I was honest and forthright and he did not probe me further. But, before leaving the class, he asked me to see him. I went and saw him and he told me, ‘Young man, I like your frankness. You are young, you have a long life ahead of you and you will be spending two years of your valuable life in the university system. I know you did not take up this subject with interest in it, but, having taken it up, invest your time and energy and take it seriously.’ And that was a piece of remarkable advice. I have never looked back. So, my entry into sociology was definitely by chance; you could say accidental. But, after having taken it, I took that advice seriously and I have been in this subject for so many years now.

MT: I would not say it was accidental, because, as you mentioned, there were so many other structural factors: your caste; your ethnicity; you being rejected when you went to Madras; your part of being in a joint family, you mentioned your mother not wanting to send you to Mysore. So, I have the temptation to call it incidental. But now I see that there are other elements, larger processes impinging on your individual choice when you opted for this discipline. And this brings me to my next question. Both of us belong to a discipline which had once produced Karl Mannheim, and I recall it was in 1936 when he wrote his famous book

Ideology and Utopia, and there he talks about ‘the existential situatedness of knowledge’. And, in our own country, sociologists have talked about social conditioning and things like that. So, now in that case, can I ask you if you don’t mind— that your belonging to a particular caste, having come from the joint family, also your being the first-generation migrant or I don’t know maybe the second-generation migrant in a city — how some of these larger issues and factors have played any role when you became a sociologist?

NJ: Oh yes, you can. I do remember reading Professor Yogendra Singh on social conditioning of sociological thought. How these conditioning factors play an important part in shaping our academic orientation is a fact that we should all recognise. And, for the first time, even before I read Professor Yogendra Singh’s book on the subject, which, in fact, I have reviewed...

MT: And that was in 1986. You were already a Professor then?

NJ: No, I was not a professor by then. Much before that Professor M.S. Gore, who was Director of Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS), was my examiner...

MT: PhD thesis?

NJ: One of my PhD thesis examiners. And that was my first job. I was interviewed for a job... Lecturer in Sociology of Education at TISS.

MT: And that was which year sir?

NJ: That was in 1977. In the beginning of 1978 I joined TISS, but the interview was in the latter half of 1977. He did not come for the viva voce because he did not find the need for one. But he was there in the interview and since he had read my thesis, he brought to my attention the idea of social conditioning. He asked me: ‘Dr Jayaram do you come from a joint family?’ I told him, ‘Yes, I come from a joint family. We are about eighteen people there.’ And, he appeared satisfied. But then I put a counter question to him: ‘Professor Gore, you asked me if I come from a joint family and I have answered your question. But what made you ask me that question? How is it relevant?’ Because, those days, I was in a fighting mode. I thought people were asking irrelevant questions. But, he was a thorough gentleman, so there was no question of fighting. I was only curious to know why he was asking me that question. Then he told me, ‘It was writ large in your thesis. The way you have written the thesis shows that.’ The second point, which again was much before I read Professor Yogendra Singh, was when I went to England...

MT: After your PhD?

NJ: Yes, after my PhD, after I became a lecturer in Bangalore University.

MT: What we would call post-doctoral?

NJ: It was not called post-doctoral. It was called Younger Scientists Exchange Scheme between the British Council and the UGC [University Grants Commission]. This was for a period of three months. I was selected for that and I spent three months at the University of Surrey, Guilford... with Professor Asher Tropp. He hosted lunch one day; his wife was also there. Halfway through the lunch he asked me: 'Dr Jayaram, are you a Brahman?' For the first time, after that Madras episode, somebody was directly asking me about my caste. I could not be rude; I had to answer. I told him that I was born in a Brahmin family. Then I asked him: 'Professor Tropp, instead of asking me what my caste is, you asked me if I am a Brahmin. Why?' He said, 'Oh Dr Jayaram, it is very simple. I have a theory and I wanted some sort of confirmation. And the theory is this: If somebody coming from India eats beef but not pork, he is a Muslim; eats pork but not beef, he is a lower-caste Hindu; he eats both, he is a Brahmin.' I was looking at his face with my mouth wide open. Then he explained: 'Every community has food restrictions –prescriptions and prohibitions. A Brahman in your part of the country is a strict vegetarian. Once he crosses that vegetarian boundary, there is no boundary for him, nothing can stop him. Since you have eaten both beef and pork, I found it remarkable and wanted to get some confirmation.' That was eye-opening. The point is, even if I don't care for my caste, even if I am not proud of my caste origin, others identify me as belonging to that caste. And this is an experience with which I have lived ever since. But one important dimension that he [Professor Tropp] brought in that I need to respond to ... is that I come from a family which originally migrated from the coastal district of South Kanara, present-day Udupi district of Karnataka. My parents migrated to Bangalore around the time of the Second World War. Two of us were born after the family's migration.

MT: Were you born in Bangalore?

NJ: No. It is very interesting. I was born in my mother's natal place near Udupi, but my records mention that I was born in Bangalore! Those days expectant mothers went for confinement to their natal homes.

MT: By the time you had already come to Bangalore?

NJ: Yes, by that time we had already come to Bangalore. So, my records just mention Bangalore as my place of birth. In my family, which has six brothers and one sister, I was the first one to become a graduate. Of the remaining five, two earned their vocational diplomas from a polytechnic; one entered college, but dropped out because the economic circumstance of the family was not that good. Even to educate two of my brothers in the polytechnic, my mother had to pawn her meagre jewellery. Very difficult times, those were. But there was a consensus – partly I attribute this to the value that is placed on education in the caste group – that at least one of us...

MT: You being the youngest got the benefit.

NJ: Yes, I being the youngest got the benefit. This is an important consequence of the rank order of my birth; the sacrifice that my eldest brother made was that he dropped out of school when he was in the 7th class. I graduated ... because of the emphasis that my mother placed on education. She wanted somebody in the family to become a doctor and since this was not fulfilled with the first six children, the seventh one had to. I became a ‘doctor’, but I was not useful to her in any medical treatment! Thus, one important factor in shaping my education and the value that I attach to learning comes from the caste system, whether I like it or not. Also I told you about my food habits. There was this challenging phase when I started eating non-vegetarian food though I did not relish it. I wanted to make a social statement against the caste system. But at some stage I realised it makes absolutely no sense. Why do you inconvenience yourself? You need not have to make a demonstration of what you believe in to others. You are in a position vis-à-vis caste system in your home and extended family and how you deal with other human beings keeping this aside is very important.

MT: But it is interesting. In fact, I wanted to move to the next question. But you have revealed two or three dimensions of caste. You referred to the culture of learning that your caste group may have had historically inherited. In that sense, caste also is some sort of capital, in the sense value of education gets inherited as part of the cultural capital that a caste group inherits. On the other hand, you also had another experience when you went into the post-graduate department of [of political science] one of the oldest universities [Madras University] where the professor asked you about your caste and rejected you for belonging to a particular caste.

NJ: Yes.

MT: It is interesting how your own biographical trajectory crisscrossed the larger historical processes. Because Tamil Nadu had historical experience of having gone through the non-Brahmin or anti-Brahmin movement and that gets reflected in maybe you not getting admission there. Did you feel any sense of reverse discrimination after your Madras experience?

NJ: Yes, I felt hurt. But, in retrospect, I could appreciate that the same thing could happen to someone else who is discriminated against because of her/his caste. The point is, I had no say in my being born in a Brahmin family, just as someone else has no say in being born in another either.

MT: But is the matter so simple? Our primordial identity is so unique.

NJ: No. It is entrenched to a great extent. I cannot change the whole society, but I can engage with you and some others with the idea of caste. I think I have engaged with my students. My doctoral students have come from different caste groups and I have never had any problem. And, since you raise that issue, I should also mention and you must have noticed that I don't have a surname. This is a question that I raised in the family after a long time. My father has a surname, my eldest brother has a surname, but after that nobody has the surname. You are aware of the Non-Brahmin Movement in the erstwhile Mysore state. My second brother was a bit enlightened. He said that the first step that we should take in this direction is to remove the surname which is indicative of one's caste. Oh, my father did not care; my mother did not much understand. So, my second brother took the initiative to get rid of the surname and he ensured none of his younger brothers or sister had the surname name. So, I don't have a surname. It would be difficult, or even impossible, for you to identify my caste by my name.

MT: But, that does not make you *not* a Brahmin!

NJ: Of course, that does not make me *not* a Brahmin, because you have other markers from which you can identify.

MT: And even if those markers are not there, politically caste does matter.

NJ: Yes, certainly.

MT: And that's why I keep dwelling on caste.

NJ: I know. There was a chief minister in Karnataka [Shri Gundu Rao] who used to call himself a chicken-eating Brahmin. It is there. The point Manish is that

caste is a relational matter; it is not just an individual matter. It is one prism through which relationships are processed.

MT: I am talking of caste in a different sense because, as you rightly said, caste is single and collective resource both, inherited and it could also be a collective resource for some form of resistance or some form of protest.

NJ: Sure.

MT: And in many universities these days we have perspectives from below and we have new writings coming up. So, in some of these writings people do identify sociologists with their caste. For instance, an article in *Economic and Political Weekly [EPW]* last year identifies some of the sociologists with their caste names. And then they would infer that the discipline has been Brahmin-dominated or upper-caste dominated and things like that. So, even though the identification is not simple, somehow the way it gets perceived, I think that is the point we are making.

NJ: Yes, that is what even I am trying to emphasise.

MT: That does matter. Anyway, now let me dwell on another, I would say, distinctive aspect of your biography as a sociologist, as a professional. If I remember correctly, you had all your education in Bangalore.

NJ: Yes.

MT: You did your PhD from Bangalore?

NJ: Yes, I have had all my education in Bangalore. I should tell you something about my educational career. I did my schooling in a Protestant mission school, United Mission High School. It was a very notorious school. In 1964, only three of us passed SSLC [School Leaving Certificate Examination] from that school. But, I had the benefit of studying in a Jesuits-run Catholic college, St Joseph's College for four years and that changed me substantially.

MT: Change in the sense— in terms of linguistic competence?

NJ: No, not linguistic competence; that had to wait. It liberalised my worldview; it was a cosmopolitan college.

MT: It took you away from the Brahminical universe.

NJ: Yes, it took me away from my Brahminical universe and there was no family interference, as I had passed the age where family dominates you. My linguistic competence [in English] did not improve because I made friends with those who spoke Kannada, Tamil, and Telugu, the languages with which I was comfortable, and avoided people who spoke English because it was intimidating to me. Only after I moved to the Department of Sociology, Bangalore University for my post-graduate studies in sociology I made a conscious effort to learn spoken English and also written English on my own. That was because Professor C. Rajagopalan, who was Head of the Department at that time, was originally from Kerala. He could speak fluently in English and Hindi, besides Malayalam, which was his mother tongue.

MT: Tamil also?

NJ: Not much. These three languages he could speak fluently, but not a word of Kannada. So, if I wanted to interact with him, I had to construct the sentences beforehand. And, since the conversation was directed by him, I had nothing more to add after uttering the first sentence!

MT: Your homework did not work.

NJ: So, I made it a point for the next two years not to speak to anybody in Kannada. People made fun of my English, but it did not matter. Now, I speak English confidently.

MT: But sir, I was asking you this question for a different reason altogether. You were someone who had all his training in Bangalore and in a state university. We have been talking about centre-periphery relations. And, generally, you would think the centres of the discipline, like the central universities in Delhi, are much better known internationally and nationally and things like that. But even later, I mean despite having been trained in Bangalore, I go on emphasising this point, and having worked there for almost two decades or more than two decades...

NJ: Formally, I worked there for twenty-one years [27 February 1978–31 March 1999].

MT: Okay, so I would say more than two decades. You would acknowledge that you had larger national acceptability. I mean, you being in Bangalore, having been trained in Bangalore, having not come from Delhi School of Economics or having not been a disciple of M.N. Srinivas or any such stalwarts, these things did not matter in any way. It did not come in the way of your wider acceptability

within the profession, within the university system, and within all other institutions which are somehow related to higher education. I am aware of your being a member of UGC subject panel on sociology and curriculum revision committee and ICSSR [Indian Council of Social Science Research] review committee. I also know that routinely you get invited to many universities in Delhi for various purposes, and many PhD theses come to you for evaluation from these universities. So, these are indicators of your wider professional recognition despite having your training, as I have said earlier, in Bangalore. How do you look at this? What we hear these days about periphery being deprived of the intellectual academic resources and being in a state of crisis, something that you talked about this morning [in the Panel Discussion] that you have been hearing for five decades. So, can you elaborate on this interplay of relations based on your own experience?

NJ: In a way you are right; there is this notion of centre-periphery. But there are two dimensions to it. One is essentially in structural terms: wherever there is a centre you can think of periphery, and wherever there is periphery you think of a centre. You go back to the writings of Johan Galtung. This is a function partly of history, partly of policy decisions that have been taken, etc. But then this is not a hard and fast structure, you can look at different centres and different peripheries. True, Bangalore is a periphery if you look at Delhi as the centre, but Bangalore itself is a centre in relation to Dharwad, Gulbarga, Mangalore, and even Mysore. So, you have different centres and different peripheries.

MT: You mean to say they are changing?

NJ: No, they are different. I am not telling that they are changing; what I am telling is that the idea varies depending upon what you would like to see as centre and what you would like to see as periphery.

MT: I have one query, because in Karnataka, Mysore was seen as a centre at some point in time, in terms of its location, Dharwad could have been another centre, and Bangalore would emerge as a centre much later. That's why I thought that...

NJ: One of the important things you associate with these processes is the location of the university in the state capital. It is much easier for Bangalore to attract a professor from Delhi than for Karnatak University. Even now there is no direct flight to some of these places in Karnataka. You will have to come to Bangalore and then go there. So, if you are invited to Gulbarga you will think ten times

before accepting the invitation, whereas you will not have to think ten times before accepting the invitation to Bangalore because it is better connected. And also when you look at Bangalore, Delhi appears as the centre of attraction; Bangalore becomes periphery. But Bangalore itself is a centre for other peripheries. Then there is another important point of the relationship between what is regarded as centre and what is regarded as periphery. Though I studied in Bangalore, did my PhD in Bangalore, and worked for twenty-one years in Bangalore, not for once did I feel that I am in the periphery. I always looked at the radiating points to where centres were. One of the important catalysts in this process was Professor Rajagopalan. He was a doctoral student of Professor G.S. Ghurye. He was employed in Punjab University and in IIT Delhi before joining Bangalore University.

MT: Professor Rajagopalan was your guide?

NJ: He was my guide and mentor. And he had worked in Delhi. So, constantly I would get exposure to what was happening in the so-called centre through him. And he was such a person that he could bring many senior scholars to Bangalore. For instance, Professor A.R. Desai, his teacher, visited Department of Sociology, Bangalore University. And when Professor M.N. Srinivas moved to Bangalore, he had relationship with the department. So, I was not starved of interaction with the stalwarts. Also, I realised very early on that, if I focus attention only on Bangalore and Karnataka, there will be a barrier to what I can learn in future. So, I consciously chose to publish, to go and participate in conferences and seminars, etc. I looked forward to engagements with scholars and centres from outside Bangalore and Karnataka. Moreover, Professor Rajagopalan advised me 'Whenever you take on, take on a big name, something of their greatness will rub on you'.

MT: That is a sage advice.

NJ: It was a very sage advice. There is no point in engaging with unknown scholars; nobody would know. What is the point in Muhammad Ali defeating me, hitting me, right? If I were to take on Muhammad Ali, people will say, 'Oh Jayaram has taken on Muhammad Ali!' So, I always looked at outside Bangalore for my reference points. This in a way has saved me.

MT: Sir, can I interject? So, can we infer that, in a way, you were consciously casting your academic net wide ever since you joined Bangalore University and you also had the good fortune of having been mentored by someone who had seen

the world and who had better exposure? And that way you believed that individual talent, individual competence, individual efforts can overcome some of these structural barriers.

NJ: Oh yes, definitely Manish. That is very important and that is a message that I would like to pass on to youngsters today, those who are joining the profession. For instance, early on in my PhD days, I had an opportunity of attending an ICSSR-sponsored discipline-specific course on ‘Research Methodology of Sociology and Social Anthropology’ organised by the Department of Sociology, University of Saugar [5 November–8 December 1973].

MT: Saugar in Madhya Pradesh?

NJ: In Madhya Pradesh.

MT: And you were in Bangalore then?

NJ: I was then in Bangalore. And those days Professor Leela Dube was heading the department at Saugar. The resource persons who came there were drawn from across the country. That was one place, in thirty-four days, I was exposed to all the big names in sociology that you could think of then. And also Professor Satish Saberwal, who again...

MT: We will come to him later...

NJ: He was a resident resource person. So, I benefitted a lot by attending that course. What you lack in the periphery, you can make a conscious effort to seek outside.

MT: You are making an important point – how institutions can play a very supportive role; ICSSR made that course possible for you.

NJ: True.

MT: And for many of you for attending the course and all that.

NJ: For many of us, including Professor John Kattakayam. It was at that course that I happened to meet him for the first time.

MT: And you could hear all those big names, what you called big names, in those thirty-four days.

NJ: Yes.

MT: But now I am changing the track a bit. And we all know that you have worked mainly in the areas of education, diaspora, and in the area of research methods and all that. What were the formative influences, I mean, when you opted for these areas of research? Were these areas conscious choice or maybe coincidence? Like I know, for diaspora, you were Visiting Professor at The University of the West Indies.

NJ: Yes it is a very interesting trajectory. One of the subjects that I was very fond of during MA was family and kinship. People may laugh at it today! I was taught this subject by a teacher [Dr Bhavani Banerjee] who had done her doctoral work under Professor Irawati Karve. She taught it in such a fascinating way, I was very much impressed. In fact, I had bought a copy of Irawati Karve's book...

MT: Thick book, *Kinship Organisation in India*.

NJ: *Kinship Organisation in India*, on her recommendation. I have preserved it till today. By the time I finished my MA, that lady had resigned and migrated to USA. When Professor Rajagopalan asked me what I wanted to do, I told him that my economic circumstances were not good and so I am looking for a job. He told me, 'Job will pay you something like 400 rupees per month. Will a 300 rupees fellowship satisfy you? Can you defer the gratification of 100 rupees by few years? In the long run it will be helpful to you.' Then he offered to supervise my doctoral work. I said okay. Then one day he asked me, 'What is it that you propose to work on?' I told him that I want to work on family, especially the practice of dowry among the Bunts of South Kanara. I was not interested in any moral evaluation of the practice of dowry. Rather I was interested in understanding how the institution of dowry has helped the community retain its wealth? It is one of the most prosperous communities and owns two most prosperous banks, Vijaya Bank and Corporation Bank. He just dismissed that idea. Though he was himself a student of Professor Ghurye, he asked me to look at something which is typically sociological. And he asked me to think it over. My second choice was my own family experience vis-à-vis education. I started reading up on education and those days Kothari Commission's Report had been submitted and its recommendations were being discussed. J.P. Naik had written a book on the subject.

MT: You are talking of early 1970s?

NJ: No, late 1960s. 1964–66 was the reference period of the Commission's Report, which was still being discussed and written about even in the early 1970s.

MT: It was a public discourse.

NJ: It was a public discourse. And I thought that is an area which also gave me some scope for engaging with sociology, political science, and several issues. An excellent analytical thinker that he is, Professor Rajagopalan helped me articulate my research problem in pure sociological terms. The fascinating perspective you see in my thesis on the relationship between education and social stratification looked at from two different poles of education — higher education and lower education — was the outcome of my constant discussions with him. I did my research work among students in higher education in urban areas at one end and an ethnographic study of primary school education in a village at the other. But the second area in which I have published is attributable entirely to a chance factor.

MT: Diaspora?

NJ: Yes, diaspora. I was selected as ICCR [Indian Council of Cultural Relations] Chair Professor in Indian Studies at The University of West Indies, St Augustine, Trinidad and I was posted there.

MT: For three years?

NJ: It was initially for two years, but extended by one more year. I was there [in Trinidad] for three years [1994–1996]. And I asked ICCR what my brief was in this appointment. And they told me that the university has an optional course on ‘Indian Communities Staying Overseas’. For the first time I heard the word ‘diaspora’ then. And they asked me to do some empirical work on Indo-Trinidadians, a hyphenated community about which I heard for the first time. After going to Trinidad I taught an optional course on the Indian diaspora, which I found was very attractive to many people, including people of African origin. And I also did work on the Indo-Trinidadians, a diasporic community. In addition to education and diaspora, my original interest in political science, gave a sociological perspective to my thinking on civil society, multiculturalism, minorities, and also the political dimension of caste.

MT: And also the city and...

NJ: And the other one was city. But I wouldn't say that I have any great expertise in this area. But then something important happened when I moved to Mumbai. I was invited in 2003 by TISS, Mumbai to head its Department of Research Methodology...

MT: Which many people may not know...

NJ: Yes. My brief in TISS was to rejuvenate the famous Department of Research Methodology of which Professor Hebsur and Professor Ramachandran were earlier stalwarts. And later on it became Centre for Research Methodology and now I am told it is a School. I discovered what they were teaching in the name of 'methodology' at TISS then was just 'methods'. And the sociologist in me looked at all these methods through the filter of theories that I had studied. So, I started floating a course on the relation between theory and methods. I also noticed a serious imbalance... there was an excessive emphasis on quantitative methods.

MT: So you brought out the philosophical premises of methods.

NJ: I gave attention to the philosophy of social sciences.

MT: More qualitative aspect...

NJ: More qualitative aspects, too. Not that I take any particular position on that, a point that we can discuss later on, but I wanted to set the balance right. And I am happy that I did this.

MT: I have a question here and, it is not very comfortable for me to ask this question. But you made a very interesting point that you do not have a position on this qualitative vs. quantitative methods debate. I want to extend this, and say, I just want to provoke you so that I get your reaction...

NJ: Go ahead, it gives you a purpose...

MT: And what I want to say is that, in your writings, whatever is the area, I mean as someone who has read most of your writings, if not all, and I have conversed with other colleagues, other friends about your writings, I have heard them. So, there is a general, what should I say, understanding that in your writings we find too much of eclecticism. Allow me two or three minutes to clarify what I mean.

NJ: Please, please.

MT: This eclecticism means that generally as part of your intellectual temperament, academic temperament, you don't take a categorical position on many issues. You say things, maybe one type of things in one article, and other type of things in another place. I am not talking of inconsistency. Like, I know that you had edited that book on *Social Conflict* with Professor Satish Saberwal. But no one can identify that you are a person who has been part of the conflict

tradition. Even in our textbooks we have this thing that these are structural functionalists and these are conflict theorists. You have taught theory papers for so long, you know [Georg] Simmel being a conflict theorist. So, I want to relate it to a larger thing that I would say metaphorically that some of the sociologists argue that sociology in India has become more or less a sanitised sort of discipline; it has been insulated from the larger burning issues of the day. I remember one of the quotations of Shiv Visvanathan where he said that you read Indian sociology and you would not realise that Bhopal had happened, this had happened, that had happened, the Dalit movements had happened, and many other, Narmada had happened. Somewhere he has written this sort of thing. So, can I say, that I wish to provoke you that do you see that Indian sociology is less political because we have too many Professor Jayarams, we have too much of eclecticism, or your eclecticism is a conscious part of the type of academic temperament you have or the type of academic contributions you wish to make?

NJ: Yes, if it is a pejorative sort of a comment that is made, if it is a negative sort of thinking that because of eclecticism there is irresponsibility, I deny that. But, if you ask me what my methodological position is, I would say that I consciously choose eclecticism, not that I have always done that. If you read my earlier pieces during my youthful days, when Marxism was ruling the roost over academics, I was strongly influenced by the Marxian perspective. If you look at my piece on, say Bangalore city or higher education, etc., you can clearly find the radical perspective there. In fact, I once made a presentation at the Communist Party Headquarters in Budapest...

MT: Budapest, Hungary?

NJ: Yes, Hungary. And they told me that I was more radical than they were because of the way I presented my views. But then you should make a difference between a young scholar, who is coming out and engaging ideologically, and when you reach a mature plain then you wonder if you are putting on blinkers. And then this was a very conscious thinking. What is important: is it this ideology which should drive what I do or is it the problem that determines what is required? And being a teacher, this was also a moral stand that I had to take. Early on, a student pointed out this to me, 'Sir you are talking all this, but do you know the implications?' And I am grateful to that student. I go back and see Max Weber...

MT: And his say on science as vocation?

NJ: Yes.

MT: Even politics as a vocation.

NJ: Yes. Whatever you call it.

MT: There are two essays.

NJ: What happens is they [the students] are all looking at you to learn. They have to make a choice. I cannot make a choice for my students in the classroom. And I would be misusing my class if I become a political orator in the classroom. So, I made a conscious decision. Many students ask me at the end, ‘Sir, when you teach Durkheim, we feel you are a strong supporter of Durkheim. But when you switch to Weber, we think you are a Weberian, and when you switch to Pareto, you are so convincing a pessimist as Pareto!’ Same is the case, when I teach sociological theories. I tell them, ‘That is my purpose. Now I leave it to you, there are critiques, I leave it to you, and you engage with it, you come up with your choice.’ Thus, I do not impose my personal predications, preferences on my students. So, you have different traditions in which dissertations are being written. But some people may choose me for particular reasons, but I will not impose my own views on them. So, what happens is that I turn out to be an eclectic. I think one important person from whom I learned disciplined eclecticism was Professor Saberwal. Professor Rajagopalan was analytically very clear; the left of centre orientation in him had some influence on me in the formative years, and that too was reinforcement of what my political science teacher [Professor Clement Arulnathan] in St. Joseph’s College had taught.

MT: But Professor Saberwal did take some stand on the issue of Partition, on the issue of Hindu-Muslim relations, and things like that towards the end of his professional career. And I would say that some of these stances were politically informed. What was the nature of communal relations in the nineteenth century and other things like, why we always compare ourselves, you know it better than me, with the West, why not with China and all that. So, anything else you would like to say. I would believe that this was your, even now this would be your conscious choice.

NJ: That is my conscious choice; disciplined eclecticism is my conscious choice. And I make no apology for that today. And I don’t pretend. My sincere belief is that what should guide us is the research problem, the issue that is there, and which is the best perspective which will give us insights on that. If you right away

impose your ideology on the problem and how you view it as a problem then I am at a loss. Sometimes it also becomes fashionable. You know, we have worked together; sometimes some word comes from somewhere, wherever it is...

MT: We know that somewhere...

NJ: You know where that somewhere is. But once that word comes, you want to grab it and you want to be the first one to use it in India, right? I am not; I don't do that.

MT: I have a subsidiary question. Since you have taught theory courses for many years in Bangalore and if you look at the history of the discipline, I am not talking about the history of the discipline in India, let's say in other places, someone would counter argue that much of the intellectual energy comes out of the big controversies that a discipline has seen. Like in Germany, they would recall three great moments of controversy: on methods, again when Mannheim published his book and the entire debate around sociology of knowledge, again the type of controversy that Max Weber generated about value neutrality. But if we go for eclecticism then we don't have that, whether you call it ideological boxing or different schools colliding with each other. So, somehow that does not generate that type of intellectual energy which would propel the discipline towards more creative endeavours. How do you react to this?

NJ: No, I don't think that is true. Because, even when I have taken eclectic position, others have critiqued that and I would stand my own ground on what I have said.

MT: Can you give us one illustration? Like, I remember once you reviewed M.N. Srinivas's book...

NJ: Yes, that was in 1983; the book [*Basic Needs Viewed From Above and From Below: The Case of Karnataka State, India*] of OECD-sponsored research project in which Professor Srinivas, Professor T.S. Epstein, Professor M.N. Panini, and Dr V.S. Parthasarathy — four of them were involved. This was something about looking at poverty from above, from below, etc. and I reviewed that book... taking a Marxian perspective.

MT: You mean class perspective.

NJ: Yes, class perspective; class perspective, not in the American stratification terms, but in Marxian mode of production terms. That people took it as a point to

criticise me; in fact, one of the criticisms was that I was a crude Marxist. Okay. Now that was my position on that. Then I reviewed a book by Professor Sarvepalli Gopal on anatomy of a confrontation; it was about Babri Masjid–Ramjanmbhumi issue...

MT: Dr. S. Gopal?

NJ: Yes, the historian. The book was titled *Anatomy of a Confrontation: The Babri Masjid–Ramjanmabhumi Issue*.

MT: Was it single authored?

NJ: No, no. It was a collection of essays, many scholars, edited by Professor Gopal. When the review of this book was published, somebody called me an RSS sympathiser! That is, I was endorsing the RSS position on the issue because...

MT: Rightist position?

NJ: Because I said that, if you are doing an anatomy of a confrontation, you cannot have eight of the scholars taking one position and there is only one who does not appear to be even on the so-called right. Now, why don't you listen to somebody from the right? Where is the anatomy there? Anatomy, you will agree, cannot be one sided.

MT: It has to be essentially pluralist.

NJ: Yes. The point is that it has to be pluralist; there are perspectives on the issue, not one so-called *the* perspective. If somebody tells me that there is only one view, that is the only view that is possible, I would find it very difficult to swallow. So, I would say eclecticism is nothing wrong. Maybe it is not passionate advocacy; it may not make you a flamboyant person. But where are these people who take this hard core perspective, do they consistently follow it?

MT: But they do have a captivating audience.

NJ: They may have.

MT: They get all the claps in the auditorium.

NJ: Manish, captivating audience...

MT: They make up public intellectuals.

NJ: I know.

MT: They would get called to TV.

NJ: Yes. But, then there is the question of priorities that you set. I have never cared for that kind of attention or adulation.

MT: Okay. Sir, now I want to ask you a different set of questions.

NJ: Please.

MT: So far my questions were mainly related to your career trajectory, professional trajectory as a sociologist, type of things you have done, type of things you have not done or the type of things you have consciously done, to put it together.

NJ: And the type of things that I have consciously not done!

MT: Not done. Yes, that would be the right way of putting that. Now, since you have been in the profession for more than four decades, if I take early and mid-1970s as the starting point...

NJ: Yes, I first entered the classroom as a teacher on 13 October 1972.

MT: This is 2016, so I would say...

NJ: Forty-four years.

MT: More than four decades.

NJ: Yes, more than four decades.

MT: I would urge you to look at the questions that I will put forth from the perspective of someone who has seen it, who has been part of the system and who has been part of different types of institutions in his professional life. I do know that you moved to Goa University in [April] 1999, from there you moved to TISS in Mumbai in [November] 2003, and then you went to the Institute for Social and Economic Change [ISEC] in Bangalore for more than a year [December 2006–July 2008] as its Director. Then you were also in [the Indian Institute of Advanced Study (IIAS)] Shimla as a fellow for a year [June 2012–July 2013]. So you have seen different types of institutions apart from the other things I have referred to. I will come to other things later, but first how do you look at most of these institutions that you have been part of somewhere or the other and their

interface with the discipline or the disciplinary practices? And I am not asking you right now about your role as Managing Editor of the *Sociological Bulletin* because that is a point that needs separate treatment. Roughly, I want to know, what are the structural enabling factors that different types of institutions offer to young and promising sociologists? Or, to put it conversely, what are the handicaps that young researchers in the discipline would face depending on the range of institutions you have been to in the country.

NJ: I think I will be able to answer this question because I have worked in two regional universities — Bangalore and Goa; a deemed-to-be central university — TISS, Mumbai; an ICSSR-funded institution — ISEC; and a centrally funded institution of advanced studies — IIAS, Shimla. I notice there is a peculiar sort of situation in which certain structural features act as a barrier for ‘good’ teachers remaining in the peripheral institutions. In fact, they are pushed out for whatever reasons: it may be caste, it may be language, and it may be [lack of] opportunities— whatever it is. And there are also pull factors. About my own movement, I left Bangalore, obviously I was pushed out more by caste-politics. I went to Goa and I would have been happy to stay there. I think you would recall the wonderful time that we had for four years. But then the government, in its wisdom, thought that it should reduce the retirement age to fifty-eight; so, four of us left Goa University at that time, all senior professors. After the exodus of senior professors, you left, [V.] Sujatha left. Where did these people go? I got invited by TISS. It is, you can say, a sort of centre.

MT: Central deemed university.

NJ: You moved to IIM [Indian Institute of Management Calcutta], Sujatha moved to JNU [Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi]. In just one year or so the department was depleted of three teachers. And we had brought our own expertise in different fields into the department. Look at the department now; it is starved... it has only two permanent teachers. Look at [the department of sociology in] Bangalore University —from eight, I am told, it is now reduced to four. And, if you look at the publications that come out, etc., where are these institutions? As a consequence, students who study in these institutions seem to suffer considerably. At the same time, I would not say this as a standard outcome; it need not necessarily happen. Some remotely placed institutions have been very active; they put up with great difficulties and work. Sometimes, even centrally placed institutions find it difficult to attract good teachers at the top level. I would say, if you leave out the so-called universities in the centre — basically you would refer

to three: JNU, Delhi School [of Economics], and University of Hyderabad — where will you look for a good institution teaching sociology. I would say from my experience of going around, there are only two institutions: one is definitely the Department of Sociology, Tezpur University. To some extent another institution which suffers from these limitations, because it is not a central institution, though located in Delhi, is the Ambedkar University. That is because some individuals take deep interest in trying to put together, attract people, and make a conscious effort to go forward. It maybe a Professor Shyam Menon, Vice-Chancellor in Ambedkar University or a Professor Chandan Kumar Sharma here [in Department of Sociology, Tezpur University].

MT: No, but even then, I mean, since you keep referring to structural factors, would you like to argue that metropolitan–mofussil divide in institutional terms has a bearing on the quality of teaching or quality of research?

NJ: Oh yes, yes.

MT: And such defect may have some implications for the type of disciplinary practices we have. In fact, I wanted to know more from you about how you look at the disciplinary practices that you see around yourself in our times. And let me add whether you are happy to see new type of work getting done by young and promising scholars at new places at new centres? How do you assess, I mean, what would your assessment of the type of scholarship that you see in the discipline? Can you share something along these lines?

NJ: Very interestingly, much of the scholarship that you are speaking of, where it is challenging new areas, it is all coming out of so-called centres. The mofussil universities suffer from several disabilities: one is the inward looking nature of these institutions in terms of language, in terms of state boundary, like they don't want outsiders, etc. You look at the recruitment in state universities in the last ten years, how many state universities have been able to attract talent; let alone attract, even if somebody wants to go and work, will they give a job? So, you find that barrier which I spoke operates at the formal level and at the informal level. And there is also simultaneously a movement; even if there is a scholar who is promising in this regard, and wants to come back or stay there and do that, he finds it extremely difficult to work. At some stage he will want to migrate. If you conduct a survey [among young academics] as to where they want to work, you are sure to find that most of them would want to go out to some 'centre'.

MT: So, do you mean to say that we are condemned to live with this divide for years to come and decades to come?

NJ: I would not wish to put it so pessimistically. But, to be sure, in the near future, I don't see any prospect of this situation changing.

MT: No policies?

NJ: No policies in place. Because notice that there is a diarchy in higher education. That is why whatever decisions are taken at MHRD [Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India] get implemented in central universities first. These universities are saved. By the time these decisions reach the state universities or mofussil universities, you find they are diluted.

MT: I have kept two questions towards the end. The first one –and I would like you to expand on this – because many colleagues have asked me that they would like to know your views. All of us know that you have been the Managing Editor of *Sociological Bulletin* [hereafter *Bulletin*] the journal of Indian Sociological Society, which has been in existence for more than sixty years now; I don't know the volume number.

NJ: Yes, it is sixty-six.

MT: Sixty-six years; founded by Professor Ghurye. And, I think, you have similar distinction of having been an editor for fifteen years. I don't know for how long Professor Ghurye was the editor, I have no clue.

NJ: Professor Ghurye was editor for about seven years.

MT: That way, I think, you were the longest serving editor so far.

NJ: My record can be broken only after 15 years! It will be intact till then.

MT: Yes, you were the longest serving editor of *Bulletin*. You have just demitted the office last year. I also know that for long you had also looked after the ICSSR Journal of *Reviews and Abstracts: Sociology and Social Anthropology*. And I am aware of your publications in another journal that we have in the country, *Contributions to Indian Sociology* [hereafter *Contributions*]. You have published in *EPW*, too. I am very happy that as editor you never published your own articles in *Bulletin*, some sort of professional benchmark that you set for future editors. I just want to know from you how, as an editor of a journal which is a collective sort of thing, which is the intellectual expression of a collective body, do you see

the kind of growth and development of the discipline I was referring to in this particular journal [*Bulletin*]. Let me add that I also have a larger theoretical question in mind that from that vantage point you also see what type of theoretical engagements we have, how you referred to imitating, things coming in as fashion, intellectual fashion from somewhere... So, what type of work is getting done in different parts of the country, what type of papers you received, the quality of the papers, the factors behind the good quality or the bad quality, etc. You have referred to some of these things. And also, your experience with international organisations like JStor, now *Bulletin* is international in that sense. I was quite happy to note that [Indian Sociological] Society has got more money from JStor. Can you tell us something about your experience, and I am saying experience in the larger sense of the term coming outside of your own biographical trajectory in relation to the discipline.

NJ: Yes Manish, today... I am able to take a view, as I am out of the *Bulletin*. I would have perhaps given a different reply if you had asked me this question five years earlier. But, before I answer that question, I would like to clarify one point. It is not that I did not publish anything of my own in the *Bulletin*.

MT: After becoming the editor?

NJ: After becoming the editor I did publish one paper which was part of a seminar on the Bombay School [of Sociology]. That was, [the Indian Sociological] Society's Managing Committee decided to have a special issue incorporating papers from that seminar and my paper happened to be one of them. But, of course, it was double blind reviewed and then included. Similarly, I wrote a report on a seminar on 'Sociology in South Asia'...

MT: You had edited that.

NJ: I had guest edited; I had a report on the seminar.

MT: Not a paper?

NJ: Not a paper. I had a report. Then I wrote an introduction to a special issue that I did with Dr. Vibha Arora.

MT: And that issue had your paper?

NJ: No, I did not have a paper, just the co-authored introduction. So, these are the three pieces. And [the Indian Sociological] Society also asked me to do a meta-analysis of sixty years of *Bulletin*.

MT: That I remember.

NJ: Of what went in to *Bulletin* over sixty years. So, that is another paper that I published. But I consciously excluded publishing anything of my own, outside of these. I did not do any book review or write any professional notice in the *Bulletin*. That is just to set the record right. The *Bulletin*, as you know, has been the flagship journal of the Indian Sociological Society, a journal which has been published for the last sixty-six years without interruption. Yes for long there was the system in which the Secretary of the Society was ex-officio editor of the *Bulletin*.

MT: Managing Editor?

NJ: No, Editor. He or she was called the Editor.

MT: Now you were the Managing Editor?

NJ: Yes, the Managing Editor. Those days the journal would move from place to place depending upon who was elected as the Secretary. That would take lot of time; there used to be disruptions in the publication schedule of the *Bulletin*. Thanks to the initiative of Professor T.K. Oommen, somewhere in the 1990s, a decision was taken to appoint Professor M.N. Panini as the first Managing Editor of the *Bulletin* for a term of five years, and delink the editorship of the *Bulletin* from the office of the Secretary. That I think was a wonderful move. I functioned as Managing Editor for fifteen years.

MT: Do you recollect the time, just for the record?

NJ: 2000-2015; August 2000 to the end of 2015.

MT: Was Professor [B.S.] Baviskar the President of the Society then?

NJ: Yes, it was during Professor Baviskar's term as President that I took charge as the Managing Editor.

MT: And you left office?

NJ: When Professor Anand Kumar completed his term as President. I have worked with eight Presidents.

MT: No President had two terms.

NJ: No. No President had two terms. As a flagship journal, I looked at the *Bulletin* as a forum which also conveys to the external world what goes on in the academic field of sociology in India. And at the same time, from the receiver's point of view, we print about three thousand copies of the journal. And since this journal is given free of cost to all the life members; it goes to the far corners of this country and also abroad. That means, as a vehicle, the *Bulletin* carries the sociological knowledge that is produced in and on India to different corners.

MT: So, it has far wider readership than any other professional journal?

NJ: Yes, far wider readership than any other professional journal [in sociology in the country]. Of course, you may say, with the coming of the Internet anybody can access, etc. But there is nothing like this hard copy which we all have.

MT: But just as a matter of thought, now things may change.

NJ: Things do change; things will have to change to keep pace with time.

MT: Because, from now on, the hard copy will be accessible to only few who have opted for it.

NJ: Yes, only for those who opted for it. But others have access to the soft copy. And they are the beneficiaries; they will also get free electronic access to the back volumes. So, those who want to preserve hard copies will take hard copies. This has changed because of the availability and use of information technology. But, what I am trying to emphasise is that, as a forum in which the knowledge generated, the journal goes to different parts of the world. If that is the case, it also makes a statement about what type of knowledge has gone into it. As a matter of policy very consciously I decided that I will not take any political stand; as I told you about my disciplined eclecticism, I would not reject an article because it puts forward a particular theoretical perspective. I encouraged different types of perspectives to come into the *Bulletin*. So, people know, this journal is not foreclosed in terms of themes or perspectives; they could seek to publish their articles. There was no particular preference. But, when I did the meta-analysis of articles published in the *Bulletin* over sixty years, I discovered one important thing: there were very few theoretical pieces. And, some of these theoretical

pieces basically engaged the idea of how those theoretical ideas derived from the West translate in the Indian situation.

MT: Just applying those ideas.

NJ: Yes, applying those ideas to see their contextual fit in the Indian context.

MT: In a different context.

NJ: Initially, there were one or two articles in which people tried to express that, like Ramkrishna Mukherjee, Ghurye, etc., but later on this trend is not to be seen. Secondly, I found these articles following the qualitative research tradition. It was not my preference; most of the articles which were submitted for publication in the *Bulletin* were based on qualitative research. Though there were articles using quantitative techniques... you find tables, you find statistical analysis...

MT: Quantitative in the true sense or just with tables?

NJ: No, no, in the true sense. They have applied statistical tests like regression, etc. But such articles were very few. My only problem with papers based on qualitative research was, are these people doing qualitative research as a matter of design or are they doing it by default. Is it by design or by default? I discovered, many of them were doing it by default. You may ask me how I found that out. Very simple: the approach followed, the methods used are qualitative, but the language in which the paper is written is quantitative, like they speak of generalisation, etc.

MT: Sampling...

NJ: Sampling and hypothesis, and things like that. So, much of my referee work focused on that, much of my editorial work focused on that. The third point I would like to make is an important point which you mentioned about the *Bulletin*. Since I took over the editorship of the journal – it may have happened earlier also, I cannot say definitely – I made a conscious effort to encourage younger generation of scholars. During the last fifteen years, many of the papers published in the *Bulletin* happen to be the first paper by the author concerned, that is, they have not had previous experience of publishing in the *Bulletin*, or for that matter in any other journal. This meant that I had to put in extra effort whenever the papers came from younger scholars.

MT: What do you mean by extra efforts? Expediting the process?

NJ: I wouldn't say expediting the process; that was not in my hands, because there is the process of refereeing. Sometimes a paper could get rejected because the language is deficient. Take for instance there was a paper I had from a research scholar in NEHU [North Eastern Hill University, Shillong]. This paper was on kinship analysis. It took on a very big name, Rodney Needham.

MT: Oh, the famous anthropologist!

NJ: Yes. When I read, I found lot of problems with the text, but I got the impression that this young man is trying to tell something important. I would keep the name anonymous. I sent it to a referee. The referee read it and said, 'This is a fantastic paper, but hopelessly written.' I will get back to you on this later on. And this referee, in fact, edited the paper; he recommended that 'This paper deserves to be published, but ask the person to revise it.' So, I took extra trouble in trying to revise the language of the paper and I had to go back and forth more than once. You may ask why I would do that. You see, I have been a beneficiary of some great man who...

MT: I will come to that point.

NJ: So, I feel, at some stage, young scholars need that little finger to hold on until they have learnt to walk; once they start walking on their own, they don't need that. These are some of my experiences with the *Bulletin*. As a reader you must tell me how you look at it. If you have any criticism I can address it.

MT: No, no my job today is...

NJ: If you have any criticism you can direct that to me.

MT: No, I don't have any particular criticism.

NJ: Or criticisms that you have heard.

MT: Once I read a piece by Nandini Sundar, much before your meta-analysis of the journal [the *Bulletin*] got published, and there she was looking at the *Bulletin* and *Contributions*. She was making a larger point that, how in some of the journals, in a sense she was making a point about the discipline itself, there are certain types of silences in the discipline...that is, the Northeast is absent, Muslims are absent, minorities are absent, etc. And in *Bulletin* as a locus where can you find and underline those silences?

NJ: Manish this is an important point you have raised. I think, in *Bulletin*, I have since addressed this silence sufficiently. Look at the number of papers we have published on the Northeast during the last ten years.

MT: That [Nandini Sundar's] is an old piece.

NJ: That is an old piece. It takes effort to address such silences. A journal cannot generate papers. If somebody writes [on those silences] you can try to improve the paper to publishable quality. But you can also put a similar question to some of other journals: whom do they publish, how many mofussil areas have appeared in those journals, etc.?

MT: How many of them have been published in *Contributions*?

NJ: In fact, when *Contributions* celebrated fifty years they called me to speak. I made this point that there is a perception that, within sociology, *Contributions* is an elite journal and *Bulletin* is *aam admi* [common people] journal.

MT: So, you mean to say that *Contributions* is supposed to carry a different mandate and it should be oriented to a different type of audience, maybe in different places, whereas *Bulletin*, as you said, as an *aam admi* journal, has to have this mandate of carrying the entire nation and its different constituents along.

NJ: To put this very simply, we have a professional obligation which *Contributions* does not have, that is, professional in the sense that *Bulletin* is an organ of the Indian Sociological Society.

MT: And you are responsible to the life members.

NJ: Certainly, responsibility for the life members, etc. But also, no journal can publish things which are not submitted to it.

MT: So, the journal also has a structural constraint where you don't fully control your publication material.

NJ: Though this is definitely true, what I noticed was, once the *Bulletin* started appearing regularly, the number of submissions started increasing.

MT: Because then it creates a virtuous cycle.

NJ: Yes, a virtuous cycle.

MT: If I submit, I know that it will get published fast.

NJ: At least, you will quickly hear whether it is accepted or not for publication. At some stage two important things happened. First, the first fifty-five volumes of the *Bulletin* were put on a CD [compact disc].

MT: That I know, that we had to buy by paying 500 rupees.

NJ: Yes, by paying 500 rupees. And then the second thing happened. Once the *Bulletin* started coming out regularly and people started making references to it, JStor took interest in it.

MT: That was the best thing to have happened to the *Bulletin*.

NJ: That was a lot of effort; it took more than two years, but all the back volumes with a moving wall of two years are available on JStor now. And that has also brought money, apart from the *Bulletin* becoming...

MT: Visible...

NJ: Visible internationally.

MT: And also anyone could download the article and all. And even some of us contributors feel good that our articles are on the website. So, I will Google Thakur and then JStor to see if I have any entries there. That is helpful because I know that the journal to which I am submitting my paper for publication to is also archived in JStor, so I will have more visibility. So, maybe, the journal may get good submissions.

NJ: And I should also say, now that you have asked questions about the *Bulletin*, it was a great learning experience for me. It broadened my horizon; I would not have read about so many things but for the *Bulletin*. And also different, you spoke about eclecticism; in fact, I found the virtue of eclecticism reflected in my editorial work. You may say this is what most people do but...

MT: A slightly personal question sir. Do you see this office of the editor or in your own professional career you having been the editor of the *Bulletin* as the most meaningful achievement? It is a personal question. How you would look at your job as an editor, the knowledge you have got from all quarters, I would say, for your contributions?

NJ: I will come to that. But, if you ask me what has been the most, what is the expression you used Manish?

MT: Meaningful...

NJ: My most meaningful experience has been my role as a teacher. That has given me the greatest of satisfaction. I think that joy I would not have got in any other job. If somebody were to ask whether I would like to be a teacher if there is rebirth, I would gladly say yes.

MT: True.

NJ: In the case of *Bulletin*, yes, fifteen years, as you know, with lot of, again, structural constraints, infrastructural constraints, we had to work. Thanks to many institutions, many individuals, some students, etc. I could do that. And when people talk about it positively, I really feel that, as a professional, it was a truly meaningful experience. I am very proud of the Society and I am proud of the journal. People may have criticisms; you may not compare this [the *Bulletin*] with the best. But, I think we have done a great job, I think we can all be proud of that.

MT: I have a different assessment. Of course, your love for teaching, your being a teacher, all these things are quite meaningful to you and should be meaningful to everyone who has this as a vocation. All said and done, teaching has some sort of a localised experience. You have a classroom; you are in a given institution, unless you go for online courses and things like that. But, in your role as an editor, someone from a small mofussil place in Madhepura in Bihar would know Professor Jayaram is the editor; as you pointed out someone who was editing *Contributions* also thought of calling you and having your view about the publication of the journal and its professional role and things like that. So, personally, I feel that your having been the Managing Editor of the *Bulletin* has given you much name and fame. I am not saying that you would not have acquired that name and fame otherwise. Why I am saying name and fame, is because, I think, teaching is one component, research is another component; you already had achievements in those areas. But when we come to something called institution-building, something called developing a professional culture, these things matter. How many of us these days are prepared to devote time to those things which will not immediately help us in our own promotion in our own career or research? Some would think it is a waste of time.

NJ: That is true. And also sometimes it may even appear as thankless when you get criticisms from people whose articles are not accepted, etc. That is there. And I have also edited, as you know, the ICSSR's...

MT: I mentioned that earlier.

NJ: ... *Journal of Reviews and Abstracts: Sociology and Anthropology* for more than a decade. Again, ten years; I did back volumes and continued for ten years. Now it has been disbanded. But editing these two journals, and editing the *Bulletin* especially, meant being very conscious about who I am vis-à-vis the profession. There is a moral responsibility in occupying a position. I do have a peculiar incident which I would like to record here. I have had the misfortune of rejecting my own teacher's paper.

MT: You are referring to? Can you mention the name?

NJ: Okay, I can mention the name. It was Professor Rajagopalan, my teacher and research supervisor, who had submitted a paper, which was refereed by somebody having expertise in the area. And the referee said, it cannot be published for whatever reason he gave. When I had first read it, I had thought it will be published; when it was rejected, I felt very sad, but I had to respect the referee's judgement. I went to his [Professor Rajagopalan's] residence to convey this bad news. He was a great man; he told me, 'You have done your job. I would have been unhappy if you had just published without getting the paper refereed.' He did not ask me who the referee was.

MT: Naturally.

NJ: But for sometime I carried...

MT: Guilt...

NJ: Yes, sort of. But, in retrospect, I look at this, maybe I was sad, but I had the moral responsibility. Frankly, I have done this to everybody – no fear; no favour.

MT: Now I am coming to my last question. And, in fact, Professor Chandan Kumar Sharma asked me to ask you this in particular. Your long, long association with Professor Satish Saberwal and last year I read the volume, the collection of essays you had put together in his memory. It is called *Institutions, Ideas and Processes*. It was published in 2016, if I recollect correctly; or was it 2015?

NJ: It was in 2014. It was titled *Ideas, Institutions, Processes: Essays in Memory of Satish Saberwal*.

MT: By Orient Blackswan. And that was your tribute to, I will use the expression, your mentor Professor Satish Saberwal. Can you tell us about your

long association with Professor Satish Saberwal? Of course, those who have read the book and those who have read your tribute to him would know about this. But for those who have not so far seen the book that would be much more interesting and meaningful. This is not a personal question that I am asking you. I think in this apparently personal question there are certain other structural features because he brings us to the idea of mentoring new generation, younger generation of scholars, the amount of time you can spare for them, the patience that a senior scholar should have for the junior scholars, etc. Are we ready to spend three days in an All India Sociological Conference and listen to some of the half-baked, ill-conceived papers and give them critical comments? And many other things like, do we have that patience? We have, you know, fly-by-afternoon speakers... they will come only when you call them for inaugural, plenary, or valedictory session. And again they would come from the centre, make the speech, get the claps and take the next available flight back. But, on the other hand, there are people like Professor Brij Raj Chauhan, about whom Professor Abha Chauhan was making a reference and also Professor Satish Saberwal, who wrote a lengthy letter commenting on my article published in the *Bulletin*. Do we have scholars like Professor Saberwal or what scholars like him can do for the profession and for the discipline? That is my last question to you.

NJ: It is always a great pleasure to talk about Professor Satish Saberwal. Out of fondness at some stage I started calling him Saberwal *ji* and that remained till the end. I should tell some things by way of background because some of the points that you touched upon would also be covered. I mentioned about this ICSSR discipline-specific course.

MT: Yes you did.

NJ: Those days it was of thirty-four-day- duration.

MT: In Saugar?

NJ: In Saugar, Madhya Pradesh. It was thirty-four days then; later on the duration was reduced. And participants were drawn from different parts of the country. We were all in the beginning stages of our research. Professor Saberwal had returned from the U.S. He had completed his term [as a Fellow at IAS] in Shimla. And he had been selected as Professor of Sociology in the Centre for Historical Studies, JNU, which was then headed by Professor Romila Thapar. But in the interim period, from leaving IAS to joining JNU, because he had to get his quarters set up etc., he decided to accept the ICSSR's invitation, especially Professor Leela

Dube's invitation, to act as a resident resource person. That meant he was there for the entire duration of thirty-four days [from 5 November to 8 December 1973].

MT: All through the course.

NJ: Yes. Other professors came and went. Professor T.N. Madan came, Professor Yogendra Singh came, Professor André Béteille came, Professor Brij Raj Chauhan came, Professor S.C. Dube came. Many of them came and went, that is, for one or two days as they were required to lecture on. But Professor Saberwal was there throughout. It was there that I happened to meet him for the first time. In the afternoon, each one of us [the participants] was supposed to present our research proposals. I think on the third or fourth day my turn came; the names were listed alphabetically. My turn came, I made a presentation. I made use of the black board. And at the end, when other participants had finished with their questions, he gave a very critical feedback. And I appreciated it, as that was the first time I had received something by way of constructive criticisms. Then the session was over. Before leaving the lecture hall he told me, 'Jayaram join me for a cup of tea at my place.'

MT: Where was he staying there?

NJ: In the faculty quarters. I joined him for a cup of tea and he told me, 'You know, that it was a good conceptualisation, the way you presented and wrapped, etc.' Then he told me something for which even now I feel very happy. He said, 'You hold promise of becoming a good sociologist.' I was very happy. But suddenly my happiness was punctured. He told me, 'Unfortunately, you have far too many limitations.' The limitations he then started listing.

MT: One by one.

NJ: One by one, and it was puncturing my balloon of my happiness.

MT: Was it a long list?

NJ: Yes, it was a long list. He first told me my reading was inadequate. Whereas Professor Madan thought I had read more than what was required of an MA student. But Professor Saberwal said, 'You need to read critically; you are familiar with the works, but you are appreciating, you are taking a position without realising what it means. So how to build... you are not doing', what in his

terms, ‘a synthetic reading; you are doing discrete reading. You are reading A, B, C, D, E, separately.’

MT: You are not able to connect the themes or arguments.

NJ: Yes, that is what he meant. He told me that is one limitation. Second, he said, ‘Your language is inadequate.’ By then I had made an effort, I should tell you. After my decision to converse only in English during my MA, it had improved considerably, but it was not adequate to fool him. There were limitations. He said that, I was jumping to conclusion without questioning the type of...

MT: Lack of criticality.

NJ: Criticality, etc. All those things he pointed out. I asked him, ‘How do I improve?’ At a weak moment he showed his little finger indicating that he would help me. And by presence of mind I grabbed it, I immediately grabbed it. If I had ignored that...

MT: That option...

NJ: ...perhaps today you would not be interviewing me. Maybe, I would have taught in some undergraduate college somewhere.... And that marked the beginning of our long relationship...

MT: Long, long relationship...

NJ: Long, long relationship, indeed. He passed away in 2010. Since then we [my wife and I] have been meeting Mrs Saberwal [who now lives in Bengaluru] every month, we have lunch together, exchange notes, etc. In this one thing that you mentioned, the mentoring part of it, you know I came from Bangalore...

MT: He was not your direct teacher.

NJ: He was not my teacher in the conventional sense of the term. I was nobody to him, nothing. You cannot say in caste terms or regional terms...

MT: Any reason, language...

NJ: In none of the terms. He just took a fancy to a young scholar who he thought had...

MT: Some promise...

NJ: Promise. And he was willing to invest his time in me.

MT: That's what I wanted to know.

NJ: Yes. He was then editing a special issue for *Contributions*...

MT: *Process and Institutions in Urban India*, which came out as a book.

NJ: Yes, Vikas published it as a book in 1978. He wrote a postcard to me. No, that day itself he gave me a book by Rudolph and Rudolph on *Education and Politics in India*. He told me, 'EPW has sent this to me for review; you attempt a review of this book as education is your area, it is not my area. You review that.' He added, 'I will write to Krishna Raj [then editor of EPW] that I have passed on the book to you.'

MT: He did give you that offer?

NJ: Yes, I still have that book with me.

MT: This is something great.

NJ: Remarkable. Because he said, 'You are working in this area; I am not working in this area. I can also review, but you will benefit from that and engage with that. You show it to me; I will help you with that.' Immediately he gave that book to me, the very first day we met... imagine!

MT: That was a great help.

NJ: Unbelievable. In retrospect, whenever I think about it, sometimes I cry because that was a very moving sort of a day for me. How many people would do that?

MT: Even now, how many people would do that?

NJ: When he went back [to Delhi], when he edited that book, he sent a postcard. It said that, 'I am editing this special issue for *Contributions*. You remember you presented a synopsis of your research [at the Saugar course]. You must have by now finished your data collection and writing your thesis. Can you send a paper based on your data?' This was how I wrote that paper titled 'Higher Education as Status Stabilizer: Students in Bangalore'. You won't believe, those days there was no Internet, no electronic typewriter; I had typed it in on my typewriter. When it

came back from Professor Saberwal, there was more of red-ink writing by him on the paper...

MT: Than what you had written?

NJ: Than my own words. At first, I was disappointed.

MT: Almost gave up?

NJ: I thought, am I competent to do academics; I should give it up. And one or two my friends to whom I showed [the paper], said does he think he is the only one who knows English, what does he mean writing so much in red, he did not find anything acceptable, etc.

MT: *Apne aap ko kya samajhta hain* [What does he think of himself]?

NJ: *Apne aap ko kya samajhta hain!* Of course, I was a bit more sensible, especially after having caught hold of the finger. Because it occurred to me, why is he telling all this, what is he benefitting by throwing my paper out? I happened to go to Delhi, so I carried the paper with me. He gave me a cup of tea at his residence and then he said 'Let's go for a walk.' In JNU campus, we walked. At some stage he stopped... I made a reference to the paper. He said frankly, 'No, it is not up to the mark. I think you can wait for some more time.' I said, 'I have a request... whether you publish it or not that's a different thing; you bring it to a level where you think it is satisfactory, that will be a shot in the arm.' You won't believe, he went through that paper seven times. That meant from the first time, later on he read six versions [of the paper]. It was the eighth version which was published. Now that was the beginning of my academic grooming under him and later on we did work together.

MT: In that volume?

NJ: No, the volume on *Social Conflict* [Oxford in India Readings in Sociology and Social Anthropology]. And that has also a very interesting point to make. Before that, I should tell you that we also jointly wrote a chapter which appeared in Veena Das's edited book [*The Oxford India Companion to Sociology and Social Anthropology*]...

MT: On conflict?

NJ: Yes, on 'Social Conflict'. In our edited book, when Oxford published it...

MT: You have referred to this in your tribute.

NJ: Yes. I think that needs to be mentioned here because people may not have read that. Look at the generosity of the man. When they prepared the contract, Oxford [University Press] mentioned his name first, my name next.

MT: Because you were from Bangalore and you were not much known.

NJ: Yes. Then he wrote a letter to Ms Esha Béteille, and marked a copy to me. I have it even now. It says just because Jayaram is not in Delhi that is no reason for his name to appear second. Incidentally, the last name Jayaram with 'J' appears first, Saberwal with 'S' appears later, if you go by alphabetical order. And another important thing is Jayaram is a scholar in his own standing and we should respect that. They rectified it. The book carries Jayaram and Saberwal. Tell me Manish, how many people...

MT: That is what I wanted to know. Why don't we have so many people like him these days?

NJ: I don't know. Now this is a reality which makes such people great. Now, one thing that I learnt from him, he must have done this to others also.

MT: True.

NJ: See, the finger which he showed, some people pick it up, some people do not. Right? Some people may say he is arrogant, etc., because he went by certain standards. What did I learn from him? I learnt analytical skills from Professor Rajagopalan; he was a master analyst. You give him a problem he will break it into its component parts. I learnt academic writing skills and honed that from Professor Saberwal. And, in addition, all the professional qualities that you see in me, I have...

MT: You will give him the credit for.

NJ: I give him the sole credit. Whether it is integrity, whether it is being honest in expressing what you think...

MT: Or punctuality, meeting the deadline...

NJ: ... meeting the deadline.

MT: Discipline.

NJ: Discipline is a part of it. And he would always say, don't bother about big names, do what you think is right.

MT: It should be done.

NJ: It should be done. He said names do not really matter. I think many of the things that I learnt from him were over the last many years. I became a part of his family and was one person among many others who had free access to his house.

MT: Though his external appearance was not very inviting.

NJ: He was very strict with that. And, in fact, you won't believe, when he was almost dying he had refused to see people. When I wrote to his daughter [Dr Gayatri], when I telephoned her, she said he does not want to see anybody. I just said, 'I appreciate the point; respect his sentiments. Please convey my best wishes to him.' Later on, I wrote a note to her seeking '... one last chance of meeting; he meant so much to me. He was almost like my elder brother.' I got a reply. She wrote, 'Professor Jayaram, you will be surprised that he has agreed to see you. When you are in Delhi next, please let us know; you can come home.'

MT: You cherish that.

NJ: Oh, I cherish that moment. Many people wonder, he did not see his own relatives, how did he see me. I think then I discovered, for him, I was something like a son, a younger brother, however you look at that. It is one point that I gained from him. What is that he was gaining; he was not gaining anything from me.

MT: Yes. You were not in a position to give him anything concrete.

NJ: On the other hand, in a way he found it satisfying that he...

MT: Grooming somebody.

NJ: Groomed somebody for the next generation. I have imbibed this underlying principle Manish. Once a student asked me, she was not my student, she was working with somebody, whenever she had problems with methodology, the interpretation of data, and when she had problems with the referee's comments on her thesis as well as any personal crisis, she would come to me. Finally, one day after everything was over, she came and she said, 'Professor Jayaram, I don't know how to thank you.' Then I told, 'You don't thank me. There is a special way of doing this, that is, some day you will find somebody who maybe looking for

the little finger; lend it. I think that day you will feel satisfied that you have thanked me enough.' So, I look at all youngsters – some of them benefit; some of them do not, I cannot help it. You do know some of the people who have been so close to me; I have extended that same thing... I do know how much I have benefitted from him; and, in the remaining life, if I can help few more people, you see, that is done.

MT: So let us conclude this conversation on this happy note.

NJ: Thank you Manish.

MT: And on this, on your part, the fond remembrance that you have of Professor Satish Saberwal. And also this idea that such practices and such affection as this, what you call the act of grooming, if it gets more extensive and if it gets on the part of many other senior scholars that would benefit everyone.

NJ: One point, if you can go back before we conclude. You asked me what is the function of our being here.

MT: Yes.

NJ: It is the same. See, for me, you may say that I am retired now and I can afford to spend time. I will tell you, I have never attended a seminar or conference in which I have not spent all the days there.

MT: This is the point that I was mentioning.

NJ: If I go to a conference, from the first day to the last I am there. Whether I present a paper or not, that is a different thing. Even if I am...

MT: Don't you think it makes you less of a star because you don't come and go by the afternoon? I'm being sarcastic. Don't you look at it that way?

NJ: Oh, Manish, stars are very far. We will not bother about stars.

MT: So, anyway Sir, unless you have anything to add... You would have noticed, and I like using the word noticed that I have learnt from you, that all through I have known you for years now, all through I have addressed you as 'Sir'. Because I have no other way of calling you, even if I tried hard, I can't call you Professor Jayaram. Maybe towards the end you could not have called Saberwal *ji*, Satish.

NJ: No. In fact, once I did call, I did make a reference to him as Satish. My wife objected to it, 'He is so elderly', she admonished me. Incidentally, there is an entry on 'Satish Saberwal' which I have written for the *International Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. It is not yet published; I think it is due early next year. I mentioned to her that I have written this on Satish, she said, now you say Satish, while you always referred to him as Saberwal *ji* before.

MT: No, I call you Jayaram when you are not there. But if you are there, when I am talking to you...

NJ: I know, I know.

MT: I have no way of, even if I wish I can't address you by your name. It's not part of the system. It's also a thing that is...

NJ: Cultural...

MT: Cultural, structural, also we live in a hierarchical society; why not acknowledge that. Also, all hierarchies may not necessarily be bad. Certain things come out of respect, out of affection. And I have been a beneficiary of your affection and I have gained much from you. And that is why I feel honoured and privileged that, apart from other things that I have gained, I also had the good fortune of having been part of this conversation. Again, as we conclude, we must say thanks for the facilities that Tezpur University has given us, specially the Department of Mass Communication, and four of them, these youngsters whom we have detained for the last two hours...

NJ: Listening to our conversation and standing all the time.

MT: And they have gone beyond their office hours; they have made this conversation possible.

NJ: We deeply appreciate that.

MT: And, personally, I want to again mention that it has been made possible by the initiative and efforts of Professor Chandan Kumar Sharma. It is interesting that we have met at a conference in Tezpur and that is a tribute to Tezpur and the facilities that it commands. Thank you so much.

NJ: Thank you very much.

MT: Thank you so much Sir. It was nice talking to you.

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