Indian Sociology and Knowledge Systems

"Traditional knowledge systems are not just remnants of the past but are living, dynamic systems that continue to evolve and adapt. They provide deep insights into the cultural and social fabric of India." - A.K. Saran

There have been diverse knowledge systems which have shaped Indian sociology. This has to be understood in the context of the many philosophical influences that have gone into making contending traditions in Indian sociology. For the first experience of modernity in India was closely intertwined with the experience of colonial subjugation. Secondly, if social anthropology in the west arose out of the curiosity felt by European society about primitive cultures, what role could it have in India, which was an ancient and advanced civilisation, but which also had simple, what used to be called 'primitive' societies within it? Finally, what useful role could sociology have in a sovereign, independent India, a nation about to begin its adventure with planned development and democracy?

Distinct views on knowledge systems emerged. G.S. Ghurye emphasized the Indological approach. There were few like A. K. Saran who emphasised not just the study of traditional values but advocated them as frames of reference for sociological understanding and analysis. While few adopted the dominant western forms of knowledge in a somehow uncritical fashion to understand social phenomena, others such as T.K.Oommen were engaged with what was termed as alien concepts and Indian reality. Some like J.P.S. Uberoi talked of swaraj in the way categories are thought. Others such as Dumont emphasised a textual understanding while others like Andre Beteille distinguished the book view from the field view. Common to most endeavours was however an engagement with the question of tradition and modernity. For Saran the postulate of modern knowledge system assumed 'unmediated universal knowability'. And he argued that the paradigm of human progress based on this postulate is a complete reversal of the traditional paradigm of man's intellectual and social existence on this earth. There has been an ongoing debate within Indian Sociology about the categories that ought to be used and their relevance. D P Mukherjee's ideas in this regard are significant.

Indian sociology has a rich body of writings that have reflected on these issues and it is important for the next generation to engage with this. The idea is to understand the argument that scholars such as A. K. Saran were putting forth and the debates that ensued. A.K.

Saran'swork often focused on the traditional knowledge systems and their relevance in contemporary Indian sociology. Saran emphasized the importance of integrating traditional knowledge systems with modern sociological approaches. He believed that traditional knowledge, often passed down through generations, provides a rich source of wisdom and understanding about Indian society. Saran critiqued the dominance of Western paradigms in Indian sociology. He argued that these paradigms often failed to capture the essence of Indian society and suggested that an indigenous perspective is essential.Saran advocated for a holistic approach to understand Indian society. He believed that social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions are deeply interconnected and should be studied together.

> *"In Indian sociology, the separation of the social, cultural, and spiritual aspects is artificial. A holistic approach that considers all these dimensions together is crucial for a true understanding of Indian society."*– A.K. Saran

D. P Mukherjee contended that sociologists should learn and be familiar with both 'high' and 'low' languages and cultures — not only Sanskrit, Persian or Arabic, but also local dialects. T. N. Madan too engaged with some of these issues. **T**he context in which Hindu pluralism has become part of a public debate he argued,is that of the religious plurality of India. At the empirical level, this plurality across religious traditions and within each major religious tradition is a well-documented fact. In respect of Hinduism, it has been argued that what needs explanation is the emergence of an allegedly homogeneous 'all-India' Hinduism in the 19th century out of the welter of regional religious traditions, such as Vaishnavism in the west, Shaivism in the south, and Shaktism in the east.

It was argued by some that if the coalescence of a large variety of religious traditions in the 19th century into 'syndicated Hinduism' reflected the pressure of an emerging nationalism, the danger that such a homogenized all-India tradition would turn out to be hegemonistic and even intolerant was also recognized, at least implicitly. Vivekananda saw both the former possibility (of an all-India Hinduism) and the latter danger (of intolerance), and strove to promote the one and prevent the other. The method he adopted is of interest in the context of the idea of pluralism. Many of these debates are important in the current context.