THE TEACHING OF SOCIOLOGY IN INDIA: CONTEXT AND CONCERNS

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The note attempts to highlight the current status of teaching of sociology in India from the point of view of course content and the related academic issues. Although there are larger issues other than purely pedagogic ones involved in the teaching of the subject such as the structure of the profession, the creation of employment, the market of textbook, I confine my presentation primarily to the teaching of the subject at the Master's level. It is at this stage that the subject is first standardized and transferred to other levels of academic stream.

In the present context, our decision was initially to collect information on all the sociology courses offered by the Indian universities at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels, the same has not been possible due to some unavoidable reasons. The present review, therefore, is based on the information collected from about 35 universities and one deemed to be university only.

Current scenario

There is no uniform structure and patterns of courses offered at the postgraduate level in sociology in the country. In the first place, the subject has to follow the given structure of the university programme and only at the subsequent stages different courses/papers are placed according to the logic of the themes and sub-themes of the subject. Secondly, universities generally follow two systems with regard to instructional and evaluative procedures popularly known as the 'annual system' and the 'semester system'. The size, content and thrust of individual papers are accordingly defined and formulated to suit the requirements of the prevailing system in a particular university. Thirdly, the inclusion and exclusion of papers/courses on specific themes and problems is circumscribed by the availability of teachers to teach them. Naturally, it is not guided by the relevance and need of the subject- matter as the logic of the discipline demands. A large number of teaching departments face this handicap.

Having shown that individual subjects of study in the university today do not take decisions independently, I shall now turn to a consideration of the nature and content
of courses being offered in the PG programme of sociology. In most of the departments, courses are broadly grouped under two categories-core courses and elective/optional courses. They are also divided into three groups in some universities, namely, foundation/compulsory courses, specialised/major courses and optional courses. While core/foundation courses ordinarily include the theoretical and conceptual side of sociology, the elective or optional courses aim to familiarize the students with the basic institutions of society which may be described as the empirical side of sociology.

A close look at the scheme of courses offered shows that the theoretical side is almost wholly imported from the West. They have not grown in the course of reflections on the nature of Indian social reality. The theoretical courses are further sub-divided into classical sociological traditions and contemporary sociological theories. They primarily focus on the writings of individual sociologists who established the principal frames of reference of modern sociology. In some cases students are introduced to various schools of sociological thinking by taking up theories such as structural, functional, conflict, action approach, phenomenology, and ethnomethodology and so forth. In addition to this almost all departments administer courses in research methodology and some components of statistics as a part of statistical reasoning in sociology. The level and thrust of papers in social statistics, of course, varies substantially from university to university.

Another set of courses commonly serviced in the majority of the departments are on the different institutional fields. The areas such as family and kinship, religion, economy, polity and social stratification have received separate attention. Each major institutional field provides problems of analysis and interpretation which are in some ways distinctive. The courses put forward on these areas tend to usually deal with society in general as well as India in particular. It is refreshing to see that the nature of Indian social reality is adequately reflected in most of these courses. However, alternative approach also continues in some university departments. They follow the conventional way of dividing the subject into rural sociology, urban sociology, industrial sociology; political sociology etc. These courses occupy a kind of middle space between theoretical courses and courses exclusively on India as they are more concrete than the first and more abstract than the second.
In addition to general theoretical courses and courses on institutions, there are courses dealing with numerous areas pertaining to contemporary issues and problems that have assumed central space in the social science discourse today. Naturally, majority of the courses in this field is in the nature of specialized courses which form part of the elective/optional stream of taught courses. Although some of these courses have surfaced under the influence of the growth of such fields of study in non-Indian sociology, there are courses dealing with contemporary issues of change and development in India. The entry of these subjects into the syllabi of sociology in Indian universities reflects the dynamism of the curriculum on the one hand and the changing concerns of the society at large on the other.

A detailed account of the assorted list of optional/elective courses (see Annexure) apparently reveals the following tendencies in framing of individual courses. First, some conventional courses have been given new look through modifications in phrases and thematic expressions. They have just been re-named and included in the syllabi. Then there are courses which have been floated in tune with the emerging concerns and new developments in Indian society. Courses on gender, marginalized communities, environment, social movement, ethnicity, mass communication and so on are some such fields of study that show this trend. Finally, we have papers which have been introduced recently in the wake of globalization and liberalization in general and marketisation of education in particular. While some courses in this area have been randomly framed and included under the usual garb of the new fields of specialisation, some departments are more innovative in launching a full master’s programme itself in Corporate Sociology, perhaps under the so-called self-finance courses of the university. This list of courses further suggests that the inclusion of courses on diverse and discrete themes is exclusively the result of local-regional needs and convenience and has nothing to do with the academic relevance and logic of the subject. Courses have also surfaced against the background of research interests of faculty members of the department concerned. This trend should be normally appreciated but the problem occurs when themes and topics commendable for research are not serviceable as taught courses or papers at the M.A. level. What I wish to question here is: at what stage or when a research topic/study graduates to become subject/theme of a full teaching course?
Furthermore close looks at the syllabi of virtually all university departments exhibit some problems that beset the teaching of the subject in India. The amorphous nature of the subject and the acute shortage of teachers are considered important limitations faced by the discipline today. In view of these limitations ambitious objective of teaching cannot be pursued effectively. The list of topics and readings included in syllabi suggests that everything that is latest is there. The elaborateness of the syllabus bears little relation to the recourses of the department. A department with hardly three or four teachers and inadequate library facilities includes in its syllabus the latest books on the most advanced branches of the subject. This situation creates an air of unreality in which both teachers and students do some thing which is very different from what they really do. The fact of the matter is that when we have to work with limited recourses it is better to have a modest syllabus and to teach it well than to handle it badly. In most of universities students ordinarily do not read the books that are prescribed for them. If it is the general situation, a little more attention has to be given to the capacities and requirements of the students we teach.

An ambitious design of the course structure is further reflected in its unduly heavy nature. Syllabuses become heavily loaded because of the desire of the departments to look up-to-date and modern. Even at the risk of being considered crazy, I argue that it is unreasonable to try to be exhaustive in teaching a subject like sociology to M.A. students. If our primary objective is to make students familiar with a certain mode of reasoning rather than merely a new technical vocabulary, we should be able to do a great deal with a modest syllabus and a small reading list.

The growth and development of the discipline in India has been an issue of serious discussion and introspection in Indian sociology. The involvement of senior professional sociologists in scrutiny and perusal has not only added theoretical rigour to these debates but it has also set the tone for its future development.¹ The space however does not permit me to elaborate on various crucial issues that have emerged in course of such reviews and appraisals undertaken during the last more than three decades. Nonetheless some major points in question expressed in course of these surveys have been-

*the search for a paradigm of “a sociology for India” or Indian Sociology,

*the issue of ‘indigenisation’ of concepts and categories, and
social policy concerns and role of sociologists leading to a debate on relevance of the
discipline to the society in general and to national policy for development in particular.

The debates and discussions circled around the above issues have definitely helped to sharpen our insights into the theoretical developments that have taken place in the discipline during the last few decades. It has also provided guidelines for revising and updating of our university curriculum.

Besides, the status of teaching of sociology and social anthropology has also been examined by statutorily constituted academic groups from time to time. Some of these surveys like the one sponsored by the UGC have not only been comprehensive and all-embracing but also sincere and critical. Recommendations and suggestions emanating from these studies have impacted the nature and content of taught sociology courses quite considerably. Majority of the existing courses serviced by several universities and PG colleges today have been adapted from the latest UGC Model Curriculum circulated in 2001.

The Challenge of Time

Sociology, like any other social science discipline, faces today the challenge of
time and the opportunity of transformation. While pressure of time has forced it to move
towards a process of transcending boundaries of paradigms, opportunity for
transformation has created refreshing ambience for professional excellence. However, the
subject faces also new challenges both as an intellectual endeavour and academic
commodity. The nature and extent of these challenges have naturally disturbed not only
the producers of sociological knowledge but also its consumers.

Why are we alarmed and uncomfortable today as professional sociologists? What
sorts of demand and pressure are being experienced by us? What new challenges does
sociology encounter in the wake of new forces of socio-economic change emerging in the
country today? I do not intend to provide answers to all these crucial questions separately
because of the limitation of my proficiency to handle all complex issues involved but
hope to touch upon them as and when they surface in our discussion that follows.

The most significant problem that is frequently raised concerning the teaching of
sociology these days is the decline in the demand of the subject in universities and
colleges. It is reported that less and less number of students are now applying for
admission into the bachelor’s and master’s programmes. Although in the absence of authentic and reliable information nothing can be said with certainty, this trend seems to be visible in almost every corner of the country. The problem is faced even by those universities which have always had large contingent of sociology students. Contextually then, one has to confront first with the emerging reality of number of students. Nonetheless there are colleagues in the profession who make fun of this problem as they do not wish to have unwieldy crowd in their classes. But such a contention is not shared by bulk of us.

This being the case, we have to hazard a guess to identify and locate reasons behind such a regrettable drift in our university departments. The question that we must ask here is: whether reasons behind the shrinking size of our classes are located entirely in the contents of sociological knowledge imparted through the courses we teach and the pedagogic practices we engage in or they are ingrained in the emerging forces of change witnessed in society at large.

The crisis in the growth of a subject in higher education is not merely on account of decline in standard of teaching or shortage of teachers or deterioration of basic infrastructure. It is as much due to academic stagnation as is the result of changing demands on the educational institutions emanating from socio-economic situation. On the academic side, there is no sign of much progress in terms of new courses, updated syllabi or innovative methods of teaching and learning. Rather than getting enriched, academic environment of most of the universities seems to have got depleted and lacks in inspiration.

On the other hand, with the advent of globalization not only the nature and magnitude of social change has experienced qualitative alteration but it has also put new pressure on the production and reproduction of the knowledge enterprises. Under the condition new professional restlessness has been created both among scholars and students. A clear transition is taking place in the value preferences among youths. They are moving towards values of achievement and entrepreneurial adventures. The process of integration of world economics in conditions of free market has transformed not only local economy but it has also changed modes of consumption and styles of life. It has led to change in career preferences of the people in general and youths in particular.
Innumerable new job opportunities are coming up in the world today and there is an unprecedented expansion in both service sector and knowledge sector. The liberalization of economy has given rise to new opportunities and demands for certain types of skill and education which is pulling students away from liberal social sciences. The new forces of change have given a whopping impetus to vocational education. As employment opportunities play an important role in education, the enrolment in liberal social studies and humanities like sociology is bound to decline.

In the new world order the lives of individuals and the fates of communities increasingly depend on what takes place in distant places. The socio-economic processes under globalization are essentially connected with market expansion and its offshoots. Thus with emergence of new disciplines and specializations and continuous advancement of knowledge coming into their own, the scope and need for curriculum modifications are far greater at the higher level of learning. But in the priority of concerns it seems ignored today in the universities in India. Broadly speaking, our subject seems to be of little help to the student community to utilize these new opportunities. We still run conventional courses in routine style leaving their products hardly equipped to take up the new challenges of the contemporary world of work. The point is not to play down the importance of the traditional discipline and courses, but even there updating of knowledge has to be kept in view, and further, the new demands of the job market also need to be addressed through the centres of higher learning. If excellence is one desirable feature of higher education, relevance is another, and if students are not sure about either, then their lukewarm interest in the study of a particular subject is quite understandable.

The pragmatic need, therefore, compels us to ‘tailor sociology to market forces’. But the moot question is how far we can vocationalise sociology? How to make it market-friendly without distorting its core? We have to think deeply on this issue because there is apparent limit within which practical innovations in the teaching of sociology could be accommodated without harming its essence. Training in sociology should not merely enable its seekers to cope up with the market forces but also inculcate in them the ability to critically comprehend the social reality from a critical-historical perspective. Thus the major tasks before us are the restructuring of courses, methods of teaching and areas of research.
Workable Interventions in Curriculum

Before we indicate some workable areas of intervention in designing sociology syllabus, it is pertinent to recapitulate the sense in which we use terms like curriculum and syllabus. By the word ‘curriculum’ we mean an ordered structure of learning opportunities and experiences defined ordinarily in an institutional context. The curriculum connects the practical domain of learning with goals of education. Syllabus, on the other hand, is a narrower term which refers to the specific delineation of the contents of teaching. This, in turn, relates to the periodic system of evaluation like the duration of a course/paper or examination. In this sense, curriculum is a broader category than syllabus. Starting from objectives of a course, it leads on to the design of syllabus and lays down the teaching learning strategies before coming to the system of evaluation. Thus our contention is that innovations are urgently needed all along in sociology curriculum if it has to sustain the interests of students and teachers and to serve them well.

Curricula at the higher level should be excellent in terms of national and international comparability, relevance and need-based. It should be open and flexible. There is a need to continuously update syllabi, design new courses or may be new modules as part of courses in different colleges and universities. Criteria for judging the rationale for introducing new courses/modules may include the following parameters:

- Whether it is in a frontier area of knowledge or a preparatory one for that.
- Whether it will be useful or productive in some way or not.
- Whether there exists a demand for the course among students and employers.
- Will it help student in acquiring some desirable knowledge, skills and insights.

Likewise the following areas need to be covered for curriculum design:

* meta-issues-purpose/objectives. Why teach a particular course?
* contents and their ordering
* instructional design
* text-books and other teaching-learning materials
* evaluation tools and methods.

Given the parameters and context of re-designing our university curriculum the tasks before us might look like the following:
1. I do not advocate replacing lock, stock and barrel the existing structure of our university courses by one that looks market-friendly. If we are to achieve any fruitful innovation, we have to carry forward the work of revision of courses with a sense of academic authenticity and intellectual discipline.

2. Our objective should not be to suggest a complete uniformity in the framework of syllabuses of different universities. Adequate space should be there for taking advantage of intellectual energy and stamina of the departmental faculty members.

3. A consensus has to be built first with regard to the minimum core (areas) in taught courses required for B.A. and M.A. classes.

4. Logical grading of courses based on areas of specialization is needed.

5. A balance should be maintained between courses on institutions and courses on (social) problems.

6. Adequate scope for courses with interdisciplinary thrust should be provided that could be shared by teachers from other allied and cognate social science departments.

7. 'New specialisations' with job-oriented potential may be developed and accommodated in general sociology programme.

8. Curriculum should not treat sociology merely as a piece of theoretical contemplation; it must provide opportunity to students to engage in adequate field-based projects. It will require a radical shift towards alternative pedagogy.

9. The alternative pedagogy may include
   - learning at work-sites,
   - project-work involving interaction with community/real life situations,
   - individual assignments and group work,
   - library-related work,
   - peer-group learning tasks,
   - presentations with appropriate equipments followed by open discussions etc.

10. A course in computer application should be mandatory for every student.

11. A fresh appraisal is also required with regard to sociology courses for professional and applied programmes like engineering and technology, architecture, town and country planning, agriculture, law, management, medicine, nursing, education and social work.

12. The increasing popularity of sociology in Open Universities and in correspondence courses has placed extra responsibility on general sociology professionals which demands our immediate attention.
NOTE
1. It will not be out of place to refer here to some well-produced books and papers on the growth of sociology in general and teaching of sociology in particular in India to refresh our memory in this respect. The list provided below is indicative not exhaustive. The author has drawn heavily from some of these publications.


Mukherjee, Ramakrishna, 1979, Sociology of Indian Sociology, Allied Publishers, New Delhi.


ANNEXURE

Post-Graduate courses/papers in sociology currently taught in Indian universities and colleges. It includes information from about 35 universities and deemed to be universities.

Core/Foundation/Compulsory Courses

* Theoretical and conceptual courses
* Classical Sociological Traditions
* Classical Social Theory
* Classical Sociological Perspectives
* Classical Sociology
* Current Sociological Perspectives
* Theoretical Perspectives in Sociology
* Sociological Theories
* Social/Sociological Thinkers
* Advanced Sociological Theories
* Recent Trends in Sociological Theories
* Current Debates in Social Theory
* Schools of Sociological Theory
* Recent Social Theory
* Contemporary Sociological Theory
* Sociological and Anthropological Theories
* Interpretative Sociological Theory
* Comparative Sociology
* Introduction to Sociology
* Principles of Sociology

Research Methods/Statistics

* Social Research Methods & Techniques
* Social Research/Techniques of Social Research
* Social Research Methods
* Research Methodology
* Methodology of Social Research
* Application of Sociological Research
* Social Science Research Methods
* Social Statistics
* Statistics for Sociology
* Applied Statistics
* Social Statistics and Computer Analysis
----Philosophy of Social Sciences
----Philosophical Foundation of Social Research
Optional/Elective/Specialised Courses

* Indian Society
  * Perspectives on Indian Society
  * Indian Social System: Continuity and Change
  * Social Structure in India
  * Sociology of Indian Society
  * Contemporary Trends in Indian Society
  * Anthropology of Indian Society
  * Indian Society and Culture
* Social Stratification
  * Social Stratification and Mobility
  * Social Stratification and Change
  * Caste System in India
  * Sociology of Caste
  * Sociology of Marginalised Communities
* Rural/Peasant/Agrarian
  * Rural Sociology
  * Rural Sociology in India
  * Agrarian Social Structure
  * Agrarian Society
  * Agrarian Social Structure & Change in India
  * Agrarian Relations and Social Structure
* Urban Sociology
  * Urban Sociology
  * Urban Sociology and Development
  * Sociology of Urbanisation
  * Urban Society
  * Urban Society in India
  * Urbanisation and Urban Development
* Industrial Sociology
  * Industrial Sociology
  * Industry and Society
  * Industry and Society in India
  * Industry, Labour and Society
  * Sociology of Labour
  * Sociology of Entrepreneurship
  * Sociology of Work
  * Sociology of Profession
  * Sociology of Informal Sector
  * Industrial Relations and Personnel Management
* Political Sociology
  * Polity and Society
  * Political Sociology
* Social Change and Development
  * Social Change
*Sociology of Change and Development
*Sociology of Development
*Change and Development
*Rural Development
*Rural Society and Development in India
*Social Development: Indian Experience
*Sustainable Development in India
*Social Change and Social Problems in India

Social Movement
*Social Movement
*Social Movements in India
*Social Movements in Modern India
*Social Movements and Revolution
*Socio-Political Movements and Democratic Decentralisation
*Tribal Movements in India
*Peasant Movements in India
*Peasant and Peasant Movements in India

Gender/Women
*Gender and Society
*Gender Studies
*Sociology of Gender
*Women and Society
*Women in Society

Environment
*Society and Environment
*Environment and Society
*Environmental Sociology
*Ecology and Society
*Ecology, Environment and Society
*Sociology of Environment

Health
*Sociology of Health
*Health and Society
*Health, Medicine and Society
*Medical sociology
*Sociology of Ageing

Population/Demography
*Population and Society
*Population and Society with special reference to India
*Sociology of Population
*Population Problems
*Theories and Methods in Population Studies
*Social Demography
*Social Demography in India
*Indian Demography
*Sociology of Demography
*Sociology of Human Settlement and Population Flows
*Sociology of Human Settlements
*Sociology of Migration

Education
*Sociology of Education
*Education and Society
*Educational Sociology

Religion
*Religion and Society
*Sociology of Religion

Family and Kinship
*Sociology of Kinship, Marriage and Family
*Sociology of Kinship

Science and Technology
*Science, Technology and Society
*Science, Technology and Information Society
*Sociology of Science

Related disciplines
*Social Anthropology
*Social Psychology
*Indian Ethnography
*Criminology
*Crime and Society

Emerging areas
*Globalisation and Society
*Globalisation and Development
*Sociology of Globalisation
*Development, Globalisation and Society
*Sociology of Information Society
*Society, Culture and Media
*Sociology of Mass Communication
*Corporate Communication
*Sociology of Popular Culture and Mass Communication
*Sociology of Culture
*Integration and Conflict in Multi-cultural Societies
*Corporate Culture
*Indian Diaspora
*Sociology of Indian Diaspora
*Human Resource Management
*Human Resource Development
*Social Foundation of Management
*Customer Relationship Management
*Change Management
*Corporate Social Responsibility
*Organisational Analysis
*Sociology of Organisation  
*Leadership in Organisation  
*Social Marketing  
*Market and Consumer Analysis  
*Tourism and Cultural Heritage  
*Sociology of Tourism  
*Tourist and Tourism  
*Social Welfare Administration  
*Social Work and Social Welfare  
*Society and Personality  
*Personality and Counseling  
*Guidance and Counseling  
*State, Society and Human Rights  
*Food, Society and Culture  
*Sociology of Minority Groups  
*Ethnicity, Pluralism and Nation  
*Multi-sectoral Approach in Development  
*Sociology of Disaster and Disaster Planning  
*Social Engineering in India  
*Sociology of South Asia  
*Sociology of Region  
*Kerala Society: Structure and Change  
*Understanding Goa  

**UGC Model Curriculum 2001** reported the following patterns with regard to the courses taught at Post-Graduate level (Total-50 Universities)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Universities</th>
<th>Course titles</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>Sociological Theory, Methods of Social Research, Sociological Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>Social Anthropology, Social Statistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01-09</td>
<td>Sociology of Literature, Sociology of Law, Sociology of Profession, Indian Diaspora, Sociology of Science.</td>
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