

Tradition enters into sociological enquiry in two distinct though related ways. The first concerns the nature of tradition as a set of beliefs and practices, and their various forms in different places and at different times. The second concerns the tradition of sociological enquiry itself, its unity and diversity, and its roots in one or another general cultural or national tradition. Tradition has been viewed as an attribute of types of action and of authority, of institutions and of whole societies. It has been viewed positively as ensuring stability and continuity in society and culture, and negatively as providing resistance to development and change. [...]

Tradition, like culture, is both a facility and a constraint; it provides the individual with resources he would be incapable of creating by his own unaided effort, but it also confines his actions within a given framework of rules and practices. Both refer to things that exist independently of their individual bearers and outlive the individuals through whom they are transmitted from generation to generation. In both cases, the attention is on the past in the present. [...]

What distinguishes tradition in the specific sense from culture in general is its conscious, not to say self-conscious, orientation to the past. [...]

An examination of contemporary Indian society – as of any large and complex society today – reveals the co-existence of a great variety of institutional arrangements. In addition to the institutions of kinship, caste and religion inherited from the past, there are many new ones devoted to a variety of specialized tasks in the fields of administration, finance, health, education, communication, research, and so on. These modern institutions are open and secular institutions, and they provide indispensable linkages between the citizen and the state. The success of civil society in India will depend to a large extent on the health and well-being of these new open and secular institutions. [...]

Today, there is much disquiet about the health and well-being of the modern institutions on which much of our public life depends. They have failed to maintain among their members the meaning and legitimacy indispensable for their effective functioning. The norms by which their activities are expected to be regulated yield too readily before the many traditional values

The Place of Tradition in Sociological Enquiry

André Béteille

that seep into them from the outer environment and disrupt their internal life. [...]

There are those who say that our public institutions – legislatures, municipal corporations, political parties, universities and colleges – do not work well and indeed cannot work well on our soil because they are all alien to the Indian tradition and hence should be replaced by alternative institutions that are more in tune with that tradition. But the appeal to tradition as a guide for building alternatives to existing institutions, whether in administration or commerce or even education, has hardly led to any concrete results. Open and secular institutions are an innovation of the modern world, and it is difficult to see how we can dispense with them on the ground that they are out of tune with traditional values. To say that our public institutions should by and large be open and secular institutions in contrast to what largely prevailed in the past is not to propose that religion, family and kinship should be abolished or deprived of their legitimacy. Traditional and other components of social action and social relations are closely intertwined in most if not all human societies. The construction and use of ideal types helps to sort these components out from each other, but only upto a point. Beyond that point the use of contrastive categories becomes misleading and counter-productive. It is one thing to construct ideal types of social action or social relations or even social institutions, but quite another to apply ideal types for contrasting whole societies and even whole continents. [...]

The noisy disparagement of tradition as a source merely of obstacles to the realization of a better and fuller life can hardly be regarded as reasonable. At the same time, the obsession with national tradition as the only guarantor of a meaningful social existence is not without its costs. [...]

There are two sides to sociology as a discipline which we may describe for short as the empirical and the theoretical sides, including in the latter not just theories in the strict sense but also approaches, methods, concepts, procedures and techniques. Ideally speaking, the two

sides should grow together and roughly at the same pace. But when we look at the actual development of sociology, we find that Indian sociologists have produced a very large body of empirical material, but there has been very little innovation by them of concepts, methods and theories. For the latter, they have relied by and large on the stock of ideas produced by sociologists in Europe and America for the common use of all. [...]

Most working sociologists in India, as elsewhere, act in the implicit belief that their work moves forward mainly through borrowing and creative adaptation. After all, what we call western sociology is not all of one piece, and American sociology, which is in the ascendant today, would not be what it is but for extensive borrowing from French and German sociology. Perhaps the majority believe that we should use such tools as are already available, adapt them to our uses as well as we can, and improvise to the extent possible. [...]

But the discontent with the passive and dependent status of Indian social science is not easily removed. Critics of the existing state of affairs argue that the poverty of our social theory follows from our own unreflective adherence to a framework of enquiry and analysis that is alien in origin and inappropriate to our needs. Working within the framework leads to its further entrenchment and to a continuing dissipation of intellectual energy. [...]

The prospect of an alternative sociology of India or even an alternative to the sociology of India has attracted some scholars almost from the time when the subject was introduced into India. Among the early exponents of the view were Benoy Kumar Sarkar in Calcutta and D. P. Mukherji in Lucknow each of whom had a considerable following in his lifetime. [...]

Professor Mukerji spoke about the kind of training he considered appropriate to the formation of the sociologist in India. He observed, 'unless sociological training is grounded on Sanskrit or any such language in which the traditions have been embodied as symbols, social research in India will be a pale imitation of what others are doing'.

The bias for Sanskrit is evident but the grounds for it are not altogether clear, for surely there cannot be any language in which traditions are not embodied as symbols. [...]

It is difficult from the sociological point of view to see why Indian traditions have to be recovered through Sanskrit rather than living languages such as Tamil or Bengali that have been in continuous use for centuries. The adulation of classical and the implicit denigration of modern languages does not augur well for the serious pursuit of sociological enquiry whose point of departure is the present and not the past. [...]

The obdurate fact about the world in which we live is that there are very many, and not just two or three, national traditions. The promise of comparative sociology, which it has fulfilled in some measure though by no means in full measure, is that it will enable us to detach ourselves, at least to some extent, from these particular traditions in order to reach towards a general understanding of social action, social relations and social institutions in their entire range and variety. How can we move forward if we turn our backs on what has been done so far on the ground that the whole framework of enquiry was alien and hence distorting, and that we will be better served by our own particular sociology? [...]

When people speak of the replacement of the alien western framework of enquiry by one more in tune with the Indian tradition, they almost invariably have in mind the Brahminical Hindu tradition, although only some make this explicit and others do not. The plea for recasting the categories of sociological enquiry from English into Sanskrit is symptomatic of this. [...]

To be sure, what prevails today as the framework of general and comparative sociology is not free from its own biases, its own distortions and its own constraints. But not all Indians may feel the same enthusiasm for having those constraints replaced by the constraints of Sanskrit Hindu categories. Many if not most of them are likely to find more room for intellectual manoeuvre in the former than in the latter. [...]

The search for an Indian way of doing sociology appears on balance to be both half-hearted and disingenuous. I call it half-hearted because the intention, though never abandoned, has not led to any cumulative progression of effort. If

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Mutinies Now. Nirad Chaudhuri's piece, 'My Hundredth Year' is yet another exercise in self-indulgence, and an apology - the *raison d'être* for his writings. His *Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* had raised hackles on account of its dedication to the 'memory of the British Empire in India.' Chaudhuri thinks that the criticism was unwarranted and born of a basic misconception about his book.

Philip Knightley, who was associated with the Bombay magazine *Imprint* in its early years, writes in 'An Accidental Spy' how in the early sixties he became, unwittingly, a part of the covert operations of the CIA (*Imprint* was a front for them) and was wooed by KGB agents for all the wrong reasons. Jan Morris, in 'Clive's Castle', links Clive's fortunes, his ambitions and his unscrupulous ways, to the then British Mission in India: 'It was an Empire, by and large, without ideology.... For the most part their loftiest motive was Clive's loftiest too - the patriotic motive - and their basest was his too - to get rich quick' (p. 253).

An objective and dispassionate assessment of Arundhati Roy's first novel *The God of Small Things* can be possible only after all the media-generated hype around it subsides, when one will be able to see the work for what it is. The extracts published in the anthology do not reveal much, except for her deft use of language and its spontaneity. The anthology has two poems, one, 'What we lost' by Michael Ondaatje who recreates a charming old world giving way to the inexorable demands of change, and the other is 'Sampati' by Vikram Seth. It is a short, haiku-like poem, but is not as evocative, and the imagery is constrained. The selection, on the whole, makes good reading, though the colonial bias shows. It is a pity no translation from any of the Indian languages is included, though there is a significant *oeuvre* in these, both in literary and non-literary fields. Perhaps the omission is deliberate. And why not, if Macaulay's mission finds a promoter in Salman Rushdie (see his article in *The New Yorker* of 23 and 30 June 1997, which also shows a truncated map of India), who valorizes the English language, implicitly privileging the structures it embodies. The Empire rules the roost.

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An Essay on Time

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Thompson's statement virtually empties the word human of all actual or possible substance.

Consider in this context the great perplexity of the modern situation. While seeking time as the marker of progress upon which all significance is predicated, in certain modern contexts, time that negates linear progression is meticulously nurtured.

To this one could add a related perplexity of another kind. Anthropology seems content to merely outline as to how survival of time that negates linear progression in the West is akin to the much more substantial survivals of that in say, India or Algeria. Further, the way that such survival continues to persist in non-Western societies may have something to teach the modern West. For some strange reason such survivals are often designated as 'indigenous'. One respects the implicit disposition of sympathy towards, to use that awkward and culturally inane expression, the 'Third World'. But that by itself cannot furnish firm philosophical or even anthropological basis for enlarging the ambit of such survivals in modern life.

The true significance of the persistence of a sense of time that negates linear progression is perhaps to be sought precisely in realms that modern theory and life dare not entirely negate. Painting and poetry are artifacts as different in appearance as any two human artifacts perhaps can be. But they both affirm the logic and sheer power of form. A poem signifies, in the words of Octavio Paz, 'human utterance frozen in time'. Poetry, like painting is a human happening but it is a happening that could never have a pre-history. Their power to speak and possess far beyond the bounded contexts of their origins stems from the unalterable freezing of a particular sequence of words and sounds in a poem, of lines and colours in a painting that invokes that ineffable sense of an eternal presence. It is that which imparts to the artistic form a resilience beyond the reach and might of institutions and structures of entrenched power.

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The Many Meanings of Freedom

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attitudes are incapable of fighting the new materialism called communalism where religion becomes not the guide to the lone soul in the dark but a ploy in the hands of day-to-day power politics, a way not to salvation but to sabotage of the most destructive and inhuman kind.

One can fight this evil only from the higher spiritual ground where all created beings are able to hear one another's call, one another's silence, and share a platform of equality. I am referring to the other discourse where the tree gets involved with the earth, the other tongue in which water speaks to the wind, the wind to air, the air to the sky, the flower to the bee, the beast to the woods and man to all of them. My more recent poems, not only the ones on saint poets like Namdev, Kabir, Meera, Tukaram, Basava, Akka Mahadevi and Andal, but even the ones on my language and region and my travels inside and outside, emerge from the borders of these two languages: the one that bargains with the visible and the one that converses with the invisible. Perhaps I still have a long way to go to realize that alter-language of the spirit where freedom breaks free of its bondage to itself.

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Mapping Postcolonialism

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attention and appropriation within its parameters.

However, despite so many disagreements, a definite sense of the postcolonial does emerge out of this collection, and will certainly set the discerning reader thinking about his/her individual relation to the postcolonial. In particular, this book is a scholars' delight: it is a timely publication, has no truncated essays and is equipped with a useful bibliography. However, after going through so many deliberations on subject positions and the sites and politics of scholarly production, one misses the usual brief note on contributors. Considering the price of the book, the quality of the print is somewhat disappointing.

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The Many Worlds of Indian History

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NCERT books: combined with constant attention to teaching methods, they do seem geared towards much more classroom discussion and creative assimilation.[...]

What is needed is not just more effective channels of communication through which high academic wisdom can be disseminated downwards, but efforts to democratize also the production of historical knowledge, to work towards a new kind of historical culture. There is a need to pioneer ways of developing interaction among researchers, teachers, and activists drawn from, or working among, diverse social strata. On a long-term scale, collaborative research works and textbooks could emerge, enriched by multiple social and pedagogical experiences, and based on a mutual reformulation of perspectives.[...] Surely we can agree that the many worlds of Indian history must not be allowed to fly totally apart, as the social base of producers and intended audiences of front-ranking South Asian scholarship narrows, even while reaching out towards global horizons.

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it is generally true that every Indian sociologist begins as if there has been no work done by Indians before, this is particularly true of those who set out to take the Indian tradition as their point of departure. [...]

There is a large and yawning gap in time and context between the tradition that is invoked and the purpose for which, it is invoked, rendering largely fictitious that sense of filiation which is an essential part of tradition as an active principle. It is obvious that the appeal to tradition serves a rhetorical purpose; but it is doubtful that it contributes anything of value to the method of sociological enquiry.

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