

Decolonizing Indian Sociology: The Case of a Forgotten Sociologist Benoy Kumar Sarkar

INTRODUCTION

Sociology was sometimes referred to as 'Sarkarism' in the 1930s.

M.N. Srinivas (as cited in Deshpande 2007: 506)

Reading about him, one might suspect that there cannot be anything new about sociology, for most of the ideas discussed by sociologists in India today were expounded, advocated, criticized or demolished by him in the first half of the 20th century. Yet he is all but forgotten today.

Andre Beteille (1991: 205)

For the students in most Sociology departments in India today, Benoy Kumar Sarkar represents at best a footnote in the history of Indian sociology.

Roma Chatterji (2007: 106)

For quite some time now, there have been emergence of criticism of Eurocentric approach and demand for decolonization of the Sociology. Scholars from the non-Western countries have started challenging the universal and cosmological social theories and categories as proposed and propagated by the Western countries. There has been a strong sense of awareness emerging that there was a disjunction between the global North social sciences and the global South social realities. There are various case studies, as mentioned in above discussions, which located that certain Western concepts and theories were alien to the non-Western societies and hence they are not able to capture the non-Western social realities in proper way and failed to do justice with non-Western social sciences and with its people. Therefore, there was a strong advocacy and demand for alternative discourses in the sociology and other social sciences. There is a strong need for the decolonization of sociology to propound an intellectual approach that acknowledges, critiques, and aspires to move beyond the legacy of colonialism and also a requirement for 'the epistemic revolution against the intellectual hierarchies within sociology' (Go 2017: 198). It would be very appropriate to quote here the words of Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000:29):

“For generations now, philosophers and thinkers who shape the nature of social science have produced theories that embrace the entirety of humanity. As we well know, these statements have been produced in relative, and sometimes absolute, ignorance of the majority of humankind—that is, those living in non-Western cultures. This in itself is not paradoxical, for the more self-conscious of European philosophers have

always sought theoretically to justify this stance. The everyday paradox of third-world social science is that *we* find these theories, in spite of their inherent ignorance of “us,” eminently useful in understanding our societies. What allowed the modern European sages to develop such clairvoyance with regard to societies of which they were empirically ignorant? Why cannot we, once again, return the gaze?”

In this context my arguments in this research paper will be proceeds in two sections. In the first section I will focus my attention on the debates and discussions on the irrelevance of Eurocentric sociology and the urgency for the generation of relevant alternative discourses in the discipline of sociology. Further, with the help of certain studies in the field of Postcolonial theory, I will try to locate the epistemic inequality and colonial difference in the disciplinary sociology. Importantly, those who made the criticism against the Eurocentric social sciences, they do not consider entire Western social sciences tradition as irrelevant, whereas, they claimed that the Western social sciences are locally and socially situated to their own socio-cultural settings and hence, they cannot be transplanted to a different historical and socio-cultural setting without doing discrimination and injustice to their respective social realities. The second section of my paper focuses on a forgotten but most creative and original thinkers of twentieth century. As a nationalist and social servant, he aspired after India’s greatness, but as a thinker and theorist he maintained a singular objectivity. He was of the opinion that the ‘social thinkers of Asia also have fallen a victim to the fallacious sociological methods and messages of the modern West, to which the postulate of an alleged distinction between the Orient and the Occident is the first principle of science’ (Sarkar 1937/85:19). Therefore, in this spirit I will examine the role of Benoy Kumar Sarkar as one of the first staunch critic of Eurocentric approach and also paving the way for the decolonization of the Sociology in India.

EPISTEMIC INEQUALITY AND EUROCENTRIC SOCIOLOGY

Epistemic inequality and marginalisation are about how some points of view were pushed to the side because they were seen as inferior, unworthy, or less important, while other points of view were seen as more important. This has led to the suppression of some social points of view, epistemic frames, social concerns, and social categories. Therefore, in due course it creates certain types of knowledge hierarchies (Go 2017:194). When sociology is described as colonial, it indicates that the discipline both reproduced and strengthened the colonial episteme itself as well as internalised its logic. The boundaries of what can be known are established by epistemes, which also specify what constitutes valid knowledge and how it can be legitimately created. Therefore, when referring to a colonial episteme, it denotes the dominant paradigms of thought and knowledge that produced and reproduced the *colonial difference* (Meghji 2019, 2021). The foundation of colonialism is the racialization and dehumanisation of colonised populations and hence they must be civilised. One fundamental tenet of colonial difference was the notion that the colonised were undeveloped and not

modern in comparison to their western counterparts. This reasoning made it possible for colonial powers to defend their actions as being a part of a larger civilising mission and to propagate the colonial difference theory. Sociologists, all over the world (West and non-West), have committed to supporting this colonial difference myth in addition to having bought into it (Go 2016:21).

Certain scholars are of the opinion that social sciences and particularly sociology was a product of Europe's imperial domination and colonizing mindset (Burawoy 2005; Connell 1997; Go 2009; Steinmetz 2007). 'Social science that parachutes in from the United States', Burawoy (2005: 517) has argued that, 'dealing in abstractions that are irrelevant to local needs, breaks up the production of local knowledge and directs it into fruitless channels, resulting in a clash of Western "universalism" and local "particularism"'. Julian Go (2017:195) argued that all knowledge is socially situated and it comes from a place. The dominant or so-called universal theories are also emerged from a standpoint and 'what history tells us is that social thought and its disciplinary arm of sociology have been part and parcel of the imperial episteme, embedding the metropolitan-imperial standpoint.' Similarly, Quijano (2007:177) believed that the coloniality of power was strongly associated with coloniality of knowledge. The heterogeneity and difference of social realities should not be understood in terms of hierarchical knowledge system, or say, in terms of superiority or inferiority; rather it should be understood in terms of 'historical-cultural heterogeneity implies the co-presence and the articulation of diverse historical logics.' Walter Mignolo has extended the theoretical work of Quijano and talked about "border thinking", which means that epistemology 'has to be geographical in its historicity' (2000:67). Further he elaborated that epistemic decolonization is essential for the injustices done by the colonial knowledge system. The decolonization of knowledge happens when the sources and geopolitical locations of knowledge are acknowledged, while at the same time, the modes and practises of knowledge that has been rejected because of the dominance of certain forms are reaffirmed.

In Europe, the work of Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, and many other founding fathers, along with W. I. Thomas in the United States, deployed data on colonized peoples that was being accrued for the purposes of colonial administration (Go 2016:4). The process of theory formation needs the inclusion of the intellectuals of the colonised world as well as the metropole. It should abandon the "imperial gaze" through which colonial empires operated. Further, 'it is a matter of studying the rich analysis of *the world in which sociology was constructed* that came from outside the metropole, ranging from Islamic and Chinese debates about modernity to Indian and African critiques of empire' (Connell 1997:1546). To decolonize the academic discourse several 'anti-colonial movements have been no less effective in unmasking racial and ethnic assumptions of Western social science' (Burawoy 2005:516). Extensive case studies of colonialism's dynamic processes and enduring legacies have yielded novel understandings of the knowledge regimes and politics of truth that emerged in many colonial contexts. However, "this literature has had limited influence on (re)shaping the discipline's boundaries and in revealing how its ontological moorings, categories, and modes of analysis have been fundamentally structured by imperial pursuits and formed within cultures of colonialism" (Kemple and Mawani 2010:238). There is

urgency for provincializing and decolonizing the social sciences and, social scientists from the South can work together to create their own emerging corpus of professional knowledge, ‘reconfiguring dominant paradigms by building them up from below’ (Burawoy 2005:518) and in the same vein the social science scholars of global North, ‘must first recognise just how powerful they are and that their universal knowledges are universal only because of that power’ (ibid.).

Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000) argued in his key work, *Provincializing Europe*, that European thought is both indispensable and inadequate for evaluating and investigating the various life practices in the non-West. Provincializing means to debunk the idea of that how the sociological universal categories ‘bear the burden’ of European/West thought and history (ibid.:4). Further, he claimed that ‘historical time is not integral and ‘ontological singularity of the human’ didn’t exist (ibid:16). Therefore, in this context, he noted that the two conceptual gifts of European thinkers, which are deeply embedded in the idea of modernity are problematic. One is ‘historicism’ and other one is ‘idea of political’ (ibid.:6). The concept of historicism conveyed a meaning that modernity first emerged in Europe and then spread elsewhere (ibid:7). On the other hand, the idea of political is based on the fallacious claim of uneven development and believe that non-West people were less modern than the West people (ibid.:9). The bifurcation of social categories and its cosmological understandings embedded within a logic of colonial difference. It organises the world into homogenous, separable categories arranged through hierarchical dichotomies and categorical logics, while in reality, they are often constitutively connected (Bhambhara 2014). Such homogenization and categorization, in the process, erased colonized masses from most areas of discussion of disciplinary knowledge system.

In this spirit of ‘imperial gaze’, ‘epistemic inequality’ and biasness of Western sociology to have an exclusionary approach towards non-Western realities, I will present the case of one of the foremost and prominent voices of early twentieth century against such fallacious and value-loaded dichotomies of East and West.

THE CASE OF A FORGOTTEN SOCIOLOGIST BENOY KUMAR SARKAR

Benoy Kumar Sarkar’s *Transcendentalized positivism*

Benoy Kumar Sarkar in his early phase very much inclined towards the uniqueness of the Indian tradition and its spiritual values, but he gave up this point of view when he started his work on *Sukraniti* and *The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology (PBHS)*. Afterwards, he began to argue that positivism, materialism and activism were also inherent and integral part of the Hindu tradition and gave a call that modern India should rise to challenge of Western world (Beteille 1991: 206). He has translated the Sukracharya’s *Nitisara* in English and it has been published as *Sukraniti* in 1914. This translation has had a great impact on the intellectual development of Sarkar. Through this translation he has been introduced with the

abundance of secular and material civilisation of the ancient Hindus. Sarkar penned a massive introduction to his translated work of *Sukraniti*, which was published under the title *The Positive Background of Hindu Sociology (PBHS)*. Sarkar claimed that study was ‘a study of Hindu Positivism, the human, secular and worldly elements in Hindu national life and culture, the place of earthly things, *sansara*, *vasana*, *bhoga*, desires, passions and attachments in the Hindu scheme of human existence’ (1937/85:17). In the *Positive Background of Hindu Sociology*, Sarkar contends for the fundamental universalism of the human species, despite acknowledging "plurality" at the individual and national levels. In PBHS different aspects of Orientalist Indology were thoroughly criticised by Benoy Kumar Sarkar. Sarkar was well ahead of his time when he criticised ‘Indological and Orientalist thinking, pre-dating by decades, Said’s *Orientalism*’ (Sinha 2017:309). Before proposing counter arguments based on his study, Sarkar debunks what he sees as the problematic and faulty assumptions of Euro-American sociology. He severely criticised Western ideas that in the past centuries Hindu civilization is fundamentally non-industrial and non-political, and that its solitary characteristic is extreme asceticism and excessive religiosity (Sarkar 1937:60).

Benoy Kumar Sarkar was against the two fallacies of Orientalists and traditional sociologists, ‘one was monism and the other was their inveterate obsession by the dogma of alleged distinction between the East and the West’ (Sarkar 1937/85:35). He has severely criticized the evolutionary and Eurocentric tone of August Comte. The evolution of the human mind through theological, metaphysical, and positive stages was refuted by Sarkar. He had very clearly stated that only the category ‘positive’ has been accepted without following him in his socio-philosophical system. In Sarkar’s (1937/85:11) own words:

“The only *liaison* of the *Positive Background of Hindu Sociology* with Comte’s *Philosophie Positive* lies in the value he attaches to the category “positive”. It is simply the association of scholarly brains, exact knowledge, experience or experiment, generalization, specialization, science as antithesis of religion etc., with positivism that is utilized in the present study. Comte’s analysis of the “mental stages” in evolution or “ages” of the human mind, however, is not accepted here. Nor, indeed, is it acceptable as an objective exhibition of the dynamics of culture-history. It is not possible to demonstrate any stage in which reason rules to the exclusion of imagination or experience, imagination to the exclusion of experience or reason, and experience to the exclusion of the other two. Nor is it demonstrable anthropologically or psychologically that imagination belongs to the primitive mind and precedes ratiocination or concrete experience.”

Benoy Kumar Sarkar has ‘attempted to assert the ‘positive’ – i.e., the this-worldly and material-practical – potential of the indigenous sciences and arts, thereby challenging dominant Orientalist/Indological scholarship and its positioning of indigenous knowledges as exclusively spiritual-ideal’ (Deshpande 2007: 506). In PBHS, Sarkar made space for both the positive, secular and material on the one hand and the transcendental, religious and metaphysical on the other. Therefore, he was the staunch supporter of synthesis and harmony

between the extreme dichotomies of the universe: ‘the worldly and other-worldly, the positive and transcendental, the many and the one, culture and faith, science and religion, caste disunions and Vedantic oneness, image-worship and the realisation of the Infinite (*Brahma*)’(ibid.:6). Sarkar therefore provided ‘positivism’ the broadest possible connotation, ‘if the term be applied to any inculcation of humanitarian principles or social duties and the like, every religion is surely positivistic and every human being is a positivist’ (Sarkar 1916:73). He asserted the ‘positive’ potential of

The Hindu civilisation through the ages carried the philosophy of *transcendentalized positivism*, which means realising the Infinite in the Finite, the Transcendental in the positive and One in the Many. In the words of Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1937/85:6):

“The Hindu has no doubt often placed the transcendental in the foreground of his life’s scheme, but the “positive background” he has never forgotten or ignored. Rather it is in and through the positive, the secular, and the material that the transcendental, the religious and the metaphysical have been allowed to display themselves in Indian culture- history. The *Upanisads*, the *Vedanta*, and the *Gita* were not the works of imbeciles and weaklings brought up in an asylum of incapables and a hospital of incurables.”

Benoy Kumar Sarkar was strong believer of studying everything in world-perspectives and practicing objectivity while conducting research. He was a strong advocate of the pluralist technique in handling and interpreting the data. He was committed to positivism and considered himself as both pragmatic and pluralist. Benoy Kumar Sarkar writes:

“It is beyond any doubt that I lay stress on empiricism and positivism. But I always used to pay due respect to transcendentalism and spiritualism. I am a double-edged sword, a pluralist indeed.” (As quoted in Sinha 2017:311).

Thus, pluralism was vital to Benoy Kumar Sarkar's methodology for interpreting the social realities. It emphasised both on the positive and non-positive aspects of society, secular and religious, scientific and idealistic, or logical and mystical. Sarkar was an advocate of synthetic viewpoint. It was based on the premise that each part of human personality and society dominates and accepts the other while not completely eliminating it. Therefore, according to Sarkar on one hand monism is grounded in idealistic philosophical theory which propagates the idea of absolutism, while on the other hand, pluralism is grounded in an opposed philosophical theory which propagates the idea of relativism (Sarkar 1942:318).

Sarkar’s Critique of the Fallacies of Colonial Historical- Comparative Method

Benoy Kumar Sarkar, one of the first Indian modern scholars to challenge the proposition of alleged distinction between the East and the West in mentality and outlook. He has rejected the key assumptions of Occidentalist and Orientalist discourse which was based on a

fundamental and qualitative distinction between the ideals and institutions of the East and the West, and established the new thesis that humanity was everywhere the same and had expressed itself in the same types of institutions and ideals both in the East and in the West. He directed a frontal attack on the epistemic prejudices and epistemic inequalities regarding India and Asia. In the preface of *Chinese Religion Through Hindu Eyes: A Study in the Tendencies of Asiatic Mentality* (1916: xi) Sarkar writes that:

“Neither historically nor philosophically does the Asiatic mentality differ from the Eur-American. It is only after the brilliant successes of a fraction of mankind subsequent to the Industrial Revolution of the last century that the alleged difference between the two mentalities has been first stated and since then grossly exaggerated. At the present-day science is being vitiated by pseudo-scientific theories or fancies regarding race, religion and culture. Such theories were unknown to the world down to the second or third decade of the nineteenth century.”

In this context he challenged the one-sided Indologists namely Max Muller, Emile Senart and Max Weber. He claimed that historical data about Hindu Positivism has been overlooked by these scholars. Max Muller wrote two books such as *History of Sanskrit Literature* (1860) and *India What Can it Teach Us?* (1883) in which he, according to Sarkar, contended with ‘mainly with vague idealism, unpractical mysticism and other-worldly absurdities, at best with metaphysical philosophizing’ (Sarkar 1937/85:20). Extending his other-worldly theory about Indian culture, Max Muller proposed that, ‘India can teach nothing but ‘sublime’ speculations of an other-worldly character the psychology of the soul, the ethics of retreat from the struggles of life and the metaphysics of the Infinite (Sarkar 1939:6). Therefore, this overemphasis on the metaphysical and over-religious attitude of Hindu culture has been popularized by the Orientalists and Indologists. In similar vein, Emile Senart in his *Les Castes dans l’Inde* (1897), has proposed an ‘essentially unhistorical and anthropologically misleading idea that India rose neither to the idea of the state nor to the idea of the fatherland’ (as cited in Sarkar 1937/85:17). Further, Senart emphasized that, ‘The Hindu spirit is very religious and very speculative. Obstinate guardian of traditions, it is singularly insensible to the joys of action and to the demands of material progress’ (ibid.:18). Sarkar also criticized Max Weber who has also suffered from this distinction between the Orient and the Occident. Benoy Kumar Sarkar argued that Max Weber in his book *Gesammelt Aufsätze zur Religions soziologie* (Tubingen 1922-23) propagated the same conventional message ‘that worldly life was despised and secular activities condemned by Indians of all ages. The Hindus and Buddhists are described as being alike in the aversions to material pursuits and in the predilections for meditation and other-worldly salvation’ (ibid.:18). Sarkar, further claimed that, ‘this kind of Indology has been propagated on a large scale among the economists, philosophers, culture-scientists, philosophical historians and sociologists of the twentieth century on account of Max Weber’s sociological investigations’ (ibid.).

Benoy Kumar Sarkar was also critical of the methodology of the prevailing Indology of his times on three grounds: *firstly*, it ignored the positive, materialistic and secular theories and

institutions of the Hindus; *secondly*, it compared the ancient and medieval conditions of India with modern and contemporary European and American societies; and *thirdly* it neglected the distinction between existing institutions on the one hand, and ideals on the other (Sarkar 1937/1985: 20-21). Sarkar was very explicit about his call for a new Indology that would demolish the idols of Orientalism as they are found in sociology (Sarkar, 1937/1985: 28-9). Oriental intellectuals unquestioningly presumed that their position was valid and felt doubly confident when the purported superior races of the West paid respect to their distinctive spiritual and metaphysical talent. Sarkar claimed that, 'The political enslavement of Asia by Eur-America engendered also the cultural chauvinism among the scientists and philosophers of the West in regard to the East. Altogether a vast body of *idolas* has grown up under the aegis of that new species of despotism, viz., albinocracy and colonialism' (Sarkar 1939: iii). He demanded for new synthesis, new logic and new Indology in order that the *idola* of the nineteenth century might be subverted (Sarkar 1916: xv). Sarkar provided a counter picture of Indian culture through his more intensive comparative investigation of the studies of the East and the West. Sarkar improved on the conventional historical-comparative technique and arrived at a completely new interpretation of Hindu culture and society. He wrote that, 'Comparative Chronology and Comparative History will show that man, as an economic, political and fighting animal, has displayed the same strength and weakness both on the Asian theatre as well as on the extra- Asian' (Sarkar 1916: xi). Further, Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1939: 93) claimed that:

"Humanity, is in short essentially one, -in spite of physical and physiognomic diversities, and in spite of historic race-prejudices. The elan vital of human life has always and everywhere consisted in the desire to live and in the power to flourish by responding to the thousand and one stimuli of the universe and by utilizing the innumerable world-forces."

Sarkar on the basis of intensive research and studies claimed that till Industrial Revolution there was a huge socio-cultural similarity between the East and the West, but it was only after the Industrial Revolution in the eighteenth century a new civilization has been created in the West and the East and the West differ substantially for the first time, but he was of the view that this difference is only temporary because it was due to the difference in economic or material development between the two. Therefore, Sarkar used pure logic to infer that the East and West are largely the same in underlying spirit, life's objectives, and global ideals and institutions. On the basis of positive achievements in ideology and institutions, the primary historical forces, processes, and phases are found to have been essentially identical between the East and West.

Sarkar's Role in the Decolonization of Indian Sociology

Benoy Kumar Sarkar has been one of the frontrunners from India, or say, from Asia who played a very important and decisive role in criticizing the Eurocentric approach in the discipline of Sociology. He was against the 'imperial gaze' and 'epistemic inequality' prevailing generally in the social sciences and particularly in sociology. Although it is quite

difficult to trace Sarkar's sociological lineage due to his broad definition of the field as well as his pedagogical considerations (Chatterji 2007: 113). However, from the above discussions it has been cleared that through his intensive and comprehensive case studies of various social systems and institutions, Sarkar talked about the fundamental unity of mankind of the world. He rejected all the existing 'monistic' theories of alleged distinctions between people, region, religion, ideals and institutions of the East and the West. He rejected August Comte's theory of evolution of development of human mind. Comte in his *Cours de Philosophie Positive* proposed three large 'mental stages' of human mind development, i.e., the 'theological stage'; the 'metaphysical stage'; and the 'positivist stage'. According to Comte, the ultimate realization for humanity was the attainment of positivist stage in which scientific experience is supreme (Sarkar 1936:1).

Sarkar has also not impressed by the Levy-Bruhl's work, *La Mentalite Primitive*, in which he has propagated the concept of primitive mind which was devoid of discrimination, judgement and criticism or in other words primitive mind is 'pre-critical' and 'pre-logical' (ibid.:2). Further, he was also against the Ferdinand Tonnies' radical contrast between the dominant patterns of human will in Community (*Gemeinschaft*) and Society (*Gesellschaft*) propounded in his book *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft*. Tonnies claimed that there were two types of humans will, the *Wesenwille* (Natural Will) and *Kurwille* (Artificial Will). The first is described by him as the real and the organic based on instinct, the second as the ideal and the mechanical based on reason. In Tonnies sociological analysis, family life and domestic economy constitute to the earlier age whereas commerce and *grosstadtisches* (city) life are prominent in the later age (Sarkar 1941: 1-3). Sarkar argued that certainly there are rural-urban differences but the way it has been proposed was problematic. It emphasized on 'the most extreme form in which these differences are presented is that of radical contrast, totalitarian antithesis, dichotomy' (ibid.:5). The exactness and rigidity of Tonnies' two kinds of existence, or principles of connection, are seldom present in actual life and must be disregarded. (ibid.: 12-13). These extreme dichotomies are fallacious because structure and function of humanity cannot be understood in such exclusive compartmentalization. Human personality is neither wholly rational nor it is wholly irrational, rather it is a little bit mixture of both. Sarkar (1941:23) wrote:

“The dichotomy-psychologies fail, as a rule, to envisage the complete mental equipment of the individual and virtually pin themselves down to one or other side of the antithesis as the exclusive feature of the mentality. The Gestalt of the human personality cannot be understood in terms of exclusive types.”

In this context Benoy Kumar Sarkar was not very much satisfied with the Eurocentric sociology which was based on the alleged distinction between the East and the West, monistic interpretation of social phenomena, fallacies in the historical-comparative method and the evolutionary and value-loaded tone of positivism. Therefore, he tried to carve out a path for the Indian Sociology on the basis of his transcendentalized positivism, corrected historical-comparative method and methodological pluralism.

According to Sarkar, the subject matter of sociology has evolved so much since August Comte's time that it is now hard to define the field (1936:4). Sarkar claimed that sociology as an independent and full-fledged discipline was unknown to Indian academic world till 1917. During that time ethics and philosophy of religion comprised the topics of Sociology and Herbert Spencer's *First Principles* was recommended as a text book (1937: 650). He was worried about the hodgepodge like character of sociology which was apparent even in the most recent publications of his time (Sarkar 1937:650). Sarkar's bewilderment clearly seen about the nature and scope of Sociology during his time in following lines "a schedule like this furnishes hardly any clue to the province and boundaries of sociology and serves but to indicate its extremely uncertain and indefinite character as a system of scientific discipline" (Sarkar 1937:651). Benoy Kumar Sarkar (1936:8) defined, sociology as the study of any and every phenomenon that may be described as social or has bearing on social relationships. He has also prescribed following and themes for orientations to sociology:

A. Theoretical Sociology:

1. Institutional sociology (family, property, state, myths, arts and crafts, science, *mores* languages)
 - (a) Anthropology and history as well as sociography
 - (b) Social philosophy and philosophical history
2. Psychological Sociology, Sociology Proper in the narrow sense.
 - (a) Social Psychology
 - (b) Social Processes and Social Forms

B. Applied Sociology:

Study in the attempts at the remaking of man, societal planning and the transformation of the world by promoting 'social metabolism' along diverse fronts. Broadly speaking, according to Sarkar (1936: 8), these items of what for general purposes may be described as Applied Sociology can be grouped under the following disciplines:

- a) The Control of Poverty
- b) Population Questions
- c) Public health and Sanitation
- d) Crime and Punishment
- e) Pedagogics

Benoy Kumar Sarkar further argued that for the enrichment of sociology as a discipline it is very essential to incorporate the ideas of philosophers, scholars, intellectuals and reformers from every field and every region of the world and therefore in due course it would make sociology as more inclusive discipline rather than exclusive. In Sarkar's (ibid.8-9) own words:

"The contributions of the psychological school as represented by Tonnies, Gumplowicz, Tarde, Ratzenhofer, Durkheim, Le Bon, Simmel, Pareto, Small, Binet, Freud, Wallas, Ross, Bogardus, McDougall, Saleilles, Wundt, Ellis, and Stanley Hall and culminating in von Wiese are to be treated by all

means as fundamental in the enrichment of sociology. But on the other hand, the lines of thought exhibited by the Chinese *Chouli*, the code of Hamurabi, the Egyptian Book of the Dead, the Vedic *Aitareya-Brahmana*, Plato, the *Manu-Samhita*, Seneca, St. Paul, *Narada-Smriti*, Al Farabi, Aquinas, Hemadri's *Chaturvarga-chintamani*, Ibn Khaldun, Francis Bacon, Macchiavelli, *Shukra-niti* and Abul Fazl among the "ancients", and Vico, Montesquieu, Herder, Godwin, Malthus, Rammohun, Beccaria, Comte, Marx, Engels, Spencer, Dayananda, Syed Ahmad, Maine, Bhudev Mookerji, Sumner, Kohler, Vivekananda, Ranade, Boas, Hobhouse, Loria, Max Weber, Ramendra Trivedi, Dewey, Sombart, Westermarck, Levy-Bruhl, Aschaffenburg, Croce, Ginsberg, Spengler, Gini, Pound, Thurnwald, Parmelee, Richard, Goldenweiser, Mazzarella, Bonger and others cannot be ignored in sociology in spite of the fact that very many of them, are predominantly anthropological, historical, philosophical or political."

Benoy Kumar Sarkar was very much influenced by the Leopold von Wiese's kind of sociology which he has proposed in his work *System der Allgemeinen Soziologie* (1933). Von Wiese claimed that the main focus of sociology should be on 'abstracting' the 'between-men' elements out of the historico-empirical raw material (Sarkar 1937/85:656). Further, according to von Wiese, the subject matter of sociology should constitute the 'science of social relation or processes' and 'social forms.' Therefore, sometimes it is also known as *Beziehungslehre* or science of relation. Sarkar as a critique of the East and the West dichotomy and proponent of uniformities in the ideals and institutions of the East and the West, borrowed the ideas of von Wiese's formal sociology to analyse Hindu philosophy of *dharma*-and the *arth-sastras*.

Sarkar claimed that, the "analytical" treatment of political phenomena is a very important aspect of the Hindu socio-political thought, which we could locate in the philosophy of *dharma* and *artha-sastras*, 'that man in politics is fundamentally a bundle or complex of social or 'between-men', i.e., interhuman relationships. These treatises do not seem to be interested in this or that particular state. Neither the Maurya Empire nor the Chola Empire nor indeed any state of Hindu history has engaged their attention. Their topic for discussion is the state *uberhaupt*, i.e., the state as 'the thing in itself' (ibid.: 654-655). The state is human collectivity which is a system of relations and orientations and Sarkar argued that in this spirit the works such as *dharma* and *artha sastras* would also be considered as a 'fine logical contributions to what is being described as "pure," "analytical" or "formal" sociology in contemporary Eur-America' because these creations of the Hindu philosophers were aptly able to capture 'the very pattern, form, geometry, so to say, of human relations' (ibid.: 655). Thus, Sarkar proposed following corrections to the one-sided, partial and erroneous view about Hindu life, ideals and institutions, firstly, 'a more searching and detailed inquiry into the economic, political and art history of India'; and secondly 'a study, according to the canons of scientific literary criticism, of the whole literature of Hindustan, Sanskrit and Dravidian, Prakrit and Vernacular, in both its metaphysical and secular branches' is required (ibid.:12). Further he stated that for the modification and correction of false notions about

Hindu genius, the ‘*Kavyas, Natyas, Kathas, Puranas, Tantras, Itihasas, Vastuvidyas, Silpsastras, Arthasastras, Nitisastras, Dharma-sutras* and *Smiritis* must be critically investigated as documents of historico-sociological development’ (ibid.: 12-13).

Conclusion

Benoy Kumar Sarkar was one of the first colonial intellectuals who declare an epistemic war against the colonial difference which generates epistemic inequality in terms of the production and consumption of the knowledge. Satadru Sen (2015: 13) rightly pointed out that, ‘Sarkar perceived a double problem with Western knowledge of Asia: the West, on the one hand, did not know enough (and did not want to know, being uninterested in what it had marginalised), and on the other, it knew much that was wrong.’ Sarkar has provided counter picture of Indian society with historical research on positive, secular and materialist traditions in India. He played a pivotal role in the decolonisation of Indian sociology by critiquing the Western hegemonic reasons of superiority of the West and myth of civilisational difference. Further, he provided a historical and comparative vantage point for the global event of decolonisation (Goswami 2013: 169). Sarkar is an important part of history of Indian sociology and he used sociology to oppose the Orientalist representations of India (Chatterji 2007: 129). He was very passionate about Indian culture and history and therefore put all his intellectual energies for bringing its glory back. Thus, Sarkar all ideas and works must be seen and analysed in the background of a sense of inferiority, pessimism and despair prevailing and dominated the minds of the colonised Indian masses. He tried to instils a sense of optimism and hope among the Indian people. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, therefore, ‘should be re-read and re-positioned as a pioneering thinker who was confronting late nineteenth-century modernity and making sense of this complex phenomenon’ (Sinha 2007: 332). The man of analytical mind and varied talents did not get proper recognition in the post-independence sociology and have been forgotten by generations of sociologists in India. Benoy Kumar Sarkar, whether he was called a prophet by some and crank by others, surely deserves more recognition and attention by the Indian sociologists.

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