

THE SOCIOLOGIST AND THE SOCIAL REALITY*

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I

In April 1955, when the First All-India Sociological Conference was held in Dehra Dun, D. P. Mukerji, in his Presidential Address, exhorted the Indian sociologists to unfold the social reality in which they lived. For, in his words, "sociology should ultimately show the way out of the social system by analyzing the processes of transformation" [Mukerji 1961 : 30]. Just after 19 years, DP's plea still rings a topical note. How much—or, oppositely,—how little has been our achievement to understand *what* is happening in Indian society, *how* is it happening, *why* is it happening, and what is *likely* to happen in the immediate future?

With great expectation, the Community Development Project was launched in the 1950-s to change the face of India. We accorded it an enthusiastic reception through books, papers, and even presidential addresses to learned gatherings; but did it achieve its end? In the 1960-s, we spoke of how *green* was the "Green Revolution", but why did not the greenery spread outwards and now, according to some reports, appears to dry out in its "seed bed"? In the 1970-s, we are talking of "poverty", "inequality", and the "weaker sections" of the society, without defining the labels precisely, identifying comprehensively those in the social space who should bear these labels, and specifying unequivocally the priority-rating of the concepts underlying these labels to show "the way out of the social system". Also, while "national integration" remains a perennial topic for social research in independent India, we are constantly faced with one or another facet of "alienation" in one or another segment of our society and in different parts of our country.

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What I have just said may sound like vilification. Let me, therefore, explain, however summarily. "Poverty", for example, can be objectively defined only in reference to the level of living of the people, of which the minimum components enumerated by the United Nations not only includes health, education, employment, etc., but also "human freedom". Does it not follow that the definition of poverty will vary according to the subjective judgement of the researchers on the qualitative attributes like "human freedom"? Also, is it not necessary to obtain, at the outset, a general consensus on the *threshold* of "poverty" in reference to the quantitative and quantifiable attributes of health, education, etc., which are known to vary within and between societies? The attempt of Dandekar and Rath for India [Dandekar and Rath 1971] is praiseworthy in this context, but is it comprehensive or even precise enough?

The image of the "weaker sections" of the society is usually conveyed in India through the social groups labelled "The Scheduled Castes and Tribes"; but is that image precise or comprehensive? No doubt, a large number of the constituents of these two social groups suffer from social, economic, and ideological discrimination; but the fact is also there that an appreciable number of those belonging to these groups are doing very well, in contemporary India, in the economic and political sphere by making use of their group-wise social and ideological deprivation. The question therefore follows: Does the juridical category of the "Scheduled Castes and Tribes" identify comprehensively and precisely the "weaker sections" of the society, irrespective of the political connotation of such an identification?

In the same series of confusion, "inequality" as an indicator to reveal the social reality, is the worst confounded. It is a phenomenon inherent in any society in one or another of its aspects, like sex, age, status, class, etc. If, therefore, the label is to refer to a particular societal aspect in the perspective of "social transformation", should we not, firstly, specify the concept (or theory) involved on that account, secondly, give that concept (or theory) a priority-rating; and, lastly, ascertain whether the concept (or theory) would be better represented by one or more precise characteristics rather than by the omnibus label of "inequality"?

Correspondingly, as regards the perennial issue of "national integration", can we reveal any such process without a precise and comprehensive appraisal of the possibilities and processes of "aliena-

tion" in the society from the operating state-power? A course of alienation has recently led to the formation of Bangladesh out of the "national integration" achieved in our neighbouring territory of Pakistan in 1947. But, have we learnt from this remarkable incident so as to reveal the social reality of India in this context?

Sporadic as these examples are they are of topical relevance in the search for the media to reveal the social reality. They also prompt us to enquire whether we are justifying our role in society. No doubt, we are accumulating knowledge in the discipline of sociology. But, are we, at the same time, playing the second fiddle to one or another administrative or political thesis; and, therefore, substantiating (or merely denouncing) a catchy political slogan ?

II

In the nearly two decades since D. P. urged us in this Conference to unfold the social reality in our country, sociology in India has become a more mature discipline. Theorizing now does not usually follow the principle that reproducing the viewpoint of only one Master from the West is plagiarism but an articulation of several such viewpoints is a "theoretical" study. Empiricism is no more reduced to the "open minded" observations of a wanderer or the "hit and run" manoeuvres of an analyst with respect to any sort of collection of "field data". Also, the once prevailing dichotomy of the "theoreticians" and "field workers" as the first and second class subjects in the kingdom of sociology is fast losing its relevance.

There is now an increasing awareness that a theory does no more than endorse a claim toward generalization beyond the "place-time-object" circuit in which it was developed. Thus the usefulness of one or another theory (as also one or another interpretation of the Grand Theories) to unfold the social reality in India is now drawing our attention. The use of statistical tools and techniques in social research was laughed at, or merely tolerated, in the 1950-s. Since then, they are more and more considered to be essential to empirical studies, even by those who had previously opposed this attempt.

Not unexpectedly, the shifts both in theory and practice have revealed their antipodes. Doctrinarism, especially of the kind which can serve the dominant political thesis for the country, has raised its head in regard to the use of theories. "Quantify or perish" appears to be a favourite slogan of some sociologists, both in India and

abroad, without evaluating the fallacies of statistical abstractions in many instances or paying due attention to the mathematical logic or principles behind the evolution of the statistical tools and techniques.¹ However, the excesses and abuses also substantiate the fact that sociology in India has passed the phase of incubation and attained a stage where a rigorous application of theories and methods is called for to reveal the social reality. This will, concurrently, help us to bridge the gap between theory and research in sociology *per se*, although it is regarded to be an impossible task by some [Blalock 1961 : 5], for the current stage of development of the discipline is not unique to India.

In virtually all parts of the world we are now in a position to deduce precisely one or another aspect of reality. But, are we entitled to consider any one such aspect to represent *the* reality? This is the question we face today, in India and everywhere. It means that while we can accumulate knowledge precisely, that accumulation must be not only comprehensive but also unequivocal.

We are being increasingly aware of the pernicious consequences for our discipline from the mechanical application of many concepts and theories which have been developed in the specific contexts of Western Europe or North America but are sponsored, *ipso facto*, to claim universal validity. Even so, we tend to swing from one extreme to another. Instead of accepting them implicitly (as we did earlier), we tend now to reject them outright. What we ought to do, on the other hand, is to test their *relative efficiency* to unfold the social reality in the given perimeter of "*sthana-kala-patra*" (i.e., the place-time-object) dimensions of variation.

We are perhaps less aware of the distortion of some Grand Theories, emphasizing certain aspects of reality and, thus, supporting or denouncing it. For instance, by a large number of Marxists, and anti-Marxists the "economic determinism" of reality is glibly associated with the views of Marx and Engels, although Engels stated on behalf of both of them: "It is not that the economic position is the *cause and alone active*, while everything else only has a passive effect" (Engels 1951: II. 457). This statement, obviously, implies the need to appraise the *relative efficiency* of diverse societal factors to comprehend the substantive reality, which is also indicated by the current world controversy on the views of "young" and "mature" (or "old") Marx, of the Marxists of various shades, like, Mao Tse-Tung, Gramsci, Lukacs, Marcuse and so on.

Our present task, therefore, is to marshal all our *a priori* knowledge (which consists of the available theories, their interpretations, and the ever-accumulating empirical findings) and employ them to answer the crucial question we face today. The question is: which societal factors are of *causal* relevance to expose the social reality under reference; which factors are of *concomitant* and *contingent* importance, respectively, in that context; and which factors are *irrelevant* in the same context?

In order to answer this question, we not only require a distinctive orientation to our task but also an appropriate methodology. To some, this is obvious to the point of being banal; but what is obvious is not always operative. To some others, on the other hand, the proposed requirements are redundant. In this Address, therefore, I shall briefly discuss these two issues and suggest an examination of the proposition that they refer to the ideology and the education of sociologists in relation to revealing the social reality.

In order that my viewpoint is not misconstrued to refer to the unique characteristic of any society or to the social scientists of any particular national affiliation, I shall consider two very different societies—territorially, historically, and contemporarily. They are Indian and Uganda. In respect to them, I shall refer to the works of several reputable sociologists and social anthropologists: the distinction between whom is virtually absent in the present context. It is not my contention, however, to impute motives into their activities or judgements, although I may discuss them rather more sharply than is usual in sedate academic gatherings. My purpose is to expose the lacunae in discharging our responsibility as scientists, and not in any other role in society which we are free to assume simultaneously or subsequently. I, therefore, assume the stand: "not to accuse or excuse" [Myrdal 1971 : 213]. I am sure everyone will subscribe to this academic impersonality.

III

In the 1920-s, when the Indian national movement was found to have attained mass mobilization of a formidable magnitude, the British Government sent a Royal Commission on Agriculture and a Statutory Commission to visit the subcontinent. The first came to the conclusion: "The desire to accumulate money is not the characteristic of rural society" [*Royal Commission on Agriculture in*

India 1928: 6]. The second declared: "Any quickening of general political judgement, any widening of rural horizons beyond the traditional and engrossing interest of weather and water and crops and cattle, with the round of festivals and fairs and any such change from these immemorial preoccupations of the average Indian villager is bound to come very slowly indeed". [*Indian Statutory Commission* 1933 : I. 15].

The second viewpoint was strongly resented by the Indian national leaders, but the fallacy of the first went unnoticed by them as well as by the general run of the social scientists. Gandhiji had already inspired a band of economists to undertake village studies, the focus of which was on how poor the villagers were and how miserably they eked out an existence due to colonial exploitation and negligence toward the welfare of the people [e. g., Kumarappa 1931; Shukla 1937]. Another slant was added to this exposition of social reality in some places (such as, in Bengal), namely, to focus attention on the oppression of the landlords on the peasantry; but the overall picture of life in the villages was not portrayed differently [Huque 1939: vi]. Meanwhile, the Indian peasant movement was gaining in momentum with the main slogan of "land to the tillers" and the declaration that it had three enemies to contend with: (1) the colonial rule; (2) the landlords; and (3) the big landholders-cum-moneylenders who had their holdings cultivated by the sharecroppers recruited from the ranks of the landless and little-landed peasants, and who loaned them food crops or cash at an exorbitant rate of interest to tide over the lean months [Mukherjee 1957].

These vignettes of rural India in the last days of British rule were all *partially* true; namely: (1) The majority of the people did not demand a luxurious life, and led a parochial existence. (2) The absentee landlords did benefit by continually enhancing the land-rent while taking hardly any interest in developing the conditions of agricultural production. (3) The landholders-cum-moneylenders were certainly reaping a substantial profit from usury and sharecropping which under the given state of the productive forces (and the development of a home market in food crops) was more profitable to them than wage-labour cultivation [*ibid* : 49]. (4) The peasant movement became increasingly stronger.

But, countering these profiles of rural India, it was equally true that from the late 1903-s, at any rate :

- (1) The market for luxury goods was penetrating into the rural

areas; the banks were making enquiries about the rural set-up in order to extend their sphere of activities (e. g., *Bengal Provincial Banking Enquiry Committee* 1930); and contacts beyond the rural horizon were spreading through the cinema, newspaper, road transport, etc., on the one hand, and the political movement, the extension of the external market, etc., on the other.

(2) Even within the limited range of income in the rural areas, the inequality of income distribution was distinctly marked [Mukherjee 1957 : 4-5]; and in economic power at least, as also in political power in some places (e.g. in Bengal), the landholder-cum-moneylender group was superseding the corresponding power of the landlords.

(3) Although it was less profitable for the impoverished peasants to earn their living as sharecroppers than as wage-labourers, they preferred to adopt the former relations of production because : (a) they could still maintain their *social* status as "peasants", instead of being demoted to the rank of "labourers" [*Land Revenue Commission of Bengal* 1940 : I. 67]; and (b) as sharecroppers they felt some confidence to remain employed through the larger part of the year than as wage-labourers [Mukherjee 1971 : 115, 120].

Significantly, the landlord element of the society was pro-British, to begin with, and gradually became "nationalist" as the movement of the Indian National Congress gained momentum. Where the newly emerged landed gentry was organized in party-formation, it proved to be the mouthpiece of the landholder-cum-moneylender element in the society.³ On the other hand, the programme of the peasant movement was geared essentially to the betterment of the conditions of the *sharecroppers*. This movement reached a climax in Bengal during 1946-47 under the banner of "tebhaga". In different forms but substantially with the same content, which was declared to be anti-feudal and anti-monopolist, the peasant movement spread over the Telengana region of Andhra Pradesh and other parts of independent India. It is also still continuing in one form or another. For instance, the Naxalites (the term used to denote the followers of the Communist Party of India—Marxist-Leninist) emerged primarily on the basis of the peasant movement.

Here, thus, was (and still is) a composite field to reveal the reality of a rural society: a field which conveys different images of the economic, social, political, and ideological characteristics of the people concerned. But, barring a few, the sociologists showed little

interest to unfold the substantive reality in an unequivocal manner; that is, not only by ascertaining the "what and how" of the different profiles of rural India, but also by answering the question concurrently: *Why* are these partially true profiles different, and *how* can they be employed to reveal the substantive reality?

What is more important is that a shift is still lacking in the orientation of the sociologists in this respect. A "holistic" approach may have been adopted from the "peasant view of life" portrayed by some eminent social anthropologists, like Redfield. This was interpreted to convey an image of the "peasants" to form substantially a *homogeneous* community, although Redfield's idyllic portrayal of the peasant life was sharply contradicted by Lewis in reference to Redfield's own field of observation [Lewis 1951: 428-435]. But while the Lewis-Redfield controversy merely demonstrated how we tend to depict *the* reality from one or another of its aspects, in India the rural society was interpreted as a "study in unity and diversity" by Bose and Sinha; and, in conformity with Newton's Third Law, Mandelbaum has recently characterized it as "Continuity and Change: Change and Continuity" [Bose and Sinha 1961; Mandelbaum 1970]. These and similar attempts do not reveal the dynamics of the rural society, although much has been written on Village India since the 1950-s [e. g., Marriot 1955].

It may not also be an exaggeration to state that such attempts distort reality. For, dynamism denotes change, and social change is ultimately substantiated by the *replacement* of one entity by another. Whereas the aforesaid attempts portray a society which either records *social accumulation*—not change (and, thus, provides us with the soothing slogan of "unity and diversity")—or denotes *fluctuations* around a central tendency (like the swing of a pendulum from "continuity" to "change" and back from "change" to "continuity"). Wilfully or not, these studies tend to imply the conclusion that here is a society where there is nothing much to worry about the *consequences* of what is happening, how it is happening, why it is happening, and "what will it be?" in the immediate future. Such attempts, therefore, may conform to the dictum of *maya* (illusion) propounded by Sankara, but they do not help us to reveal the reality.

However, the different facets of rural India are objectively portrayed by the social scientists belonging to different disciplines; but their *segmental* attention reveals the social reality in as much as the

seven blind men of the well-known Indian fable could characterize what an elephant looks like. The economists analyze the characteristics of a closed versus vulnerable economy, submarginal and subsistent versus capitalistic enterprise, etc. The political scientists explore the class and political alliances, power cliques and the lacunae of nation building, and so on. The social anthropologists describe the village as a unit based on locally operating ties, the clientele (*jajmani*) system, "little" and "great" traditions in the rural areas, etc. The sociologists explain the processes of parochialization and universalization, sanskritization and westernization, urbanization and modernization of a "great tradition", and so on. Also, along with the social psychologists, they study the motivations of the rural folk to change, their achievement orientation, communication and "development" in the rural areas, and so forth. But, neither the sociologists nor the social scientists of other brands usually *synthesize* the different aspects of social reality, although nearly two decades ago DP had begun his Presidential Address to this Conference with the words:

"Sociology has a floor and a ceiling, like any other science, but its speciality consists in its floor being the ground-floor of all types of social disciplines, and its ceiling remaining open to the sky. ...In so far as they live on the same floor, they are bound to come into conflict with each other in the name of autonomy. ...But a stage comes when exclusiveness ceases to pay for the living." [Mukherji 1961: 20].

To be sure, although infrequent, the attempts of sociologists to synthesize different aspects of reality is not altogether absent. As a result of these attempts we have the concept of 'dominant caste' from Srinivas, the schema of "caste, class and power" from Beteille, and several others. Such concepts, schema and models denote a step forward to appraise the social reality, but they may not be efficient enough for the purpose because of their unilateral or compartmental emphasis on the societal factors. For example, the concept of dominant caste does not persuade us to search for the *prime* characteristics of "dominance" which may not subscribe to the configuration of any caste [Mukherjee 1973: 45-47]. Similarly, acceptable or not, while it was left to a political party to state that "caste is fossilized class" [Socialist Party of India 1972: 30], the schema of "caste, class and power" does not clarify the relationship between caste and class as homologous, analogous, or discrete entities [Beteille 1966]. These attempts, therefore, may *diffuse* any effort to ascertain the causal,

concomitant, or contingent relevance of the societal factors to reveal the social reality unequivocally.

There are, of course, studies subscribing to this effort; and also from the above-mentioned two sociologists. Our present task, however, is to highlight our deficiencies in this respect and learn from them. I shall, therefore, attend to those which have failed—partly, at any rate. The illustrative cases may be the *deductive* attempts of Bailey and Epstein to answer merely the questions “what, how, and why is it?” of a phenomenon in a place-time-object bound situation, and not the concurrent questions of “what, how, and why is it *not*?” on an *inductive* base. Both of them found, in the 1950-s, the emergence of entrepreneurship in the rural areas, on a caste basis or not [Bailey 1958; Epstein 1962]; but, while the deductive attempt has been replicated by several sociologists in other parts of India little has been done so far to ascertain why after a while the “nonconformists” do not find ‘the way out of the social system’. Instead, the erstwhile “nonconformists” tend to conform, eventually, to the *status quo ante*, and thrive as landholders and usurers. This I noticed in 1972, however cursorily, in the area where Epstein had worked, and was told the same in 1973 by an Oriya anthropologist who had just intensively studied the area where Bailey had worked.

How much of this lag between the social reality and our appraisal of it is due to our “ideology”? And, how much of it is due to our “education” which prompts us to describe and explain the phenomena on a *deductive-positivistic* base instead of diagnosing the dynamics from a dialectical appreciation of their positive and negative aspects with an *inductive-inferential* orientation?

IV

Let us now illustrate the inadequate or fallacious appraisal of the social reality with reference to another society which, until recently, used to be categorized as “primitive”; namely, Uganda—before, during, and after the British rule.

In 1950, Lowie labelled the peoples of Uganda as “tribals” [Lowie 1950: 453-458], which was in conformity with the practice of the British anthropologists and the colonial government. But we find from the earlier accounts of the travellers like Speke, administrators like Lugard, and ethnographers like Roscoe, that before the advent of the British in what became the Uganda Protectorate, the

"Baganda" had developed a class society with an external and home market in operation. "The "Banyankole" had developed a State on the basis of class-domination, as Oberg has brilliantly portrayed [Oberg 1950 : 121-162] ; and class division had either emerged among others (as among the "Banyoro") or was incipient (as among the "Nilotes" and the "Nilo-Hamites"). These details could be collected from the easily available literature [Mukherjee 1956 : 46-105]. Why did the anthropologists, then, label the peoples of Uganda as "tribals" throughout the British rule? Was it to endorse the "civilizing mission" of the colonial power?

Katherine Mayo provided justification, in 1927, why India could not be made free because of her backwardness and obscurantism [Mayo 1927]. In 1948, Elspeth Huxley provided similar justification for the British rule in Uganda [Huxley 1948 : 199-201]. However, like Mayo in India, Huxley was a mere traveller in East Africa and probably also a propagandist. Let us, therefore, be attentive to the conclusions drawn by the reputable anthropologists and sociologists working in Uganda or the neighbouring areas of British Africa.

Lucy Mair stated in 1934; "In sum, then, the history of Uganda presents a justification for the system of Indirect Rule—the preservation of the native society as a basis for new development, and its transformation only to the extent which these developments necessitate" [Mair 1934 : 286]. Similar conclusion was drawn by the Wilsons in 1945, "based on observations in central Africa" [Wilson and Wilson 1945]. And, at the same time, Malinowski declared while inquiring into the "race relations in Africa" that : "As a Pole born and bred, I may be allowed to say here that in my opinion the British colonial system is second to none in this capacity to learn from experience, its adaptability and tolerance, and above all, in its genuine interest in the welfare of the natives" [Malinowski 1945:161].

No wonder, then, that the Governor of Uganda announced in 1949: "the established policy aims at developing Uganda for the benefit, not of imported Europeans or Asians, but of its African population" [Hall 1949 : iii]. But such was the policy, acclaimed by the sociologists and anthropologists, that regarding the "peace-loving" Acholis—as Huxley characterized them since they had not yet displayed political inclinations like the "Baganda" with the 1945 and 1948 uprisings—she stated in 1948: "In the debating club, politics are barred. At the last meeting the topic "Where does the rainbow come from?" was discussed" [Huxley 1948 : 243].

To be sure, some of the sociologists and anthropologists working in Uganda and the neighbouring colonies (as also in India and elsewhere) produced good ethnography, and a few of the notable ones contributed significantly to the development of ethnological and sociological theories. But that is not our present concern. The point to note here is that even some of the most reputed among them missed or bypassed the hub of social reality. Although they professed to be concerned with the 'dynamics of culture change' or the "analysis of social change", they failed to answer the question: which societal factors are of causal, concomitant, and contingent relevance respectively, or irrelevant, to unfold the social reality [Mukherjee 1956: 267-274]? Was it due to their "ideology" and/or their "education"?

I may mention, in this context, what I heard a North African student say in Paris in 1948: "Today we are 'tribals' and the 'anthropologists' study us; but tomorrow we shall attain independence, and then we shall be 'people' and the 'sociologists' and 'political scientists' will come to study us"! Is that, in sum and substance, our utility in a society and in the world at large?

Indeed, the query is buttressed by the contrary fact that the prophecy of the North African student has not been fulfilled in Africa, India, and most other parts of the world. "Tribes" are still studied by the departments of anthropology in the universities in India and elsewhere, the Anthropological Survey of India and similar governmental and non-governmental research institutions in many countries, either without specifying the precise meaning of the term "tribe" or by defining it in an esoteric manner peculiarly their own. But, in reference to internal differentiations, class formation and polarization within a community of people, how many "tribes" are there in contemporary India and other countries in contradistinction with the nomenclature of ethnic groups, nationalities, etc.?

Should the Lapps of Scandinavia be categorized as "tribals" who even resent the term "Lapp" in place of "Sabme" [Gjessing 1954: 1]? Should the juridical category of "Scheduled Tribes", which may grind a political axe, be our guide to impose the invidious distinction of "tribals" and others on the Indian society? Similar is the situation in many other parts of the world: Africa, West and Southern Asia, Oceania, Australia and New Zealand, South America and even North America. Like the *laissez-aller* adoption of the meaning of a "tribe", is it not an indicator of our "ideology" and "education"?

V

It is not in a spirit of frivolity that I have reproduced the cynicism of an African student. It is also not in a mood of frustration that I have questioned our worth as scientists in that context. My purpose is to introduce the argument we hear sometime that all I have said about Uganda (and also about India) is a matter of the past: the new generation of sociologists have a different ideology and education. But what has so far been the outcome of this difference ?

Prima facie, there are indications to the contrary. For example, when in the autumn of 1971 it was suggested in a meeting of the Unesco experts that a course of diagnostic research denotes the high probability of a different form of nation-building and state-formation in the Eastern wing of Pakistan, a number of young sociologists expressed a good deal of "national" and "religious" animosity [Mukherjee 1974]. It thus appears to me that the issue of ideology and education of the sociologists is no less relevant today and to the new generation as it was in the past and to the old generation to which I probably belong.

To substantiate this statement further, let us examine the contemporary situation in Uganda and its repercussion on India and abroad. For, this way, we shall link up two different "place-time-object" circuits which reflect the comprehension of reality not only by the natives of the two societies but also by those who belong to other societies. Our discussion, thus, may demonstrate the universal and contemporary relevance of ideology and education of the sociologists to unfold the social reality.

The mass exodus of the "Indians" from East Africa has generated a good deal of resentment in India and elsewhere ; but how many sociologists have reacted to the phenomenon, and that also unemotionally and objectively (as was also lacking in the case of Bangladesh) ? Yet, as in the case of Bangladesh, this outcome could be logically apprehended ; just as the inter-"people" tension in Uganda, particularly manifest today between the Ganda and the Acholi, could be diagnosed from an objective analysis of the Uganda society in the British days [Mukherjee 1956 : 252-255]. It could also be diagnosed simultaneously that since Uganda was unified from the 1930-s under the primary production and processing of cotton, the Europeans (essentially the British), the Asians (essentially the citizens of the subcontinent of India), and the Africans (namely, the Ugandans)

formed three tiers of a class structure. The British were at the top, wielding economic and political power. The Africans were at the bottom, with no political and economic power at all. And, the "Indians" were placed in the middle of the hierarchy, with appreciable economic power developing from the British who, however, did not yield any political power to the "Indians" and they, in their turn, did not seek for it in alliance with the Uganda Africans whom they exploited as intermediaries [*ibid*: 177-181]. Therefore, when the Africans could break through the shackles of bondage, the present plight of the *unrooted* "Indians" could also be anticipated [*ibid*: 255-263].

Such a diagnosis made in the 1950-s and still found to be valid is possible *not* because one is an astrologer, a yogi versed in "transcendental meditation", or because one possesses the "third eye" of Siva. The probability lies in formulating one's ideology *objectively* and undertaking the consequent rigours of research.

This assertion, however, may be contested on the ground that the behaviour and the consequences of the behaviour of mankind must be value-based and value-expressive. Therefore, the counter-argument will suggest: (a) social research cannot be value-free; (b) one's approach to research cannot be objective; and (c) what has been stated as the consequent rigour of research is, correspondingly, meaningless. In operational terms, this would mean that all one can do is to appraise reality according to one's ideology and obviously, therefore, in a deductive-positivistic manner.

In support of such a stand, it would be said that: (1) those who speak of "value neutrality" in social research actually conceal a particular value-load; and (2) if one form of analysis of a society proves to be valid in the future perspective, it is because a *particular kind* of ideology is implicit in it and that ideology has proved to be superior to other kinds of ideology which might have led to other forms of analysis of the same society.

We must not ignore this viewpoint because it contains more than a grain of truth. But we must also consider the fact that if we stop at such a generalization to formulate our role as sociologists, we shall not be serving science but operate as doctrinaires and dogmatists. For virtually no ideology is bereft of truth—however partially it is accounted for, as we have illustrated by the vignettes of rural India. Therefore, the problem before us is *not* that sociology contains value-loads, but how we may *objectively* treat the differential value-loads

for an evermore precise, comprehensive, and unequivocal appraisal of the social reality.

Operationally, it would mean that we should not be "value-neutral" but "value-accommodator" in the sense that our task is *not* to deduce *the* reality by emphasizing one or another of its aspects according to our value-base. Instead, what we ought to do is to appraise the *relative* relevance and necessity, and the *nature* and *degree* of efficiency, of all the aspects in order to elucidate what the reality substantially is. For the different aspects of reality being unilaterally stressed in diverse manner according to their "ideological" prerogatives, the process will automatically test and verify which is the "right" kind of ideology to unfold the social reality. This way, therefore, we shall gain in knowledge and proceed toward bridging the gap between theory and research, instead of dogmatically pinning our faith on one kind of ideology as the "right" one and merely straining our vocal chord to assert its rightness as a doctrine.

Needless to say, knowledge may always form an asymptote with reality, but our task is to narrow down the gap between them with evermore precision and comprehensibility. Hence, for an efficient execution of this task at the current state of our knowledge on the societal phenomena, the following three postulates may be helpful to "clean" our ideology and equip ourselves with the appropriate education:

1. An imperial interest—hidden or exposed—may seek for its direct rule or indirect domination by developing a suitable image (or theory) of the life of the people concerned, which may be accepted (consciously or unconsciously) by the general run of the social scientists in the imperial and allied nations. The elites in the colonial, semi-colonial, or independent countries may also develop an image (or theory) to serve their class-end or in-built orientation; and this may be subscribed by the sympathetic social scientists in other countries. Correspondingly, the social strata worse-hit in the process (or which become the targets of the images developed by the domineering interests) may form other images (or theories) and find supporters among the social scientists in other countries.

2. Value-loaded as they are, none of these images (or theories) may be divorced altogether from reality; and they may be relevant, necessary, and efficient to *describe* "what and how", and *explain* "why", of the facet of reality each one deals with. But none of them may be *sufficient* to appraise the dynamics of the society under re-

ference and thus to *diagnose* "what will it be?" in the immediate future. For this purpose, a course of *systematization* and *relative* evaluation of the images (or theories) in the light of an *unconstrained* and everimproving appreciation of the empirical manifestation of reality is imperative.

3. This calls for a *value-free*, but all kinds of value-accommodating, *inductive-inferential* approach to reveal the social reality. For, in reference to each image (or theory) and exhaustive empirical explorations, a social scientist will have to answer concurrently; "what is it?" and "what is it *not*?" ; "how is it?" and "how is it *not*?" ; and "why is it?" and "why is it *not*?" . Thus, a constant interplay of the positive and negative aspects of the available knowledge, and a dialectical interaction among them, will produce a precise, unequivocal, and evermore comprehensive appreciation of *the* social reality.

VI

Were we discussing the topic of sociologists and the social reality two decades ago, it might not have been so very necessary to stress upon the ideology and the education of the social scientists. In the first flush of India's independence, what was primarily necessary was to *introspect* the Indian society, and not to *impose* one or another external viewpoint on it. This is what D. P. Mukerji told this Conference in 1955. But since the Second World War, rapid communication among the social scientists had developed all over the world. Also, on the one hand, the newly emerged nation-states in the Third World were bursting with energy and even showing impatience to quickly change the "face" of their societies. On the other, the economic, political, and ideological power was concentrated in the United States of America or the Soviet Union; and, given its medium, power flows from the higher to the lower potential. Logically it followed, therefore, that the world was viewed according to either of the two images developed in these two epicentres of human progress and prosperity; and the voice of those who pleaded for a critical appraisal of the reality in the society under reference was lost in wilderness. D. P. Mukerji's statement was misinterpreted as a plea for an "Indian science of sociology" [Desai 1962 : 192-194] when he pleaded for "the study of Indian traditions" as "the first and immediate duty of the Indian sociologist" [Mukerji 1961 : 22].

Sociology has, no doubt, progressed far beyond the stage it had attained two decades ago. In the world scale, this is exemplified by: (1) the current interest shown in the USA and many other countries to *understand* Marxism with reference to its various interpretations, instead of merely vilifying it in terms of the distorted renderings obtained from interested quarters; and (2) the commendable attempts of some Soviet scientists to examine the role of "tradition" in the developing processes in the Third World countries [e.g., Polonskaya 1973]. But the progress has not yet been duly organized. On the one hand, therefore, we still find a doctrinaire and dogmatic imposition of a world-view emanating usually from the aforesaid two epicentres of socio-economic-ideological power. On the other, the "introspective" reaction has now become fashionable and given rise to demands like that for Asian Sociology. And, in between these two extreme approaches, certain plans and programmes of "universal" appeal are floated by the international organizations and some reputable social scientists which tend to link-up the two polar ends. These "universal" issues have impressive labels, like, the eradication of poverty and inequality, uplifting the weaker sections of society, and national integration [e.g., Myrdal 1971; ECAFE 1973].

At this juncture, therefore, I may also be misjudged as was DP's turn in the 1950-s. I have been labelled a 'bourgeois-marxist' or a 'marxist-bourgeois', or merely a dilettante or purist, for I harp on the necessity to "clean" our ideology and equip ourselves with a rigorous education to unfold the social reality. And, yet, I would emphasize this need of the hour for two reasons:

1. Sociology as a discipline has reached a stage where it can no more fulfil its role by merely *describing* the societal phenomena and thus answering the first two of the four fundamental questions one answers in any scientific discipline; namely, "what is it" and "how is it". Its responsibility will also not be adequately covered by answering the third sequential question: "Why is it", in order to *explain* the disappearance, emergence, or persistence of the societal phenomena. Instead, by following the chain of these three questions, the discipline must now answer, on a probability basis, the fourth and the last question: "what will it be" in the immediate future.

2. An answer to the question "what will it be" is the crucial demand contemporarily, in India and elsewhere, as is evident from our failure so far to appraise the reality and anticipate what happened since the 1950-s in Indonesia, Nigeria, Vietnam, Bangladesh,

and recently in Chile and Thailand. It is also necessary in order to diagnose the virulence of the students' upsurge in affluent Japan, West Germany and France; the intensity or marginality of the New Left and Black movements in ever-prosperous U. S. A.; the "cultural revolution" brought about by the Hippies; and the emergence of the Youth Revolt all over the world.

The situation is no less urgent at our own threshold because our role in unfolding the social reality in India has not so far been particularly impressive. The dynamics of the Indian society is still left mainly to the economists to determine, as it is in the world perspective and against which Myrdal is pleading since the 1950-s [Myrdal 1956]. The economists also have not shown perceptible achievement in this respect. Instead, in India for instance, discontent among them has lately been manifest in the Planning Commission itself. On the other hand, we—the sociologists—have entered the arena more by proxy than on our own right. Since the 1960-s, sociology in India is making its impact felt in the government circle, and among the public, principally because of the growing awareness that the economists *alone* cannot "show the way out of the social system by analyzing the processes of transformation".

Hence, in the "national" and "international" perspectives, the force of events is persuading the social and political scientists of various brands to accept sociology as the "ground floor" of their activities. But we, as sociologists, will fail to discharge our responsibility to integrate and activate all social science disciplines for a precise comprehensive and unequivocal appraisal of the social reality unless we deliberately 'clean' our ideology and equip ourselves with the appropriate "education". For there is always the temptation to find an easy way out, which may also prove to be profitable for the time being—personally or otherwise.

In this context, the previously mentioned issues of "universal" appeal loom large before us. Thus, at the current state of our knowledge on any society, "poverty" is not only a definitional issue but also value-loaded in diverse ways for the materialists, existentialists, and the idealists. Regarding the materialists alone, who are very vocal on this issue, Lenin's comment is instructive and of topical relevance; namely: "Marx there (in *The Poverty of Philosophy*) says of the Communists of the old school that all they saw in poverty was just poverty and that they failed to observe its revolutionary, destructive side, which would overthrow the society" [Lenin 1946;

227]. The question follows: Is not the slogan of *Garibi Hatao* in India, or the "mass poverty study" of ECAFE, worse confounded in conceptualization, comprehension, and execution? And yet, the slogan has been adopted in India as a theme of research in several social science research institutions, and ECAFE is busy organizing "mass poverty" studies in the "developing" societies—just as the US Government was interested in its territory a few years ago.

As to the "weaker sections" of a society, it is not only a value-loaded identificational issue but also that the label tends to forbid a precise and comprehensive identification of relevant groups in a society, in whichever manner the value-load may be employed for that purpose. The reason is that the down-trodden people are not usually identified *inductively*, out of the total social space, and in terms of a constellation of societal attributes taken into account to denote this characteristic in a society. Instead, certain social groups are *prima facie* picked out, on this account, in the light of the image or images prevalent in the society *en bloc* or its domineering sector(s). The focus on the Scheduled Castes and Tribes in India in this context is not a unique phenomenon. This is the general practice—usually sponsored "officially"—in all societies: "developing" or "developed". It makes the "popular" label imprecise in definition, diffused in identification, and indiscriminately value-loaded.

Also "inequality", in this series of "popular" labels, begs a precise definition, identification, and comprehension before any course of research may be undertaken on that account. And, one would expect that grave doubts will now be raised regarding the usefulness of the label "national integration" to reveal the reality of nation-building since the formation of Bangladesh in 1971 out of the "national integration" of Pakistan in 1947.

We are, thus, led to consider the notable issues of the "universal" appeal to be intangible or diffused or indiscriminately value-loaded. At any rate, they are inefficient to unfold the social reality, although they look impressive, speedily gather "official" approval and support, and are thus conducive to researchers to find an easy way to establish their bona fides. A case in point may be the encouragement received presently in India and in many other countries for researches on *Futurology* which will roam in the realm of unadulterated speculation unless, on the basis of an objective ideology and rigorous education of the researchers, they involve systematic and sustained exploration

of the dynamics of the society.

For none of these issues of "universal" appeal refer directly to the dynamics of a society. Poverty is a symptom, and not the disease. The "weaker sections" of a society merely embody a disease; they do not denote the disease itself. Correspondingly, "inequality", "futurology", etc., are such omnibus formulations to lose oneself in a maze of too many variations that researches on their account may prove to be futile due to barren or inconsequential conceptions. And, the search for clues toward "national integration"—with obviously a deductive model of "consolidation" within the schema of unity and diversity in view—may degenerate into trivialities or impose a dogma, as we find not infrequently.

Neither of the two would happen if clues for "national integration" were sought on the basis of an inductive model incorporating all possibilities of "alienation" from the operating state-power. But that, as in the other instances I have cited, would presuppose discarding the "popular" labels of "universal" appeal and dealing with issues which involve such concepts and definitions as are tangible, observable, measurable, deducible and inferential on a strictly objective and probability basis.

We may, thus, concentrate our attention on such societal characteristics as disparity and conflict (not mere "inequality") in the "social" sphere, deprivation and expropriation (not just "poverty") in the "economic" sphere, class collaboration and contradiction (not any vague characterization of the weaker sections of the society) in the "political" sphere, unequal exchange and alienation (instead of "national integration") in the "ideological" sphere, and so many others. These characteristics can be conceived under precisely formulated themes of research; and these themes can be considered either in a value-free manner in respect of the phenomenon of "social change" or against systematized, value-loaded constellations in respect of the phenomenon of "social development". They may also be considered in respect of "nation-building" or similar topics.

Formulated in this manner, the themes of research will represent the issues of "universal" appeal precisely and systematically; for they should lead us, eventually, to such common *causal* sources as are envisaged or implied by the "popular" labels. So that, they will be valid for research, in any case; while our current state of knowledge on virtually any and all world societies suggests that they will also be relevant and necessary to unfold the substantive reality of the

society under reference and, finally, of the world at large.

Whether or not they will be efficient, and eventually sufficient, for that purpose, or other themes of research will have to be considered simultaneously or subsequently, will depend on the course of research we undertake rigorously and systematically, as enumerated earlier under three postulates. For knowledge will be acquired thereby in an unequivocal manner to enrich our theoretical understanding and promote further empirical investigations on that base. The quest for knowledge will thus be translated into a never-ending course of research, and we shall be able to unfold the social reality with evermore precision and comprehensibility.

VII

To be sure, if we formulate our task in this "down to earth" manner, it may not look impressive enough to catch the "official" eye and the consequent munificence. In any case, it will not promote an emotional upsurge or help to devise catchy political slogans either for the Establishment or for the opposition. But Science is not the handmaiden of Politics, or of any power—sacred or secular—other than of Knowledge itself. No doubt, to speak of the role of science in this manner has almost become a cliché; but the cliché has a topical relevance today.

Equally it may be necessary to point out that while knowledge is not an end in itself and has to be employed for the betterment of humanity, the quest for knowledge cannot be controverted by saying that the scientists should not only reveal the social reality but also change it according to their value-judgement. For the force applied to change society may end in failure or have a dangerous consequence (as in the hands of the sorcerer's apprentice, in the Egyptian fable) unless an objective and rigorous attempt is first made to unfold the reality evermore precisely, comprehensively, and unequivocally.

Therefore, in response to the call to change society (but not on a dogmatic-doctrinaire base), I may go forward from Marx and Lenin, and cite Mao Tse-Tung to the "highest form of the materialists" by quoting from one of his writings which was accepted by all Marxists when it was written :

"In the process of development of a complex thing, many contradictions exist; . . . True, the productive forces, practice, and the economic basis generally manifest themselves in the princi-

pal and decisive role; . . . But under certain conditions, such aspects as the relations of production, theory, and the superstructure, in turn, manifest themselves in the principal and decisive role. . . . There is nothing in this world that is absolutely even in its development, and we must oppose the theory of even development or the theory of equilibrium." (Mao Tse-Tung 1952 : 50-52).

And to the "highest form of the idealists" at the other extreme, who may also desire to change society, I may not cite their contemporary masters, like, Mumford or any one of the currently fashionable Maharshis. For them, I shall go way back from Marx and reproduce the Article 10 of *kenopamishad* as translated by my teacher Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis. Characteristically, this verse is *interpreted* sometimes to refer to the Supreme Being, the repository of all Knowledge. But it can be our *leit motiv*—whether or not we are theists, agnostics, or atheists—since, literally, it contains no other value than the quest for Knowledge and harbours no constraint in that pursuit. Thus, in a "value-free" manner, the verse reads as follows :

I do not think I Know very well
nor that I do not Know.
He Knows who Knows this
I do not Know and I Know.

NOTES

1. To consider a simple example, a correlation does not necessarily denote causality, but this is how it is often interpreted. Also, the construction of a coefficient of correlation presupposes a normal distribution of the variates, but in how many instances in social research that supposition is verified to be valid? Moreover, although a correlation-coefficient may yield as low a value as 0.25, it will be significant even at the 1 per cent probability level for a sample size of at least 100; and a sample of that size is quite common in social research. Yet in many quantitative sociological studies the significance of the obtained values of correlation-coefficient is duly mentioned while the more relevant point is seldom discussed, namely: how much of the given social space will be interpreted by a correlation-coefficient of 0.25, or even 0.50, beyond which the "social" variables yield a value only infrequently?

We could pursue the subject with respect to the scaling techniques (e. g., the mathematical base—if any—of the Guttman scale), the subjective bias of factor analysis, the path analysis in reference to the serial ordering of the variates taken into account (which are amenable to various possibilities of permutations and combinations), and so on.

2. Md. Azizul Huque, who had sharply criticised the role of the landlords of Bengal in the 1930-s (as mentioned earlier), was one of the organizers of the Krishak Praja Party with like-minded colleagues—both Hindus and Muslims—who also largely represented the newly emerged landed gentry. Their role, in this respect, was evident from the activities of the Ministry of Bengal which they formed at that time and later, by collaborating with the Muslim League, held on to the ministerial position for about 10 years until the partition of Bengal in 1947.

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