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DR. ABHISHEK GUPTA	Teacher Govt. School, Sahaspur	वर्तमान में युवा वर्ग का मानसिक स्वास्थ्य एवं व्यसन की चुनौतियां

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Decolonizing Social Sciences in India: Reclaiming Language, Knowledge and Relevance

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Abstract: *The enduring shadow of colonialism continues to impede the progress of 21st-century Indian social sciences. This manifests as a persistent Western intellectual hegemony that marginalizes indigenous knowledge systems, erects linguistic barriers and also sever the connection between social science and the lived experiences of its people. A critical factor exacerbating this challenge is the insufficient emphasis on native languages. This linguistic neglect limits accessibility to social science discourse, detaches research from rich cultural contexts, and further marginalizes invaluable indigenous knowledge. Consequently, the potential for impactful policy engagement and meaningful public discourse is diminished. Against this backdrop, this paper investigates the contemporary trend of native language displacement by the growing prevalence of English and hybrid linguistic forms among young Indians. Through a qualitative study involving 50 Bengali children and youth (aged 15-25) in Kolkata, this research seeks to*

uncover how the under-emphasis on native languages in Indian social sciences profoundly impacts the recognition, preservation, and integration of indigenous knowledge systems.

Keywords: colonialism, indigenous knowledge system, native language, marginalize, integration.

Introduction

Over seven decades after independence, India's social sciences still carry the weight of colonial legacies. Western hegemony shapes academic thought, sidelining indigenous knowledge and estranging scholarship from lived realities. The dominance of English and Western frameworks has fostered a culture of elitism, shutting out vast sections of the population from meaningful academic engagement.

The colonization of sociology and social sciences in India is deeply rooted in the historical context of British colonial rule and its enduring impact on the Indian education system, intellectual life, and academic frameworks. This process entailed the systematic dominance of Western epistemologies—ways of knowing, theorizing, and researching society—that shaped the development of the social sciences in India, often at the cost of marginalizing indigenous systems of knowledge. The legacies of colonialism continue to influence how Indian society is studied, understood, and taught, even decades after independence. During British rule, colonial administrators sought to educate a class of Indians who would assist in governance and administration. This vision was formalized in Lord Macaulay's famous "Minute on Indian Education" (1835), which proposed the creation of a system that would produce "a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes,

in opinions, in morals and in intellect" (Macaulay, 1835). This led to the establishment of universities in Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras in 1857, all of which prioritized Western liberal arts and social science curricula, modelled closely on British institutions. These institutions became the primary centres for higher learning in India and played a crucial role in shaping the trajectory of social science education (Chatterjee, 2012).

Colonial knowledge in India was built on ethnographies by British officials and missionaries that portrayed society as static, hierarchical, and irrational, legitimizing the "civilizing mission" (Dirks, 2001). Censuses and classifications froze fluid practices like caste into rigid state categories (Cohn, 1996). This legacy shaped Indian sociology and anthropology, where early scholars, guided by Comte, Durkheim, Weber, and Spencer, applied Eurocentric models that universalized Western social evolution while neglecting local specificities (Deshpande, 2003).

Tracing India's Colonial Roots and Legacies

Despite India's independence in 1947, its academic institutions continued to reflect colonial structures, privileging English-language education and Western frameworks of knowledge. Regulatory bodies like the UGC reinforced this model, and Indian scholars were often evaluated by Western academic standards, leading to an epistemic dependence on foreign knowledge systems (Nandy, 1983). Efforts by thinkers like G.S. Ghurye, D.P. Mukerji, Benoy Kumar Sarkar, and Radhakamal Mukerjee aimed to develop a distinctly Indian sociology grounded in indigenous traditions, but their work remained constrained by institutional pressures to conform to Western norms.

By the 1980s, critical movements emerged in response. The Subaltern Studies group, led by scholars such as Ranajit Guha and Partha Chatterjee, challenged elite-centric narratives and sought to recover the voices of marginalized communities (Guha, 1982; Chatterjee, 1993). Simultaneously, Dalit scholars, building on B.R. Ambedkar's legacy, exposed the caste-based exclusions of mainstream sociology and demanded a more inclusive, socially engaged discipline (Ambedkar, 1936; Guru, 2002). Feminist scholars, too, highlighted the patriarchal biases of academic discourse and introduced intersectional perspectives (Rege, 2006).

In recent years, calls for the decolonization of Indian social sciences have intensified. Scholars are revisiting indigenous concepts like *dharma*, *karma*, and *lokavidya*, advocating for knowledge systems rooted in Indian realities (Visvanathan, 2001). However, this process faces significant obstacles, including the continued dominance of English, Western citation norms, and the neoliberal commodification of education, all of which limit critical, context-sensitive scholarship (Chakrabarty, 2000).

Colonial Rule, English Education and Native Language Displacement

This paper contends that one of the most critical and underexplored aspects of this colonial residue is the linguistic neglect within Indian social sciences. The preference for English in both instruction and publication marginalizes native languages and, by extension, the cultural and epistemic frameworks embedded within them. This linguistic alienation impedes the recognition, preservation, and integration of indigenous knowledge systems, ultimately undermining the relevance of social sciences in contemporary Indian society.

I. Colonial Legacies and the Western Epistemological Dominance

The colonial period in India was marked not only by political and economic subjugation but also by a profound epistemic violence (Nandy, 1983; Chakrabarty, 2000). British colonial authorities institutionalized English as the language of administration, education, and 'modern' knowledge, while systematically devaluing Indian languages and traditional systems of thought (Macaulay, 1835; Viswanathan, 1989; Kumar, 1991). Institutions like the universities of Calcutta, Madras, and Bombay were modelled after British counterparts and designed to produce a class of intermediaries proficient in English and steeped in Western modes of thinking (Cohn, 1996; Deshpande, 2003).

Even after independence, these colonial structures were largely retained. The curricula, teaching methodologies, and academic benchmarks continued to privilege Western theorists and frameworks, with thinkers such as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim becoming canonical in Indian sociology, while indigenous thinkers and knowledge systems were relegated to the margins or treated as 'alternative' or 'folk' knowledge (Deshpande, 2003; Guru, 2002).

This Western intellectual dominance persists in contemporary Indian social sciences, creating a hierarchy in which 'universal' (read: Western) knowledge is deemed superior to local or regional epistemologies (Chakrabarty, 2000; Rege, 2006). Indigenous knowledge systems—rooted in oral traditions, cultural practices, and community-based understandings—are often considered unscientific or parochial, further reinforcing

the colonial binaries of civilized/primitive and modern/traditional (Zavos, 2001; Viswanathan, 1989).

II. Linguistic Alienation and the Crisis of Accessibility

Language plays a pivotal role in shaping how knowledge is produced, disseminated, and interpreted. It is not merely a neutral medium of communication but a cultural and epistemological tool that frames how we perceive and engage with the world. In the Indian context, the overwhelming dominance of English in academic and intellectual discourse has created profound barriers to access, inclusion, and representation—especially for students, scholars, and communities from non-metropolitan, rural, and marginalized backgrounds (Deshpande, 2003; Nandy, 1983). English, as the primary medium of higher education and scholarly publishing in India, has become a gatekeeping mechanism that privileges the elite and urban classes, often to the exclusion of those who operate in vernacular languages (Kumar, 1991). This linguistic hegemony is a direct legacy of colonial rule, during which English was deliberately positioned as the language of reason, science, and modernity (Macaulay, 1835; Viswanathan, 1989). Post-independence, instead of dismantling this structure, Indian academia largely reinforced it by continuing to valorize English-medium education and Western models of scholarship (Chakrabarty, 2000). As a result, many Indian languages were sidelined in formal education and research, delegitimizing the knowledge produced within those linguistic traditions (Cohn, 1996; Guru, 2002).

The dominance of English in social science restricts participation and narrows what counts as valid knowledge. Indigenous epistemologies—expressed through oral traditions, rituals, kinship, and community practices—are deeply tied to

local languages, which often resist accurate translation (Rege, 2006; Viswanathan, 2001). As a result, English-language research risks simplifying or erasing India's diverse lived realities, reinforcing an epistemic hierarchy that privileges Western knowledge as more rigorous or universal (Chakrabarty, 2000). Moreover, the pressure to publish in English-medium journals and align with global citation metrics drives Indian scholars to frame their work for Western audiences (Guru, 2002; Deshpande, 2003). Success in academia is thus measured by conformity to Euro-American debates and methods, often sidelining local contexts and concerns (Nandy, 1983; Chakrabarty, 2000).

This creates a troubling gap: Indian sociology, anthropology, and political science often remain inaccessible to the communities they study (Rege, 2006). Research framed in English and through foreign theories may fail to resonate with non-English speakers, turning language into a structural barrier that shapes whose voices are heard and how knowledge is validated. This hierarchy sustains a colonial legacy where English and Western epistemologies dominate, while Indian languages and indigenous knowledge are sidelined. Bridging this divide demands not just linguistic inclusion but an epistemic shift that values multilingual, culturally rooted ways of knowing (Viswanathan, 2001; Rege, 2006).

III. The Marginalization of Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Indigenous knowledge systems encompass a broad and nuanced spectrum of cultural, ecological, spiritual, and social understandings developed over centuries through community interaction, observation, and lived experience. These systems are holistic in nature, often emphasizing the interconnectedness

of human beings with their environment, community, and cosmology (Sillitoe, 1998; Agrawal, 1995). Unlike Western scientific knowledge, which tends to prioritize objectivity and abstraction, indigenous epistemologies are context-sensitive, practice-based, and intimately tied to specific geographies and social realities (Semali & Kincheloe, 1999). In the Indian context, these knowledge traditions are deeply embedded in local languages, oral literatures, customary practices, and spiritual beliefs—ranging from Ayurveda and Siddha medical systems to community-based agricultural techniques, environmental stewardship, and forms of conflict resolution grounded in traditional panchayat systems (Rangachar & Berkes, 2000; Nandy, 1988). Despite their richness, such knowledge systems have long been marginalized in academic discourse, particularly within the social sciences. The privileging of English and the dominance of Western academic standards in Indian universities have systematically undermined the legitimacy of indigenous epistemologies. This marginalization is not just incidental—it is rooted in the colonial project, which deliberately devalued native knowledge forms as irrational, superstitious, or primitive in contrast to the purported rationality of Western science (Cohn, 1996; Viswanathan, 1989). Even in post-independence India, academic institutions have largely failed to reimagine knowledge hierarchies; instead, they have continued to operate within frameworks established by colonial powers (Chakrabarty, 2000; Guru, 2002).

This epistemic injustice manifests in numerous ways. Traditional healing practices, for example, which often combine spiritual and medicinal knowledge accumulated over generations, are frequently dismissed as unscientific or anecdotal in academic and policy circles (Rege, 2006; Banerjee & Madhurima, 2013). Oral histories that provide valuable

insights into marginalized communities' experiences are often excluded from mainstream historiography and sociology because they do not conform to positivist methodologies or written documentation norms (Narayan, 1989). Similarly, ecological and agricultural knowledge—such as seed preservation techniques, intercropping systems, and community water management strategies—are frequently overlooked in favour of Western, technocratic solutions (Shiva, 1997; Agrawal, 1995). The systemic erasure or trivialization of such knowledge is reinforced by institutional academic practices. University syllabi across the social sciences rarely feature indigenous texts, philosophies, or knowledge holders. When included, these are often treated as a token or relegated to elective modules rather than being integrated into core curricula (Deshpande, 2003; Rege, 2006). There is also a conspicuous absence of indigenous scholars in key academic spaces, editorial boards, and policymaking bodies. This underrepresentation is not merely accidental but reflects deeper structures of caste, language, and class exclusion that pervade Indian academia (Guru, 2002; Rege, 2006).

Furthermore, research funding and academic recognition are heavily skewed in favour of projects that align with Western theoretical paradigms and publishing norms. Scholars who engage with indigenous frameworks often struggle to publish in high-impact journals or secure institutional support, as their work may be seen as “parochial” or lacking in universal applicability (Chakrabarty, 2000; Nandy, 1983). The global North’s influence on academic evaluation criteria—such as citation indexes, peer-review standards, and methodological rigour—further entrenches this bias and discourages alternative epistemologies. The consequence is a growing disconnect between academic social science and the lived realities of India’s

diverse communities. When indigenous knowledge systems are treated as inferior or supplementary, it not only undermines their value but also limits the potential of Indian academia to generate socially relevant, locally rooted understandings of development, identity, governance, and justice (Visvanathan, 2001; Rege, 2006).

Reclaiming space for indigenous epistemologies in Indian social sciences thus requires more than mere inclusion; it demands a decolonization of the very structures through which knowledge is validated and disseminated. This involves rethinking curricula, revising evaluation standards, supporting bilingual and vernacular research, and creating institutional pathways for community knowledge holders to actively participate in knowledge production (Smith, 1999; Rege, 2006).

Objectives

In the light of the above-mentioned literature, the present study aimed -

- to identify the impact of colonial linguistic legacy and English dominance on the accessibility and relevance of Indian social sciences, particularly in relation to indigenous knowledge systems.
- to analyse how the marginalization of native languages, such as Bengali, affects young people's engagement with social science discourse and their connection to local cultural contexts.
- to investigate the role of hybrid linguistic practices among Bengali youth in Kolkata and how these reflect broader patterns of linguistic displacement in contemporary India.

Methodology

To explore this issue in greater depth, this paper presents findings from a qualitative study involving 50 Bengali children and youth aged 15 to 25 in Kolkata. The study investigates their linguistic preferences, attitudes toward their native language, and perceptions of the relevance of native languages in their lives as well as in social science education in higher studies. It highlights how the growing prevalence of English and hybrid linguistic forms (such as 'Benglish' or 'Hinglish') contributes to a kind of disconnect between academic discourse and cultural identity, revealing a broader crisis of epistemological dislocation in Indian social sciences. To investigate how these macro-level trends manifest in the lives of young Indians, a qualitative study was conducted among 50 Bengali youth aged 15–25 in Kolkata. The participants were drawn from diverse socio-economic backgrounds and included college or university students, young professionals, and school-goers. The respondents were selected with the help of purposive and snowball sampling techniques. The primary rationale behind using these sampling techniques was to inquire those individuals who have been residing in Kolkata for at least two generations, whose native language is Bengali and whose primary and secondary level education has been in Bengali medium schools. The researcher has initially identified some respondents using this criteria and then taken help of snowballing to reach out to other such respondents without any hassle within a short period of time. The research was conducted within a span of four months (from March to June 2024). For its emphasis on qualitative research methodology, the study followed in-depth interviewing method through a semi-structured interview schedule. Except the personal background information, all other questions were open-ended with probing cues so that detailed response could be

obtained. Responses were recorded with the permission of the respondents and for ethical purpose their names have been changed while referring to the narratives.

The study employed in-depth interviewing and narrative analysis to explore participants' linguistic preferences, their exposure to and use of Bengali (their native language) as well as English and Hindi (the dominant link languages) in academic and non-academic contexts. Furthermore, their attitudes toward the social sciences especially with reference to availability of indigenous knowledge written in their native language as well as in the dominant lingua-franca has also been measured.

Respondents' views and opinions for each question in the schedule were obtained and coding of the data was done by assigning conceptual labels (codes) to segments of such data. This helped the researcher identify specific themes on the basis of which some concrete interpretations could be made.

Since the study reflects an exploratory orientation, thereby it not only aims to unveil several unearthed dimensions but also tries to bridge the gap between theory and practice as well as identify how the initiation of the process of decolonization of prevalent linguistic practices can actually facilitate the formation of a rich indigenous knowledge base and strong social science discourse. However, due to time constraints more detailed and inclusive study could not be done, which can definitely be pursued in near future.

Research Findings

The study delved into several significant domains, which are often unnoticed and require sincere attention from the social science researchers. With reference to the objectives of the study and with the help of the methodological parameters the following themes have been identified as important findings.

A. Native Language Displacement among Indian Youth

Within the home, native languages still play a significant role in communication, especially with older family members. However, there is a noticeable generational shift: while over 80% of respondents used their mother tongue with grandparents and around 65–70% with parents, they were more likely to use English with siblings. This suggests a decline in native language use among the younger generation, who are increasingly comfortable using dominant languages in informal settings.

Even within peer groups, while the mother tongue remains in use, it competes with other dominant languages due to generational and social pressures. For example, while 86% of older family members use the native language, only around 46–50% of the younger generation do the same. Notably, the preference for English is more pronounced among female respondents, with 15.78% using English with peers compared to just 8.33% among males.

Now there is a debate whether we should consider this change as language attrition or language shift. In linguistics or more specifically sociolinguistics, language shift is referred to have occurred when a community replaces one language with another, leading to large-scale language loss. Unlike individual attrition—where speakers gradually lose proficiency—shift happens collectively and threatens the survival of a language. In this context reference to Joshua Fishman's model of language shift becomes significant. In *Reversing Language Shift* (1991), Fishman outlined how certain languages gradually give way to other prevailing and dominant ones across generations and social domains. He developed the Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (GIDS) to assess language vitality, stressing

that intergenerational transmission is crucial for survival. Fishman maintained that reversing language shift depends on community-driven efforts and education initiatives that root the native or minority language in both homes and local communities, rather than relying solely on schools. Fishman, in *Stabilizing Indigenous Languages* (ed. Gina Cantoni), further identifies several factors contributing to this shift: limited opportunities to use the native language at home, lack of parental fluency, and negative attitudes from teachers in schools. Additionally, the perception of English as a tool for economic advancement and the misconception that native languages must be abandoned to learn other languages further accelerate this trend.

With reference to the issue of native language displacement three major themes have also emerged:

1. Erosion of Linguistic Confidence

Most participants reported a decline in their confidence and fluency in Bengali, especially in academic contexts. English was perceived as the language of success, professionalism, and modernity, while Bengali was increasingly confined to informal or familial settings. Some youth expressed embarrassment when asked to discuss complex ideas in their native language, suggesting a deep internalization of linguistic hierarchies.

It has been observed that younger generations increasingly avoid receiving primary education in their native languages. As reflected by the respondents, the preference for using the mother tongue as the first language in school declines with each generation, with a clear shift toward English. Among today's youth, English is often chosen over native languages due to its perceived global relevance and utility. It is seen as a "business language," a tool for survival, and a symbol of status and class.

This shift reduces the role of native languages even in early educational settings—the first major public space in a child's life. The dominance of English in India reflects its rise as a global language. As linguist David Crystal notes, a language becomes truly global not just through the number of native speakers but through international adoption—and English fulfils this role due to its global accessibility and widespread use.

The increasing prominence of English has reshaped communication patterns across age groups, particularly among the youth. Its elevated social prestige has contributed to the marginalization of native languages, not only in public spaces like schools but increasingly within private interactions as well. Moreover, as the respondents have put forward, there is often an acute dearth of good quality study materials for higher studies on Indian culture, heritage etc. especially in the social sciences. While quite a number of books, journals and other resources are available in English, researchers working in their respective native languages often experience a severe lack in terms of inaccessibility to collect information on indigenous knowledge system as well as on Indian cultural legacy. Some narratives can validate this point in a substantial manner.

For instance, Indusree (25 years, PhD scholar) opined, 'I have studied through-out in a Bengali medium school and also in college and university, I chose Bangla as the medium of instruction for my History course. But now for doctoral research though there are books in Bangla but mostly the good books and academic journals are in English. I am stuck in between..[pause] I sometimes feel proud that I have learnt history in my native language but then I also regret that I am not that acquainted with English. That limits me in many cases.'

Ritesh (20 years, Undergraduate student) stated, ‘We are taught to respect our native language. Our elders say that mother tongue is just like mother’s milk. But I prefer English because can we go without English anywhere? Can we do higher studies in our native languages only? Our professors always tell us to read and write in English as it will help us in future. We have seen them translate the original English texts. So, if there is really lack of good social science books or journals in Bangla or other native languages then why should we opt for them? Why will students learn their native languages?’

In this context, we can refer to Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of **linguistic capital** that highlights the unequal value societies assign to particular languages, dialects, or speech styles within what he calls the *linguistic marketplace* (Bourdieu, 1991). As a form of cultural capital, linguistic capital functions as a resource that individuals can mobilize to gain advantages in educational, professional, and social contexts. For example, speakers who command a prestigious language variety—such as standard national languages or socially dominant accents—often enjoy greater legitimacy, authority, and upward mobility, while speakers of stigmatized dialects or minority languages may face exclusion and diminished opportunities (Thompson, 1991). In this way, linguistic capital operates as a mechanism of symbolic power: it not only grants access to material and social resources but also naturalizes hierarchies of speech by presenting dominant varieties as more “proper,” “rational,” or “cultured.” Consequently, language becomes both a site of empowerment and of social reproduction, perpetuating broader class, ethnic, and cultural inequalities (Bourdieu, 1977, 1991). This line of thought has been prevalent among the respondents of the present study, where they have assigned greater value and prestige to

English and sometimes Hindi rather than their native one-Bengali.

2. Hybrid Linguistic Practices and Cultural Dislocation

The growing dominance of English and other widely spoken languages has not only displaced native tongues but also created a dual crisis for young people. They often struggle to balance their public identity—where fluency in English and Hindi is seen as a marker of education and status—with their private ties to native-language communities, where such fluency can create emotional distance. Many respondents expressed concern over the declining use of their native languages, which they view as cultural heritage. While they acknowledge the importance of preserving these languages, they also find it difficult to do so in daily life.

To navigate this tension, many young individuals adopt a blended linguistic style, combining native and dominant languages. This has led to the emergence of hybrid forms like ‘Hinglish’ (Hindi-English) and ‘Benglish’ (Bengali-English), which help them stay connected to both their cultural roots and contemporary social expectations. Hybrid language actually emerges from the blending of two or more linguistic systems that offers important social and cultural advantages. It allows speakers to navigate multiple identities, enabling communication across diverse groups while retaining ties to local cultures (Bhabha, 1994).

A significant number of participants used hybrid linguistic forms such as 'Benglish' (a mix of Bengali and English). While this hybridity allowed for creative expression, it also signalled a deeper disconnection from the cultural and epistemological roots of the Bengali language. In addition, in postcolonial

contexts, hybridity challenges the dominance of colonial languages by embedding indigenous meanings and cultural nuances within global forms of communication. Few narratives in this context can enlighten us about the everyday usage of several hybrid forms.

Anika (High school student), ‘If we mix two languages it is easier to convey ourselves- I just told my friend- Aaj class-e ekta boring presentation chhilo’ that means *(There was a boring presentation in class today.)* So, here in a single sentence I am mixing two languages, but I think there is nothing wrong in using such forms.

Reema (IT professional), ‘We often use two languages together. I say, **aajke ami ekta important meeting-e jabo** *(Today I will go to an important meeting.)* and it is a hybrid form. I do not think that using hybrid form is wrong as far as you are using it for certain purpose without hurting anyone and also if you are able to convey the meaning you wish to communicate to others.’

Respondents noted that while they value their native language as cultural heritage, certain ideas are easier to express in English, leading to widespread use of hybrid forms. They acknowledged the decline of their mother tongues and stressed the need for active preservation yet also recognized the practical advantages of blending languages. This hybrid speech allows them to balance the high social capital of dominant languages with the emotional significance of their native ones, reflecting their evolving identities. Scholars argue that such hybridity is not a linguistic weakness but a resource: it enables multiple identities, resists rigid hierarchies of “pure” language, and embeds local meanings within global communication (Bhabha, 1994; Canagarajah, 2013; García & Wei, 2014).

3. Disconnect Between Education and Lived Experience

A considerable portion of the participants expressed deep dissatisfaction with how social science education was being imparted to them. They criticized the teaching methods and curriculum content as being excessively theoretical, abstract, and largely disconnected from the lived realities of their everyday lives. According to them, the lessons lacked practical relevance and failed to engage with the immediate social, cultural, and political environments they inhabited. While local and regional issues were sometimes referenced in textbooks or brought up during classroom discussions, these were typically addressed in a detached, overly technical, and formal academic language. Such presentation styles, rooted in jargon and complex conceptual frameworks, alienated the students and hindered their ability to relate to the material in a meaningful and emotionally resonant way.

This disconnection from lived experience led to a growing sense of alienation among many of the youth, who felt that their voices, backgrounds, and concerns were invisible or marginalized within the educational discourse. They described a longing for a form of education that would acknowledge and incorporate their community's histories, struggles, and cultural narratives. For them, meaningful learning would involve the use of familiar language, locally grounded examples, and storytelling methods that reflect their socio-cultural contexts. Rather than rote memorization of abstract theories, they wished for participatory, dialogic forms of pedagogy that could foster critical thinking and social awareness through direct engagement with their surroundings. This demand underscores the need for a more inclusive and decolonized curriculum—one that is attentive to the lived experiences of students and capable

of bridging the gap between academic knowledge and everyday life.

B. Consequences for Policy and Public Discourse

Another significant finding of the study projects that the effects of linguistic displacement in Indian social sciences reach far beyond the boundaries of academic institutions. One of the most critical consequences is its impact on public policy. In India, policymaking often follows a centralized, top-down model that inadequately reflects the diverse cultural, linguistic, and social realities of the populations it intends to address. Moreover, policymakers often come from English-medium, Westernized educational systems, whereas communities at the grassroots level, rely on very different linguistic and cultural frameworks. This creates a linguistic and epistemological divide. The misalignment between the two can be traced to this divide.

This gap contributes to a persistent disconnection between the intentions behind policies and their practical outcomes. Policies are frequently formulated using technical jargon and abstract theoretical models that fail to engage with local knowledge systems or lived experiences. Consequently, the voices and insights of marginalized communities, particularly those grounded in vernacular traditions and indigenous epistemologies, are excluded from the decision-making process.

Furthermore, the continued sidelining of indigenous knowledge has serious implications for democratic participation and intellectual inclusivity. When academic discourse is confined to an elite, English-speaking minority and remains inaccessible to the broader public, it restricts the possibility of inclusive dialogue and collective problem-solving. This fosters a form of social science that is not only detached from the people but also

risks becoming irrelevant to the pressing challenges faced by society. Instead of empowering communities, such a system perpetuates inequality by privileging certain ways of knowing while silencing others.

Conclusion- Towards a Decolonized and Linguistically Inclusive Social Science?

The enduring influence of colonialism in Indian social sciences continues to manifest most clearly in the systematic marginalization of native languages and indigenous knowledge systems. The entrenched dominance of English as the medium of instruction, publication, and intellectual validation does more than exclude non-English speakers—it actively reshapes and distorts the foundational ways in which knowledge is produced and understood. This linguistic hierarchy narrows the scope of academic inquiry and creates barriers to participation for vast sections of the population. The qualitative study of Bengali children and youth in Kolkata highlights how such linguistic alienation disrupts personal and collective identity, erodes cultural continuity, and diminishes engagement with academic discourse.

To address these structural challenges, Indian social science must undergo a comprehensive transformation in its pedagogical and institutional practices. Several interlinked strategies can guide this process:

1. Curricular Reform:

There is an urgent need to reform social science curricula so that they meaningfully engage with indigenous scholars, local histories, and culturally rooted theoretical perspectives. Rather than being treated as supplementary to the Western canon, these

must be integrated into the core of teaching and expressed through native languages to ensure depth, authenticity, and contextual relevance. Such curricular transformation can foster intellectual diversity, strengthen cultural self-understanding, and empower students to address local challenges with locally grounded knowledge. By disrupting the dominance of Eurocentric paradigms and foregrounding Indian epistemologies, these reforms would contribute to more inclusive education. This can in turn, support concrete social and developmental outcomes such as community-based policy design, culturally sensitive governance, and knowledge production that directly benefits society.

2. Multilingual Academic Practice:

Promoting bilingual and multilingual education is vital for democratizing knowledge and enriching students' learning experiences. When research and scholarship are produced not only in English but also in regional languages, students gain access to multiple intellectual traditions and cultural perspectives. Institutions must support teachers in learning, practicing, and teaching in at least two languages. They should also promote translation initiatives, bilingual publications, and regional academic journals. These efforts broaden participation and ensure that ideas connect more deeply with local contexts. Such an approach enhances critical thinking, fosters inclusivity, and equips students to navigate both global and local spheres with greater cultural competence and intellectual flexibility.

3. Community-Based Research Engagement:

Social science must reconnect with the people it seeks to understand and serve. Research should extend beyond academic

institutions and actively engage with communities using participatory, inclusive methodologies. Incorporating vernacular narratives, oral traditions, and lived experiences can enrich academic inquiry and render it more relevant to contemporary social challenges.

4. Institutional Recognition and Incentives:

For these changes to take root, universities, research councils, and funding bodies must revise their metrics of academic excellence. Scholarly contributions in native languages, research on indigenous knowledge systems, and community-focused studies should be recognized, funded, and rewarded. This requires a shift away from an over-reliance on global citation indices toward more nuanced evaluations of local and societal impact.

5. Engaging more with Post-Colonial Theoretical Frameworks:

Moreover, since postcolonial theory in sociology critiques the Eurocentric assumptions of modern social sciences and shows how colonial histories continue to shape knowledge systems, more engagement with such theoretical frameworks should be established. It should be brought into the notice of academicians and policy makers that colonial domination was not only political but also epistemic, as languages like English became the privileged medium of scholarship, relegating indigenous knowledge to the margins (Chakrabarty, 2000). Thinkers such as Said (1978), Spivak (1988), and Bhabha (1994) have already revealed how Western representations silenced colonized voices, reified categories like caste (Dirks, 2001), and reinforced hierarchies of language and power. Spivak underscored how

excluding local languages erases subaltern perspectives, while Bhabha's notion of hybridity highlights both creative negotiation and the persistence of colonial dominance. In India, scholars such as Chakrabarty (2000) and Rege (2006) argue for frameworks rooted in concepts expressed through Indian languages like *jati*, *samaj*, or Dalit testimonies that better capture local realities. Since postcolonial theory views language as a structuring force where privileging English sustains epistemic inequality, while embracing multilingualism can decolonize knowledge (Nandy, 1983; Visvanathan, 2001), to be genuinely postcolonial, sociology must integrate indigenous languages into research and teaching, reclaiming them as sites of theory and cultural memory.

So finally, in conclusion it should be emphasized that reclaiming native languages as valid and vital mediums of knowledge production is not simply a linguistic concern, rather it is a decolonial imperative. By centring indigenous epistemologies and dismantling hierarchical academic structures, Indian social sciences can become more inclusive, responsive, and transformative. Only through such intentional reform can the discipline truly contribute to India's democratic development and cultural self-determination.

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Debunking the Gendered Health Discourse: A Case Study of Migrant Women of Indian Sundarbans

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Abstract: *The present paper through gendered health discourse attempts to understand the underlying nuanced pattern of multiple realities about health that brings out the oppositional and “natural” differences between male and female bodies within the context of an ecologically fragile region i.e. Sundarbans. The domain of medicine for a long period remained ‘male-stream’ that eventually led to understand the mechanisms of the body from the man-made world that deliberately ignored the pain, sufferings and experiences of the female bodies. The medicalisation of women bodies design a specific way to control, regulate and monitor the feminine embodiment of women that bereft them off their bodily autonomy. However, the mainstream Sociology remained ignorant about this issue for a long time until 1960s and 1970s period. Therefore, this paper attempts to debunk the gendered health discourses on the basis of everyday lived experiences of the migrant women of Sundarbans as to how they perceive their bodies and form the identities about their ‘selves’ as they strive hard*