

## Appendix-1: Global Income Growth and Inequality, 1980-2016

| Total Cumulative Real Growth Per Adult |       |        |       |        |           |       |
|----------------------------------------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-----------|-------|
| Income group                           | China | Europe | India | Russia | US-Canada | World |
| Full Population                        | 831%  | 40%    | 223%  | 34%    | 63%       | 60%   |
| Bottom 50%                             | 417%  | 26%    | 107%  | -26%   | 5%        | 94%   |
| Middle 40%                             | 785%  | 34%    | 112%  | 5%     | 44%       | 43%   |
| Top 10%                                | 1316% | 58%    | 469%  | 190%   | 123%      | 70%   |
| Top 1%                                 | 1920% | 72%    | 857%  | 686%   | 206%      | 101%  |
| Top 0.1%                               | 2421% | 76%    | 1295% | 2562%  | 320%      | 133%  |
| Top 0.01%                              | 3112% | 87%    | 2078% | 8239%  | 452%      | 185%  |
| Top 0.001%                             | 3752% | 120%   | 3083% | 25269% | 629%      | 235%  |

Alvaredo, F., Chancel, L., Piketty, T., Saez, E., & Zucman, G. (2018). *World Inequality Report 2018*. Cambridge, MA and London, England: Harvard University Press. Table 2.1.1, p. 45

**Dr. N. Rajaram** is Former Professor, School of Social Sciences, Central University of Gujarat. He is also the Guest Editor of this Special Volume on “Challenges Before Social Sciences”.

**Email:** rajaram.bdq@gmail.com

## Enlightenment-Centrism in Indian Social Sciences: A Transdisciplinary Analysis

**B K Nagla**

**Abstract:** *This paper investigates the continued influence of Enlightenment-centric paradigms on Indian social sciences. It critically examines how colonial inheritances, disciplinary demarcations, and entrenched epistemological hierarchies shape contemporary knowledge production. Drawing on postcolonial, subaltern, feminist, and indigenous perspectives, the study adopts a transdisciplinary approach to highlight epistemic constraints and propose alternatives rooted in plural knowledge systems. The central question—whether Indian social sciences remain aligned with Enlightenment thought—necessitates an exploration of the genealogy of social theory, institutional formations, and the normative aspirations of the discipline. This inquiry establishes a conceptual linkage between historical trajectories, structural conditions, and present-day critiques, which forms the analytical foundation of the paper.*

**Keywords:** Enlightenment, Epistemic, Philosophical, Institutional and Normative Perspectives, Transdisciplinary.

### Introduction

The intellectual heritage of modern social sciences is deeply rooted in the Enlightenment—a European philosophical movement that championed reason, empiricism, universalism, and secularism. In postcolonial contexts such as India, the institutionalization of social

sciences was heavily influenced by colonial administrative needs and Western theoretical frameworks. This paper seeks to explore whether Indian social sciences continue to be Enlightenment-centric and how a transdisciplinary perspective might help us rethink their foundations.

### **Interpreting the Enlightenment Legacy in Indian Social Sciences**

The question of whether social sciences in India remain Enlightenment-centric demands a layered interrogation that engages with the historical-philosophical origins of the field, the institutional developments in postcolonial India, and the current transdisciplinary possibilities that aim to reorient the discipline toward more contextually relevant futures. The intellectual lineage of social sciences is deeply intertwined with the epistemological values of the European Enlightenment—namely, rational inquiry, empirical observation, and a belief in linear progress. These ideas find their roots in ancient Greek philosophy but were revalorized during the Enlightenment period in 17th- and 18th-century Europe. The Enlightenment laid the groundwork for social science disciplines such as sociology, economics, political science, and psychology to emerge as distinct fields that sought to explain human behaviour through systematic methods, thereby aligning closely with the model of the natural sciences. This Eurocentric legacy continues to shape not only the form but also the content of social science inquiry globally, often marginalizing non-Western epistemologies and indigenous knowledge systems.

In India, the institutionalization of social sciences gained momentum after independence, with the creation of numerous research institutes and university departments. This growth was supported by state and semi-autonomous bodies such as the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR), which aimed to democratize and expand access to social science research. While this expansion marked an important phase in India's intellectual development, it also largely replicated Western models of disciplinarity without significant structural innovation. Despite the proliferation of interdisciplinary and future-oriented research, there

remains a conspicuous lack of inter-institutional dialogue and synthesis, as scholars often work in isolation, limiting the potential for transdisciplinary engagement (Sathyamurthy, 1984). This fragmentation may inadvertently contribute to the persistence of Enlightenment-centric paradigms, as the absence of robust internal critique across institutions prevents the emergence of alternative frameworks that draw from India's pluralistic and diverse intellectual traditions.

More recently, scholars and practitioners have begun to emphasize the need for social sciences to move beyond their Enlightenment inheritance by adopting transdisciplinary approaches that are more responsive to contemporary ethical, technological, and societal challenges. As new developments—such as nanotechnology and biomedicine—raise complex legal, ethical, and social questions, the role of social science is no longer limited to descriptive analysis; it must also offer critical frameworks to guide collective decision-making. The Enlightenment model, while foundational, is no longer sufficient to address the complexities of the present. In the Indian context, this reorientation demands that social scientists not only critique inherited paradigms but also engage with non-Western philosophies, decolonial perspectives, and locally grounded forms of knowledge production. This transformation, as the text suggests, is essential for enabling social sciences to imagine alternative futures that are inclusive, contextual, and emancipatory.

In the above paragraphs, we have tried to trace three perspectives: (A) philosophical origins, (B) institutional trajectories, and (C) contemporary challenges to the normative and Forward-Looking Justification to explore the question: *Are social sciences in India still Enlightenment-centric?*—A transdisciplinary interrogation of the three key perspectives reveals how the historical foundation of social sciences, institutional developments in postcolonial India, and their present-day roles intersect to frame this critical inquiry. These perspectives offer insights into the Eurocentric genesis of social sciences, the expansion of India's social science infrastructure, and the

need to reorient the field to address contemporary ethical, technological, and social realities.

In this context, the three perspectives can be interpreted collectively as a transdisciplinary exploration of the historical, institutional, and philosophical foundations of social sciences, with a special focus on India's current position, particularly the question: Are social sciences in India still Enlightenment-centric? Here's how they link together:

Collectively, these three perspectives illustrate how the philosophical underpinnings, institutional structures, and normative aspirations of social sciences in India are entangled with the Enlightenment legacy. The intellectual architecture of the discipline, rooted in rationalist and universalist traditions, continues to shape its contours even as it seeks to respond to local and global challenges. In India, the proliferation of institutions has not necessarily translated into epistemic pluralism or methodological innovation, due in part to fragmented knowledge systems and limited cross-disciplinary engagement. The need of the hour, as suggested in the normative perspective, is a transdisciplinary rethinking of social science practice—one that is not merely critical of its Enlightenment heritage but also constructive in imagining alternative futures that are locally grounded and globally relevant.

Therefore, answering whether social sciences in India are still Enlightenment-centric involves more than a historical critique. It requires a holistic interrogation across three domains: the genealogy of social thought (philosophical and historical), the evolution and limitations of institutional practice, and the urgency of reimagining the field's future through contextually grounded, transdisciplinary approaches. Only by integrating these perspectives can Indian social sciences move beyond inherited paradigms and realize their transformative potential. Table 1 reflects how these three perspectives link together.

**Table 1: Synthesis of Philosophical, Institutional and Normative Perspectives**

| Aspect           | Philosophical-Historical Context                  | Institutional and Contemporary Practice in India | Normative and Forward-Looking Justification             |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| Historical roots | Enlightenment origins of social science           | Post-independence institutional growth           | Contemporary relevance & critique                       |
| Core concern     | Disciplinary foundations & Western legacy         | Institutional fragmentation in India             | Need to evolve beyond the Enlightenment                 |
| Implication      | Social sciences are shaped by Western rationalism | India mirrors Western models without integration | Urges transformation through transdisciplinary critique |

Together, the three perspectives suggest that the intellectual architecture of social sciences is deeply tied to Enlightenment thinking. In India, while institutions have proliferated, they may still operate within this inherited framework without enough internal critique or integration. There is a pressing need to transcend this legacy by incorporating transdisciplinary, context-sensitive, and future-oriented perspectives that reflect India's unique socio-political realities.

Hence, the interrogation: *Are social sciences in India still Enlightenment-centric?* —requires us to understand the genealogy of social thought, to analyze institutional structures and limitations, and to rethink the purpose and future directions of social science. This framing creates a powerful interpretive link across history, institutions, and contemporary critique.

In this context, "Are Social Sciences in India still Enlightenment-Centric? A Transdisciplinary Interrogation" is a rich and complex one.

It touches on the intellectual foundations of Indian academia, colonial legacies, and the ongoing transformation of epistemologies in a globalized world. Below is a structured response with critical reflection and interdisciplinary insight:

#### Conceptual Construction of Social Sciences

1. Social Sciences in India: Promoters of Unity and Diversity
2. Ideological Dilemmas: Encounter of Social Sciences with Democratic and Secular Order
3. Traditional Indian Knowledge System: Traditional- Modernity Debate
4. Shortcomings and Structural Challenges
5. Toward a Transdisciplinary Interrogation
6. Are Social Sciences in India still Scientific Temper: The Present Contexts
7. What Should Be Done? Toward Epistemic Plurality
8. Future Possibilities
9. Need and Imperative of Social Sciences
10. Conclusion

#### 1. Conceptual Construction of Social Sciences

This is imperative to understand the terms like enlightenment-centric, social sciences in India and Transdisciplinary Interrogation. These ideas were central to the formation of social sciences in India in shaping modern knowledge systems. Therefore, the question “Are Social Sciences in India still Enlightenment-Centric? A Transdisciplinary Interrogation” invites a critical examination of how Indian social sciences are structured epistemologically and whether they remain rooted in Enlightenment ideals — rationality, universalism, empiricism, secularism, and progress — inherited largely through colonial modernity. Here's an analysis, structured around key dimensions, using a transdisciplinary lens:

#### i. Enlightenment-centricity and its Legacy in Indian Social Science

The Enlightenment was an intellectual movement in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries that sought to improve society through fact-based reason and inquiry. The Enlightenment brought secular thought to Europe and reshaped the ways people understood issues such as liberty, equality, and individual rights. The origin of social sciences as a structured discipline is deeply rooted in the European Enlightenment (universalist epistemology), emphasizing rationality, objectivity, empirical observation (fact-finding, data-gathering), and scientific temper leading towards commitment to progress, socio-political reform and the belief in universal laws governing human behaviour (Outram, 2013). These epistemological foundations (often Eurocentric i.e., Linear models of progress and development, often Eurocentric.) heavily influenced colonial and postcolonial academic structures in India (Chakrabarty, 2000). With the importation of Western education models under British rule, social sciences were constructed around the idea of understanding society through positivist lenses, often excluding indigenous knowledge systems. These ideals underpinned the birth of modern disciplines such as sociology, political science, and economics. The social sciences, in turn, became mechanisms for organizing and managing populations within colonial and capitalist frameworks (Bhambra, 2007). In the Indian context, much of the social sciences was institutionalized knowledge production through surveys, censuses, and administrative ethnographies during and after colonial rule, heavily influenced by British liberalism, positivism, and functionalism (Cohn, 1996). Post-independence, Indian academia retained many of these epistemic structures, continuing to privilege Western thinkers like Durkheim, Marx, and Weber in curricula and methodologies.

The early Indian social scientists, such as D.P. Mukerji and Radhakamal Mukerjee, attempted to integrate Indian philosophical traditions into sociological inquiry (Singh, 2004). However, the overarching framework remained Eurocentric. The dominance of modernization theory in post-independence India reinforced the



Enlightenment-centric model, portraying traditional societies as static and in need of transformation through Western rationalism (Nandy, 1987). Sathyamurthy (1984) notes that Indian social scientists have indeed shown a commitment to intellectual rigour and socio-political goals, especially in trying to improve the lives of the disadvantaged. This reflects an enduring Enlightenment-inspired belief in rational analysis as a tool for social betterment.

## **ii. Evidence of Enlightenment-Centric Continuities**

### **a. Epistemic dependence in the context of Curriculum and Canonical Dominance**

The syllabi in sociology, political science, and economics of major Indian universities often feature Western canonical theorists (e.g., Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Locke, Rawls, Rousseau), with limited representation of indigenous or non-Western theorists (Nandy, 1983). This reflects an implicit belief in the superiority of Enlightenment rationalism, even in contexts where it may be epistemically inadequate. Indigenous concepts are often relegated to "case studies" rather than foundational theory. Theoretical models often prioritize methodological individualism, formal logic, and statistical empiricism.

### **b. Methodological Constraints**

There remains a heavy emphasis on quantitative and formal (structured) qualitative methods rooted in positivist traditions. Ethnographic, narrative, affective, or indigenous methodologies are often seen as secondary or less rigorous, despite their relevance in the Indian socio-cultural landscape (Deshpande, 2011). Hence, disciplinary boundaries persist, reducing opportunities for epistemic plurality.

### **c. Institutional and Structural Biases**

Academic institutions value positivism and empiricism. Academic funding and recognition often favour 'scientific' rigour over culturally prioritized measurable, embedded, quantifiable knowledge systems. This skews the production of knowledge toward what Santos (2014) calls the "epistemologies of the North,"—indexed journals, citation

metrics, and English-language publications marginalizing local languages and epistemes. Peer review standards still tend to privilege Western citation practices and metrics (e.g., Scopus, impact factor, etc.).

## **iii. Points of Disruption and Decentering**

Despite the inertia, several intellectual trends indicate challenges to enlightenment-centrism. This reflects contestations and emerging alternatives:

**a. Subaltern and Postcolonial Studies:** The Subaltern Studies collective, particularly scholars like Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty, Partha Chatterjee, and Gayatri Spivak, challenge the dominance of colonial historiography, i.e the universality of Enlightenment reason and advocate "provincializing Europe", a call for de-centring Western categories (Chakrabarty, 2000). Their work exposes the silences within Enlightenment-based history and emphasizes local agency. Hence, there's an effort to recover vernacular voices and epistemologies historically silenced.

**b. Dalit, Adivasi Epistemologies, and Feminist Interventions:** Dalit scholars like Kancha Ilaiah and G.N. Devy interrogate both Brahmanical and colonial and postcolonial epistemologies, advocating for knowledge rooted in lived experience (Guru, 2002). These voices critique Brahminical and colonial domination of knowledge. Adivasi scholars advocate for cosmopolitical worldview approaches, one that includes non-human agency and ecological interconnectedness, grounding knowledge in relations with land, spirit, and community (Bijoy, 2011). Feminist interventions increasingly question the Enlightenment's masculinist bias in concepts like autonomy, citizenship, rationality and propose embodied, relational ways of knowing (Rege, 1998). Critical geography, and cultural studies increasingly challenge disciplinary silos (storage).

**c. Transdisciplinary and Indigenous Approaches:** Transdisciplinary Interrogation goes beyond traditional disciplinary boundaries, integrating insights from philosophy, postcolonial theory,

history, cultural studies, and indigenous knowledge systems. Environmental humanities, STS (Science & Technology Studies), and Anthropology increasingly foreground (focus) plural ontologies and non-Western ways of knowing. Decolonial thought is emerging as a parallel stream, distinct from postcolonialism, drawing from Latin American, African, and indigenous traditions. Global discourses on decoloniality (e.g., Walter D. Mignolo, Anibal Quijano) are influencing Indian scholarship. There is growing interest in *Swaraj in Ideas* (from Gandhi), indigenous knowledge systems, and alternative modernities. Movements like Lokavidya and Jñana-Pravaha challenge formalized knowledge hierarchies and seek to decenter academic monopolies on knowledge by validating community wisdom, oral traditions, and spiritual knowledge. Integration of arts, oral histories, and performative traditions enriches knowledge production. Trans-disciplinary research—integrating natural sciences, humanities, and local epistemologies—offers a holistic mode of inquiry (Nicolescu, 2002).

## 2. Social Sciences in India: Promoters of Unity and Diversity

Despite their Enlightenment moorings, Indian social sciences have also functioned as mechanisms for nation-building and promoting pluralism. Institutions like the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the University Grants Commission (UGC) encouraged the study of caste, language, religion, and region — elements central to India's diversity. Textbooks and public discourse framed by social sciences helped cultivate a sense of national unity while recognizing India's composite culture. The framing of Indian identity through constitutional values like secularism and democracy owes much to social scientific engagement (Guha, 1997). However, critics argue that these engagements have sometimes abstracted away the everyday lived experiences of marginal groups, favouring elite perspectives (Guru, 2002).

## 3. Ideological Dilemmas: Encounter of Social Sciences with Democratic and Secular Order

A secularized worldview that sidelines indigenous cosmologies or religious epistemes. This reflects the compartmentalization of

knowledge into disciplines. Social sciences in India have struggled with their ideological commitments. On the one hand, they have supported secularism and democratic ideals; on the other, they have often remained silent or complicit during periods of political crisis (Bhargava, 1998). The Emergency (1975–1977) is one such period where mainstream academic voices were muted, revealing the limitations of academic freedom in politically charged contexts.

Moreover, the rise of majoritarian nationalism has posed significant dilemmas for social scientists. The increasing delegitimization of secular narratives and the privileging of religio-cultural majoritarianism challenge the very premise of neutrality and critical inquiry (Jodhka, 2012). These dilemmas call into question the ability of Indian social sciences to sustain their Enlightenment ideals in practice.

## 4. Traditional Indian Knowledge Systems: The Traditional-Modernity Debate

While Eurocentrism is a problem in Indian disciplines of knowledge today, a careful understanding of the methodological and conceptual issues involved in the diversification, interdisciplinarity<sup>2</sup> and the advancement of the Western systems of knowledge is required. Though there is a seeming illogic in the profusion of disciplines in the West today, it is marked by a heroic spirit for new experimentations, adventures and scientific advancement. True, its dynamic is often deleterious and fragmentary to the subject positions and cultural identity of Western humankind. Nonetheless, in the final tallying of the good and bad, the knowledge explosion only works to their overall advantage compared to the rest of the world.

The encounter between traditional Indian knowledge systems (IKS) and modern social sciences remains fraught with tension. While postcolonial theorists and historians have pointed to the need for decolonizing knowledge (Seth, 2007), mainstream academia often marginalizes IKS as non-scientific or pre-modern. The post-liberalization period in India (generally noted as the period since 1991) has seen marked shifts in the focus of the country's social science research. This inference and the following analysis are based

on a study of India's leading social science journals and books of recent times, as well as on the debates between social scientists in the weekly journal *Economic and Political Weekly*, which is widely considered a leading national social science journal (Kalpagam, 2010: 226-227). The critique of technological education (IITs) having grown too rapidly or being misaligned with India's developmental realities raises concerns of misapplied Enlightenment rationality. It reflects an Enlightenment faith in progress through elite, technical education. But also, a lack of contextualization—what transdisciplinary approaches would call a failure to integrate local, socio-political and economic dimensions. This is a problem of technocratic expansion and the crisis of applicability of technological education.

Efforts to include Ayurveda, oral histories, and indigenous philosophies into social science curricula remain sporadic and tokenistic. The dichotomy between tradition and modernity — itself a colonial construct — continues to shape this debate, often reinforcing the hegemony of Western epistemologies (Visvanathan, 1998). However, newer movements, particularly within environmental sociology, anthropology, and gender studies, have begun to adopt more inclusive and dialogic approaches that value localized and traditional knowledge as legitimate epistemic resources. This reveals the tension between universalist Enlightenment models and localized developmental needs — a key issue in postcolonial and transdisciplinary critiques.

### 5. Shortcomings and Structural Challenges

Despite these critical interventions, Enlightenment-centrism persists due to several factors:

**Lack of Institutional Support and crisis of institutional confidence:** Indigenous and transdisciplinary research often lacks formal funding or recognition. The observation that India's political system is undergoing a "crisis of confidence" mirrors critiques those modern institutions—often modelled on Enlightenment-era ideas of governance and bureaucracy—are increasingly seen as rigid, hierarchical, and unresponsive. From a transdisciplinary standpoint,

this challenges the Enlightenment's assumption that rational institutions ensure social order. By suggesting that context-sensitive, pluralistic and adaptive models may now be more appropriate.

**Language Hegemony and Accessibility:** English continues to dominate academic discourse, marginalizing knowledge produced in local (regional) languages, reinforcing epistemic colonization. Due to epistemic inertia, the deep-rooted belief in Western modernity as a universal template continues to shape both pedagogy and policy. Consequently, some scholars adopt critical-theoretical frameworks, and institutional practices often remain positivist. This creates a gap between academic discourse and vernacular experiences. Work rooted in indigenous frameworks often lacks visibility in mainstream academic publishing. Hence, local knowledge often lacks formal academic recognition. Because of disciplinary boundaries, rigid academic silos prevent integrative approaches and limit methodological innovation.

### 6. Toward a Transdisciplinary Interrogation

A transdisciplinary approach bridges the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences with non-academic knowledge systems (folk, spiritual, ecological). This moves beyond critique to co-construct epistemologies with communities and seeks methodological pluralism, allowing intuition, storytelling, ritual, and praxis to coexist with analysis. Sathyamurthy (1984) recognizes a vanguard of social scientists who are experimenting with new scenarios of change, aware of the social and economic contradictions and prepared to engage with uncertainty, complexity, and non-linear development. This shift signals a move beyond the Enlightenment paradigm, toward transdisciplinary engagement:

- Blending normative concerns with empirical research
- Incorporating lived realities and multiple knowledges
- Addressing power dynamics and systemic tensions
- Emergence of a Vanguard: Toward Trans-disciplinarity

## 7. Are Social Sciences in India Still Scientific Temper: The Present Contexts

This can be analyzed in historical context as well as post-Independence in the present context. In the historical context, the colonial legacy continues as British colonialism imposed Western models of knowledge, marginalizing indigenous epistemologies. And Social sciences were used to classify, control, and manage the colonized population (e.g., Census, ethnographic studies). In Post-Independence India, Nehruvian India embraced modernity and rationalism, promoting social sciences as tools of nation-building. Scientific temper, as advocated by Nehru and enshrined in Article 51A(h) of the Indian Constitution, implies rational thinking and critical inquiry. While social sciences in India initially embraced this vision, the current socio-political climate reveals a contested terrain. Yet, these sciences largely retained Western frameworks, albeit adapted to the Indian context.

However, there is a visible shift towards ideological rigidity, bureaucratic interference, and the marginalization of dissenting voices in academic institutions (Menon, 2015). The questioning of data integrity, suppression of critical research, and targeting of scholars underlines a broader crisis of scientific temper in the social sciences.

At the same time, digital humanities, critical race theory, intersectional feminism, and decolonial studies are gaining traction, suggesting a diversification of methodological and epistemological frameworks. These developments challenge the monopoly of Enlightenment rationality and call for more pluralistic and context-sensitive approaches.

## 8. What Should Be Done? Toward Epistemic Plurality

In Leeds School of Social Science, John Craig (2021) exemplified how social science teaching, research and enterprise contribute to our community. We believe that improving our understanding of how individuals and communities behave is an important part of tackling key social challenges and achieving goals such as greater sustainability, inclusive growth and a fairer society. Therefore, to move beyond Enlightenment-centrism, Indian social sciences must:

- i. **Revise Curricula:** Include Non-Western, Dalit, Adivasi, and feminist thinkers alongside canonical Western texts.
- ii. **Promote Language Diversity:** Support academic publishing and teaching in regional languages.
- iii. **Encourage Trans disciplinarity:** Create institutional frameworks for research that transcends disciplinary silos.
- iv. **Democratize Knowledge Production:** Involve communities as co-producers of knowledge, not merely as subjects.
- v. **Rethink Metrics:** Develop new forms of academic evaluation that value context-specific, community-rooted scholarship.

## 9. Future Possibilities

Social science can open up debate and give us a say in shaping our collective future. The social sciences developed as a field of study during the nineteenth century. Social science helped people understand the consequences and applications of the new technologies of the age, such as steam power. The growth of railways and factories not only transformed the economy and the world of work but also changed forever the way people organized their family lives and leisure. Today, nanotechnology and advances in medical research will have a significant impact on the way we live. They present us with a bewildering range of ethical, legal and social issues. But it isn't enough to rely on the scientists. We also need social scientists to analyze and critique what's going on. That way we will make informed choices that shape the future.

The future of social sciences in India lies in negotiating a fine balance between universalism and contextual specificity. A transdisciplinary, reflexive, and decolonized framework is essential for addressing the complexities of Indian society. This means recognizing and integrating local knowledge systems, encouraging epistemic diversity, and resisting the instrumentalization of academic work for political ends.

Though, Indian social sciences remain partly Enlightenment-centric, they are contested terrains. While institutional inertia preserves



Enlightenment legacies, a growing corpus of critical, indigenous, and transdisciplinary scholarship is actively reconfiguring the epistemic core. The future lies not in rejecting Enlightenment altogether, but in situating it among many knowledge traditions, embracing plurality without relativism. The evolution of Indian social sciences must be dialogic, engaging with both Enlightenment values and indigenous epistemologies. This transdisciplinary interrogation can rejuvenate the discipline, making it more inclusive, critical, and socially relevant in the 21st century.

Social science is not just important for the future but for what's happening now. A range of social scientists – not just economists but also psychologists, sociologists, and political scientists, for example - can help us understand the economic crisis and weigh up decisions we make for ourselves, and those which governments make on our behalf. Without this kind of analysis, we may feel like pawns in a global game of chess. With the knowledge and understanding that social science offers us, we will feel empowered to act for ourselves and to influence decisions being made on our behalf.

### 10. Need and Imperative of Social Sciences

In Leeds School of Social Science, John Craig (2021) exemplified how social science teaching, research and enterprise contribute to our community. We believe that improving our understanding of how individuals and communities behave is an important part of tackling key social challenges and achieving goals such as greater sustainability, inclusive growth and a fairer society. Audrey Osler (2012) suggests 10 reasons why you need social science:

1. Social scientists help us imagine alternative
2. Social science can help us make sense of our finances.
3. Social scientists contribute to our health and well-being.
4. Social science might save your life.
5. Social science can make your neighbourhood safer.
6. We need social scientists as public intellectuals.

7. Social science can improve our children's lives and education.
8. Social science can change the world for the better.
9. Social science can broaden your horizons.
10. We need social science to guarantee our democracy.

For debates about feminism, peace, ecology, social movements, and much more, social science offers each of us new perspectives and new ways of understanding. Whether your idea of relaxation is visiting a museum, watching soaps, or chatting online, social science encourages a fresh look at our everyday activities and culture. From sports sociologists to public health experts, from those interpreting medical statistics to those evaluating policies for our care in old age, social scientists are working hard to make sure that our health, leisure and social care services work to best effect. Conversely, social scientists what needs to be done to create a safer environment in the factory for employment, or measures to reduce crime in society. Similarly, those working in development studies are then able to support women's ability to benefit by looking for creative solutions to such problems. We just need to listen to children, provide structured opportunities for them to give their views, and prepare adults to really listen. For this, social science can improve our children's lives and education by understanding Children's perspectives (Osler, 2012).

Above all, yet in our fast-changing world, there is a place for the social scientist as a public intellectual. In a knowledge-based world, we need people who can integrate a variety of different types of knowledge, and that come from different intellectual roots and from a range of institutions, to work together. We can generally agree that the world needs to be a safer place where all people can enjoy basic dignity and human rights. This is the case even when we can't always agree on what we should do to make this happen.

There is a need for social scientists related to public social science. Nagla (2024) narrates the need for social science in an interview taken by Nagaraju Gundemeda about sociology as one of the social sciences as follows:

“Sociology helps us to imagine alternative futures that can change the world for the better. Sociology provides an illuminating look at topics of concern to everyone at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in times of globalization and internationalization. In his book *Sociology of Giving*, Helmuth Berking questions the view that our societies are dominated by individualism and explores the contemporary interplay between self-interest and the common good. In my view, the sociology of giving helps people to understand the consequences and application of the new technologies of the age, such as Digital Innovation, Information Technology (IT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), etc. Overall, sociology offers multiple perspectives on society, informs social policy and supports us in holding our politicians and our media to account. This depends upon the concentrated and committed efforts of sociologists in doing sociology and practicing sociology, expanding the disciplinary boundaries of sociology to the public to engage with non-academic audiences. In his book *Public Sociology*, Michael Burawoy argued that sociology should speak beyond the university, engaging with social movements and deepening an understanding of the historical and social context in which they exist. Therefore, sociology has a very bright future in India and elsewhere, looking to the relevance and practical utility of the discipline. Hence, sociology does matter to move forward” (Nagla, 2024:298).

Social scientists working in interdisciplinary teams have made their mark in the area of human welfare and development. They are concerned with the social and economic advancement of humanity at large. They are influencing the work of strategists, planners, teachers and programme officers in developing and growing economies, like India, to influence development so that it impacts the lives of the poorest members of society. For example, social scientists from the Delhi School of Economics are cooperating with colleagues at SOAS, University of London, to explore the impact of legislation in India to guarantee minimum wages for rural unskilled manual labourers on the lives of women. Hence, social science offers multiple perspectives on society, informs social policy and supports us in holding our

politicians and our media to account. Just think what might happen without it!

### Conclusion

This paper interrogates whether Social Sciences in India remain influenced by Enlightenment ideals. It examines the conceptual origins rooted in Western rationalism, the discipline’s role in promoting unity and diversity, and ideological dilemmas in confronting secularism and democracy. It also assesses the tension between traditional knowledge systems and modern epistemologies and questions the relevance of scientific temper in the current context. The conclusion advocates for a transdisciplinary, decolonized approach to make social sciences more inclusive and contextually relevant in India.

Indian social sciences, though still partially entrenched in Enlightenment-centric paradigms, are undergoing critical transformation. Transdisciplinary and decolonial approaches provide avenues for reimagining social science in more inclusive, plural, and context-sensitive ways. The task is not to reject Enlightenment entirely but to situate it among many ways of knowing, fostering dialogue between traditions rather than domination. Hence, India’s social sciences are in transition, not fully Enlightenment-centric, but not fully decolonized either. This reflects three things:

**Persistence:** Eurocentric frameworks still dominate institutional structures and mainstream academic output.

**Resistance:** Transdisciplinary and subaltern voices are gaining ground, contesting Enlightenment hegemony.

**Possibility:** There is potential for epistemic justice through a conscious and plural rethinking of knowledge.

### Notes

1. I am thankful to Prof. Rajiv Gupta, who has given me this idea to write on this topic.

2. In interdisciplinary education, you examine complex issues such as climate change, globalization, or diversity from different approaches and disciplines. The goal is to get closer to a solution, or to use the insights gained for your research or educational practice. There are different forms of interdisciplinarity: multi-disciplinarity, interdisciplinarity and trans-disciplinarity. How they differ from one another is given below.

i. Multidisciplinary applies to studying a subject from multiple different disciplines at the same time. Perspectives from the different disciplines create a broader understanding of a subject. Consider, for instance, how you could interpret the behaviour of people from the viewpoint of psychology, biology, and economics. You cross the boundaries of the disciplines, but the disciplines keep their own 'voice'. The goal is not to come to an integration of insights. In higher education, for example, you see guest lectures from different disciplines coming to share their knowledge on a particular topic, or groups of students doing literature research on different perspectives on a particular question.

ii. In interdisciplinary thinking and working, you take an extra step: you try to integrate perspectives or insights from different perspectives through interaction, to better understand a complex phenomenon. Integration can take place, for instance, at the level of methods, tools, concepts, theories, or insights. In this, you can do more together than alone ('it goes beyond a simple sum of its parts'). So, it helps if students in higher education represent different perspectives. An important point of attention here is for lecturers to develop the course with lecturers from other disciplines, and specifically to think about training students in integration techniques.

iii. Trans-disciplinarity involves not only students or academics, but also other (societal) partners in researching a complex question. Think, for example, of co-creation between students and municipalities, companies, or other societal organizations. It is therefore about bringing together knowledge from science and practice, for example, to arrive at a certain integrative approach or

solution that also has an impact on society (Huutoniemi et al. 2001, 79-88; Klein, 2010, 15-30).

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**B K Nagla** is the former Professor of Sociology at M.D. University, Rohtak. He has researched at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi and has taught at M.S University, Baroda and the National Institute of Criminology and Forensic Science, New Delhi. Post-retirement, he continued his academic journey as a Professor on Babu Jagjivan Ram Chair at Banaras Hindu University. For his significant contributions to sociology and criminology, he received the **ISC-Fellow Award** and **ISS-Lifetime Achievement Award**. He was also the editor of ISS Hindi Journal *Bhartiya Samajshastra Sameeksha*.

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**Email: bnagla@yahoo.com**

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