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Indigenization and the Decolonization of Social Sciences: Normative Visions and Structural Pathways

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Abstract: *Indigenization in the social sciences has emerged as a critical response to epistemic dependency and the dominance of Western frameworks in formerly colonized and peripheral societies. In the Indian context, it seeks to counter Eurocentric dominance by fostering theories and methods rooted in local histories, cultures, and lived experiences. This paper examines the rationale for indigenization, distinguishes it from decolonization, and explores strategies for its pursuit amid globalisation. Drawing on seminal contributions by Yogesh Atal, Krishna Kumar, Syed H. Alatas, Syed F. Alatas, Oommen, A. K. Saran, and others, it argues for a pluralistic and flexible indigenous sociology that enriches global discourse without lapsing into parochialism. Atal underscores the normative dimensions of indigenization—self-awareness, alternative perspectives, cultural specificity, and resistance to both false universalism and false nationalism—while Kumar complements this vision with an analytic typology of structural, substantive, and theoretic forms that reshape institutions, research agendas, and conceptual frameworks. Together, these perspectives reveal indigenization as both an intellectual project and a practical agenda: liberating scholarships from borrowed consciousness while building institutional capacities and locally grounded theories.*

Situated within broader debates on decolonization of knowledge and epistemic autonomy, indigenization advances knowledge pluralism by positioning social science as simultaneously context-sensitive and globally resonant, contributing to nation-building while expanding the horizons of international dialogue.

Keywords: Indigenization of social sciences; Decolonization of knowledge; Epistemic autonomy; Context-sensitive methodologies; Knowledge pluralism; Structural Pathways; Normative Vision

Introduction

The indigenization of sociology in India represents a critical postcolonial response to the Eurocentric dominance embedded in Western social theories, which often impose universal frameworks ill-suited to non-western contexts. This paper delves into the historical and intellectual rationale for indigenization, tracing its roots to colonial resistance and post-independence nationalist projects aimed at liberating knowledge production from hegemonic influences. Indigenization differs from decolonization; while the latter focuses on purging colonial residues, cultures, and experiences to generate contextually relevant theories and methodologies, indigenization seeks to foster theories and methods rooted in local histories, cultures, and lived experiences to enrich global discourse.

The paper explores practical strategies, including national language instruction, insider-led research, priority-setting for local issues, and theoretical reorientation, as outlined by Yogesh Atal, A.K. Saran's critiques of Western paradigms such as Parson's functionalism and Marxism which further propel this shift toward holistic, traditional knowledge integration. Ultimately, the analysis argues for a pluralistic, flexible indigenous sociology that enriches global discourse. By balancing universal aspirations with cultural specificity, it avoids parochialism while addressing globalization's challenges, ensuring disciplinary integrity and scientific vitality.

Indigenization in the Social Sciences: A Basic Idea

Indigenization in the social sciences refers to the efforts of scholars in formerly colonized or peripheral societies to develop theories, methods, and pedagogical practices rooted in their own historical and cultural contexts, rather than relying uncritically on Western inputs. This intellectual project is closely tied to broader debates on autonomy, national development, and the decolonization of knowledge. Conceptually, indigenization signifies an attempt to broaden the academy's historically narrow understanding of knowledge by integrating Indigenous perspectives in ways that are not merely additive but fundamentally transformative (Kuokkanen, 2008, as cited in Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p. 2). Academic indigenization can be understood through three distinct yet interrelated visions—Indigenous inclusion, reconciliation, and decolonial indigeneity—which together constitute a conceptual spectrum rather than mutually exclusive positions (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). These debates resonate with parallel projects such as localization in Asian social sciences (Atal, 1981), vernacularisation in feminist legal scholarship (Merry, 2006), and decolonial epistemologies in Latin American thought (Mignolo, 2009), all of which challenge the dominance of Eurocentric paradigms by foregrounding regionally grounded knowledge systems.

The Indian experience offers a diverse scholarly landscape that maps onto the three visions of indigenization identified in Canadian scholarship. The inclusion model finds a parallel in Krishna Kumar's focus on structural and substantive capacity-building within existing institutions. The reconciliation vision is echoed in the reflexive, synthetic approaches of T.K. Oommen and Yogendra Singh, who seek a balance between global theory and local relevance. Finally, the radical vision of decolonial indigeneity is most clearly reflected in the work of A.K. Saran and Yogesh Atal, whose rejection of 'borrowed consciousness' and Western epistemological hegemony demand a fundamental restructuring of the academy toward epistemic sovereignty. Collectively these strands underline that indigenization is not a singular endpoint but part of a wider intellectual movement toward pluralizing the academy and reconfiguring the politics of knowledge production.

The conceptual landscape of indigenization is characterized by ongoing tensions between reformist strategies and transformative change. While inclusion emphasizes the incorporation of Indigenous students, faculty, and content into existing institutional structures, it often risks reproducing the academy's dominant epistemologies by treating Indigenous knowledge as supplementary rather than foundational. Reconciliation, positioned as a middle ground, seeks to repair historical relationships between Indigenous peoples and universities, yet it can be critiqued for privileging symbolic gestures over structural change. In contrast, decolonial indigeneity advances a more radical vision, demanding a reconfiguration of the academy itself by centering Indigenous epistemologies and governance systems. This tension between reformist approaches (inclusion and reconciliation) and transformative ones (decolonial indigeneity) highlights the contested nature of indigenization: whether it is to be understood as a project of adaptation within existing frameworks or as a fundamental restructuring of knowledge production and institutional authority (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Such debates mirror broader struggles in global contexts, where efforts to indigenize or decolonize social sciences confront the challenge of balancing pragmatic reforms with epistemic sovereignty.

Across Asia and other regions, native scholars have increasingly questioned the "relevance" of Western theories and research techniques for understanding their own societies. They argue for the use of "native categories of thought" and context-sensitive methodologies. In this sense, indigenization seeks to overcome what has been described as a "captivity of the mind", where local realities are forced into externally generated conceptual frames. The emphasis and terminology vary across countries, with parallel movements such as "Canadization" in Canada, "Koreanization" in Korea, and "Indianization" in India-- all pointing to the need for locally grounded social science. In contexts where the social sciences are still emerging, indigenization may simply involve introducing and legitimizing these disciplines so that local scholarship can flourish and contribute meaningfully to nation-building.

Indigenization and Indian Sociological Debates: Historical Development and Concern

The question of indigenization has occupied a central position in critical debates within the social sciences since the late 1770s, particularly in national and international academic forums (Atal, 1981). Early interventions by scholars from the Global South challenged the uncritical transplantation of Western social science frameworks, arguing that such practices produced epistemic dependence and reinforced what Alatas (1972, 2006) as the condition of "captive mind". Theories rooted in Western socio-historical contexts are often universalized and applied to non-Western societies without contextual grounding (Hountondji, 1997). Subsequently several Western scholars also began to question the hegemony of Eurocentric knowledge systems and advocated epistemological pluralism and the recognition of diverse intellectual traditions (Connell, 2007; Santos, 2014). In Asia, these concerns are articulated sharply at the 1973 Asian Conference on Teaching and Research in Social Sciences held in Shimla, which called for greater attention to regional perspectives and problems. Indigenization was not framed as isolationism but balance participation in a universal social science with stronger roots in specific cultural and historical contexts.

The discourse on indigenization revolves around a tension between two simultaneous concerns: diffusion of a "Universal" social science culture and the desire to anchor knowledge in diverse cultural settings. Proponents generally prefer the term "indigenization" over "endogenous development" because it underscores this effort to negotiate between global circulation of ideas and local rootedness. Debates on the indigenization of sociology in India center on decolonizing knowledge production from western hegemony while integrating local epistemologies. Scholars argue for frameworks rooted in Indian cultural realities, such as sacred sociology, and subaltern perspectives, amid globalization pressures. These discussions evolved from postcolonial critiques to calls for epistemic justice. Critics have noted that calls for indigenization sometimes slide into romanticization of tradition or into nationalist self-congratulation, turning legitimate demands for intellectual autonomy

into “national narcissism”. Others point out that the origins, motivations, and meanings of indigenization are complex, ranging from opposition to “academic colonialism” and foreign dominance in faculty and curricula to debates over the applicability of Western methods.

Within the Indian context, concerns regarding indigenization predate and parallel these global critiques. Indian Sociologists have critiqued colonial knowledge systems for imposing Eurocentric paradigms that misrepresented Indian society, perpetuated hegemony, and marginalized indigenous traditions. Key figures like A. K. Saran (1958), D.P. Mukerji (1958), G.S. Ghurye (1964), and Yogendra Singh (1973) challenged Western dominance by advocating contextual theories rooted in local realities. Indian sociologists have long grappled with the problem of developing conceptual frameworks sensitive to India’s unique social realities, particularly in relation to caste, kinship, village studies, and processes of social change. Early efforts by scholars such as Srinivas (1952, 1966) emphasized the need for empirical grounding and the use of indigenous concepts- most notably through notions such as *Sanskritization* and *dominant Caste* – to capture the dynamics of Indian society. D. P. Mukerji (1958) highlighted how colonialism disrupted traditional structures, causing cultural alienation and economic exploitation. He criticized the nationalist movement of uncritically borrowing western ideas, which rendered Indian thought futile and distanced intellectuals from the masses. Desai (1959) highlighted the limitations of applying Western evolutionary and functionalist models to Indian social formations, advocating instead a historically informed and materially grounded sociology. G. S. Ghurye’s *Indological Approach*, which drew extensively upon Sanskritic texts and India’s civilizational history, represented an early and significant attempt to indigenize sociology by grounding sociological analysis in indigenous cultural and historical contexts (Ghurye, 1964; Singh, 1986). G. S. Ghurye blamed British policies for deepening religious divisions through communal strategies post-1957, using separate electorates to prevent unity against colonial rule. Critic note his textual reliance overlooked colonialism’s empirical impacts and caste oppression. Yogendra Singh

(1973) identified a “cognitive hiatus” between Western theories and Indian realities, urging methodological indigenization to address cultural contradictions like globalization’s erasure of indigenous practices. He faulted early sociologists for Eurocentric misrepresentation.

The debate was further enriched by scholars such as Oommen (1988, 2001), who critically examined the challenges of theory-building in Indian sociology and cautioned against both uncritical imitation of Western paradigms and romanticized notions of cultural essentialism. Oommen argued for a contextual and reflexive sociology that balanced universal theoretical concerns with empirical specificity. More recently, scholars have revisited the indigenization discourse by foregrounding issues of power, colonial knowledge production, and epistemic hierarchies, particularly in relation to caste, gender and subaltern experiences (Guru, 2002; Patel, 2011). These interventions have reinforced the argument that indigenization is not merely a methodological concern, but an epistemological and political project aimed at democratizing knowledge production in Indian Sociology.

Collectively these India sociological debates on indigenization resonate strongly with broader Global South critiques of epistemic dominance, while also contributing distinct theoretical and empirical insights rooted in India’s complex social structure. The ongoing challenge remains to develop a sociology that is simultaneously locally grounded and globally engaged, avoiding both epistemic dependence and parochialism.

Theoretical Frameworks: Normative Visions and Structural Pathways

The project of indigenizing the social sciences in India is anchored in a dual movement: a normative reorientation of the intellectual spirit and a structural reconfiguration of the academic infrastructure. This has been shaped by a diverse set of scholars who emphasize both normative imperatives and structural strategies. By synthesizing the contributions of key scholars, this section establishes a framework that distinguishes between the ethical imperatives of knowledge production and the practical mechanisms of its institutionalization.

The Normative Vision: Epistemic Sovereignty and Self Awareness

The normative foundation of indigenization, as articulated by Yogesh Atal and A. K. Saran, frames the movement as an ethical and intellectual quest for self-awareness.

Yogesh Atal (1981) provides one of the most influential normative formulations, framing indigenization as a quest for self-awareness that rejects borrowed consciousness. His vision is defined by four pillars: the cultivation of alternative perspectives, an insistence on historical and cultural specificity, a resistance to false universalism, and a caution against false nationalism. For Atal, indigenization is an intellectual corrective aimed at liberating scholarship from epistemic dependency.

A. K. Saran (1958) extends this normative grounding through a philosophical critique of Western epistemologies. He argues that Western sociological theories are often irrelevant to Indian society because they fail to capture its spiritual cultural, and social interconnections. He categorized Indian sociology into rejectors of Western modernity, synthesizers, and rationalistic positivists, critiquing Western relevance. Saran advocated for a “sacred sociology” and the integration of traditional knowledge systems, viewing the recovery of indigenous categories of thought as a moral necessity rather than just a methodological choice.

The Structural Pathways: Institutional Capacity and methodological Reflexivity

While the normative vision defines the *why* of indigenization, Krishna Kumar (1979) and T. K. Oommen provide the analytic categories and practical strategies—the *how*—needed to reshape the discipline. Krishna Kumar offers a vital analytic typology that categorizes indigenization into three distinct levels:

- Structural Indigenization: The development of institutional capabilities, including the expansion of indigenous curricula and local research funding.

- Substantive Indigenization: A focus on national content and research agendas that prioritize local social realities over Western case studies.
- Theoretic Indigenization: The construction of conceptual frameworks and methodologies rooted in local worldviews and “native categories of thought”.

T. K. Oommen: Oommen complements this by focusing on the institutional and reflexive dimensions of sociology. He cautions against “cultural essentialism” and the romanticization of tradition, instead advocating for a contextual sociology that balances universal theoretical concerns with empirical specificity. His work emphasizes that indigenization must be a “reflexive project” that democratizes knowledge production while remaining globally engaged.

Current Debates on Indigenization

Current debates question whether Indian sociology should reject Western theories outright or synthesize them with indigenous concept like *Philosophia Perennis* and traditional holistic views. Critics like A. K. Saran highlighted Western paradigms incompatibility with India’s spiritual-cultural interconnections, advocating endogenous alternatives over universalism. Recent voices emphasize distinguishing indigenization-contextual adaptation from full decolonization, avoiding parochialism.

Yogesh Atal (1981) and Krishna Kumar (1979) offer complementary frameworks for understanding indigenization in the social sciences. Atal emphasizes its normative and intellectual dimensions, highlighting the quest for self-awareness, the cultivation of alternative perspectives, the insistence on historical and cultural specificity, and the rejection of both false universalism and false nationalism. His formulation underscores indigenization as a corrective to epistemic dependency and as a pathway toward more inclusive, reflexive scholarship.

Kumar, by contrast, provides an analytic typology that distinguished between structural (institutional capabilities), substantive (national

content focus), and theoretic indigenization (indigenous frameworks). He draws attention to the institutional capacities required for knowledge production, the substantive orientation of research toward national contexts, and the construction of theoretical frameworks rooted in local worldviews.

Collectively, Atal's normative vision and Kumar's analytic categories reveal indigenization as both an intellectual project and a practical agenda—reshaping the infrastructure of knowledge production while reorienting the questions, data, and theories that define social science practice. Situated within broader debates on decolonization and intellectual autonomy, these perspectives converge on the imperative of liberating scholarship from epistemic dependency and fostering knowledge systems that are locally grounded and globally resonant.

Oommen similarly emphasizes the institutional dimensions of sociology, drawing attention to the role of organizations and policy relevance in shaping indigenous knowledge systems. Finally, it can be held that, these contributions reveal indigenization as both a normative vision (Atal, Saran) and structural project (Kumar, Oommen), situated within broader debates on decolonization of knowledge, epistemic autonomy and knowledge pluralism.

Alongside these normative perspectives, structural approaches to indigenization are advanced by scholars like Kumar and Oommen. These contributions focus on the practical challenges of theory-building in Indian sociology, cautioning against both uncritical imitation of Western paradigms and romanticized notions of cultural essentialism. Such structural projects emphasize the need for contextual and reflexive sociology that balances universal theoretical concerns with empirical specificity and local relevance.

Collectively, these contributions reveal indigenization as both a normative vision and a structural project, situated within broader debates on the decolonization of knowledge, epistemic autonomy, and pluralism. The ongoing engagement with indigenization highlights the importance of developing scholarship that is locally anchored while remaining globally resonant, reflecting the complexities of Indian

society and its place within the wider landscape of sociological thought.

At the comparative level, early interventions by scholars from the Global South challenged the uncritical transplantation of Western social science frameworks, arguing that such practices produced epistemic dependence and reinforced what Alatas (1972, 2006) critiqued “intellectual imperialism” and described as the persistence of the “captive mind”, calling for autonomous knowledge system across Asia. Syed F. Alatas develops this vision further through the idea of “autonomous sociology”, advocating for pluralism in which indigenous categories enrich global discourse rather than retreat into parochialism.

The combined interventions of Atal, Kumar, Saran, Oommen, and the Alatas reveal indigenization as a multidimensional project, simultaneously normative in aspiration, structural in orientation, and comparative in scope. The frameworks articulated by these scholars provide a rich foundation for analyzing the trajectory of indigenization in India's social sciences. Atal and Saran emphasize the ethical and intellectual imperatives of self-awareness, cultural specificity, and resistance to epistemic dependency, while Kumar and Oommen highlight the institutional and analytic pathways through which indigenous knowledge systems can be consolidated. Atal's normative emphasis on self-awareness and cultural specificity resonates strongly in a context where Eurocentric categories have long shaped both pedagogy and research agendas. Kumar's typology further clarifies how indigenization must operate simultaneously at structural, substantive, and theoretical levels, underscoring the need for institutional capacity building alongside intellectual autonomy. Saran and Oommen add depth by highlighting the philosophical and organizational imperatives of indigenization, while Alatas situates these debates within a global frame, emphasizing the need to overcome intellectual imperialism and to cultivate autonomous sociologies that enrich rather than isolate themselves from international discourse.

This convergence demonstrates that indigenization is not a singular or parochial enterprise but a pluralistic and dynamic process—one that liberates scholarship from borrowed consciousness, builds infrastructures for knowledge production, and advances theories rooted in local experiences while remaining globally resonant. Such a synthesis provides the foundation for examining how indigenization intersects with decolonization, nation building, and the pursuit of epistemic autonomy in contemporary social science.

In India, these frameworks converge on the challenge of reconciling indigenous priorities with the pressures of globalization. The expansion of transnational academic networks, the dominance of English language scholarship, and the circulation of Western theories create both opportunities and constraints. Indigenization must therefore be understood not as isolationism but as a dynamic negotiation—seeking to reclaim epistemic autonomy while engaging critically with global currents. This dual orientation positions indigenization as a strategy for nation building, enabling social science to address local problems through context sensitive methodologies while contributing to knowledge pluralism at the international level.

Indigenization: Major Scholarly Positions

Perspectives	Key Proponents	Main Argument
Synthesis with West	Yogendra Singh; S.C. Dube	Combining universal theoretical insights with local cultural specificities
Traditional Knowledge Revival	A. K. Saran	Creating native concepts and meta-theories; Sacred sociology and perennial wisdom against modernist fragmentation
Decolonial Shift	Syed Farid Alatas	Epistemic justice through subaltern and

		indigenous epistemologies
Perspective from Below	Oommen, Gopal Guru	Critiquing caste, gender hierarchies in knowledge production.

Comparative Strategies: Indigenization in India and Other Asian Contexts

Indigenization of social sciences has unfolded differently across Asia, reflecting diverse historical, cultural and political contexts. While India grapples with linguistic plurality, entrenched hierarchies and democratic academic traditions, countries such as China, Japan and Indonesia. Have pursued distinct pathways shaped by state ideology, cultural reinterpretation, or vernacular recovery. A comparative lens highlights both shared struggles against epistemic dependence and divergent strategies of adaptation. Situating India within this broader Asian landscape underscores the dual imperatives of local relevance and global resonance in knowledge Production.

India

India's indigenization strategies emphasize multilingual pedagogy, insider research, and theoretical reorientation. The challenges of linguistic diversity, caste and gender hierarchies., and balancing national relevance with global participation make the Indian case particularly complex. Scholars such as Atal (1981), Oommen (2007), Sharma (2016), Saran (1981) highlight the need for the reflexive methodologies and inclusive pedagogy that democratize knowledge while resisting epistemic dependence.

China

China's indigenization has historically been tied to state-led projects of nation building, and ideological consolidation. The promotion of Mandarin as the national language, and the integration of Marxist frameworks into social sciences reflect a strong emphasis on political relevance. While insider research is encouraged, state control often

shapes the boundaries of academic freedom unlike India's pluralistic linguistic and cultural challenges, China's indigenization has been more centralised with theoretical reorientation, framed through the lens of Sinicization of knowledge (Shen, W. 2025; Wang, N. 2025; Cheng, F. 2021; Zhang, L. 2016).

Japan

Japan's trajectory differs in that it has long sought to balance Western models with indigenous traditions. Early modernization involved adopting Western social science frameworks, but scholars later emphasized the need to reinterpret them through Japanese cultural categories. Theoretical reorientation has been gradual, with emphasis on blending imported methodologies with Indigenous concepts such as *ie* (family system) and *amae* (dependence). Compared to India, Japan's linguistic homogeneity simplified the national language question, but the challenge lay in negotiating cultural specificity within global academic networks (Barshay, A. 2008).

Indonesia

Indonesia's Indigenization efforts, influenced by Alatas's critique of the "captive mind", have focused on recovering indigenous categories and oral traditions while resisting Eurocentric dominance. The use of Bahasa Indonesia as a national language facilitated accessibility. But regional diversity still poses challenges. Insider research has been central, with scholars emphasizing the importance of local perspectives in studying development, religion and community life. Compared to India, Indonesia's indigenization has been less constrained by extreme linguistic plurality but similarly shaped by postcolonial concerns of autonomy and relevance.

Strategies of Indigenization in India, China, Japan & Indonesia: Comparative Insights

Across diverse national contexts, the indigenization of social sciences reveals distinct trajectories shaped by language, insider research, relevance, and theoretical reorientation.

Language: India and Indonesia grapple with multilingualism, while China and Japan benefit from linguistic centralization.

Insider Research: All contexts emphasize insider perspectives, but political constraints are more pronounced in China, while India and Indonesia face internal hierarchies of caste, class and ethnicity.

Relevance: State-defined relevance dominates in China, while India and Indonesia negotiate between developmental imperatives and scholarly autonomy. Japan's emphasis has been cultural reinterpretation rather than developmental urgency.

Theoretical Reorientation: India and Indonesia stress recovering indigenous categories; China frames reorientation through ideological Sinicization; Japan blends Western and indigenous frameworks.

The following table summarizes the strategies of Indigenization in India, China, Japan, and Indonesia across five dimensions: language and materials, insider research, priority setting and relevance, theoretical-methodological reorientation, and pedagogical implications.

Dimension	India	China	Japan	Indonesia
Language & Materials	Multilingual challenge; push for vernacular texts; tension between accessibility and global visibility (Atal, 1981)	Centralized use of Mandarin, strong state led production of teaching materials.	Linguistic homogeneity; easier adoption of national language; reinterpretation of western texts through Japanese categories.	Use of Bahasa Indonesia as national language; regional diversity still poses challenges.
Insider Research	Emphasis on local scholars; reflexivity needed due to caste, class, gender hierarchies (Saran, 1981; Sharma, 2016)	Insider research encouraged but heavily shaped by state control; limits on academic freedom.	Insider perspectives blended with Western frameworks; focus on cultural reinterpretation.	Insider research central; emphasis on oral traditions and community knowledge (Alatas, 2006)

Priority-Settings & Relevance	“Revolution of relevance” focused on poverty, inequality, caste, gender, development (Oommen, 2007)	Strong alignment with state priorities; relevance defined by ideological imperatives.	Less developmental urgency; focus on cultural specificity and reinterpretation.	National development themes prioritized; balance between local relevance and autonomy.
Theoretical Methodological Reorientation	Recovery of indigenous categories (<i>jati, varna, samaj</i>); vernacularizing; feminist and intersectional critiques (Sharma, 2016)	Framed through “Sinicization”; Marxist frameworks dominate theoretical reorientation.	Blending Western theories with indigenous concepts (<i>i.e. amae</i>) gradual innovation	Recovery of indigenous categories; oral traditions emphasized; critique of Eurocentrism (Alatas, 1974)
Pedagogical Implications	Reflexive, Inclusive pedagogy; Integration of oral traditions, limited space for pluralism	Pedagogy aligned with state ideology; limited space for pluralism	Comparative pedagogy blending global and local; cultural categories central.	Pedagogy rooted in community knowledge; democratization of classroom through local case studies.

The above comparative table illustrates how indigenization strategies vary across Asian contexts while sharing a common goal of resisting epistemic dependence.

- India stands out for its linguistic plurality and entrenched social hierarchies, which complicate indigenization but also enrich it with diverse epistemic resources (Alatas, S. H. 1972; Alatas, S. H., 2006; Atal, Y. 1981; Oommen, T.K. 2007; Sharma, C.K. 2016; Saran, A. 1981).

- China demonstrates a centralised model where indigenization is closely tied to state ideology, particularly through the Sinicization of knowledge and the dominance of Marxist frameworks.
- Japan presents a case of cultural reinterpretation, blending Western theories with indigenous categories, facilitated by linguistic homogeneity but challenged by the need to assert cultural specificity in global debates.
- Indonesia, influenced by Alatas’s critique of the “captive mind”, emphasizes oral traditions and community knowledge balancing national development priorities with epistemic autonomy (Bahar, A.A. 2019; Usmi, R. et al 2025; Takbir, M. et al 2022).

Indigenization in India exemplifies the complex interplay of linguistic plurality, entrenched social hierarchies and democratic academic traditions, making its trajectory distinctive within Asia. While India emphasizes vernacularisation, reflexive insider research, and inclusive pedagogy, comparative insights from China, Japan and Indonesia reveal alternative pathways—ranging from centralized ideological models to cultural reinterpretation and oral tradition recovery. Together, these cases emphasize that indigenization is not a uniform project, but a constellation of strategies shaped by diverse political, cultural and historical contexts.

For India, the challenge lies in balancing accessibility with coherence, autonomy with relevance and recovery with innovation. Yet, its pluralistic approach offers valuable lessons for global scholarship that decolonized knowledge must remain dynamic, inclusive, and dialogical. By situating Indian realities within broader Asian debates, indigenization advances both national development and international scholarly dialogue, reshaping the epistemic foundations of social science for a more equitable global future.

Indigenization as a nationalist project

Indigenization has emerged as a significant nationalist project across colonised societies aimed at liberating knowledge systems from the dominance of colonial Eurocentric paradigms. In India, efforts toward Indigenization began during the colonial period as part of the broader

nationalist struggle and gained renewed strength after independence. These initiatives were accompanied by sustained debates among social scientists, who sought to interrogate and decolonize intellectual discourses within their respective domains.

It is important to distinguish between *decolonization* and *indigenization*, as the two concepts, though related, are not interchangeable. Decolonisation refers to the removal of colonial elements from intellectual frameworks, while indigenization. And was the incorporation of indigenous or native categories of thought, thereby making scholarship more contextually relevant and meaningful.

Syed F. Alatas (2006) defines indigenization as the proposition that social scientific theories, concepts, and methodologies can be derived from the histories, cultures, and lived experiences of non-Western civilizations. He argues that the call for indigenization affirms the possibility of constructing bodies of knowledge grounded in indigenous cultures, just as Western science is rooted in Western historical experiences and cultural practises. In this sense, indigenization does not entail a wholesale rejection of Western social science.; rather, it advocates A cautious and selective adaptation of Western knowledge to indigenous needs.

The project of indigenization thus underscores the desirability of alternative perspectives on human societies, with the aim of making the social sciences less parochial and more enriched. Its urgency in newly independent nations stemmed from the need to correct historical misrepresentations perpetuated by colonial hegemony and to produce knowledge that could serve as a tool of emancipation.

Indigenization within India's Institutional and Policy Landscape

The pursuit of indigenization in India's social sciences cannot be understood apart from the institutional and policy frameworks that shape knowledge production. Universities, research councils, and funding bodies such as the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) have played a pivotal role in encouraging scholarship that is contextually grounded. Structural indigenization, as outlined by Krishna Kumar, finds expression in efforts to build institutional

capacities—expanding indigenous curricula, supporting region-specific research, and fostering networks of scholars committed to epistemic autonomy. These initiatives are complemented by government schemes aimed at promoting socially relevant research, particularly in areas such as rural development, gender equity and financial empowerment.

At the same time, substantive indigenization is reflected in the reorientation of research agendas toward national priorities. Policy frameworks increasingly emphasize studies of Indian institutions, communities, and social practises, thereby resisting the tendency to privilege Western case studies as universal models. Theoretic indigenization, though less institutionally codified, is visible in attempts to construct conceptual frameworks rooted in Indian worldviews—drawing on indigenous categories of thought, cultural traditions, and collective aspirations. Together, these institutional and policy efforts illustrate how indigenization operates as both are structural and intellectual project negotiating the tension between global academic currents and the imperative of national relevance.

Globalisation and the challenges to indigenization.

While indigenization seeks to reclaim epistemic autonomy, its pursuit unfolds within the complex realities of globalisation. The expansion of transnational academic networks, the dominance of English as the lingua franca of scholarship, and the circulation of Western theories and methodologies exert significant influence on Indian social sciences. These forces create opportunities for visibility and exchange but also risk reinforcing dependency on external paradigms. The pressure to publish in internationally indexed journals often privileges Western theoretical frameworks, marginalising indigenous categories of thought and discouraging context-sensitive methodologies.

At the same time, globalization fosters, hybrid spaces where local and global knowledge can intersect. Collaborative research projects, international conferences, and digital platforms enable Indian scholars to contribute indigenous perspectives to global debates. Yet the challenge remains to ensure that such participation does not dilute the normative and structural imperatives of indigenization. The task,

therefore, is to negotiate globalisation critically leveraging its opportunities for dialogue and recognition, while resisting its homogenising tendencies. In this sense, indigenization must be understood as a dynamic process; not a retreat into parochialism but a strategic engagement that is strengthens, national relevance while enriching global knowledge pluralism.

Sustaining Indigenization: Balancing national relevance and global engagement

The Indian experience demonstrates that indigenization must be pursued as a dual strategy—anchored in national priorities while critically engaging with global academic currents. Institutional initiatives, such as indigenous curricula, region-specific research, and government-supported schemes, provide the structural foundation for epistemic autonomy. At the same time, globalisation compels Indian scholars to participate in transnational networks, publish in international journals, and engage with global theoretical debates. The challenge lies in ensuring that such participation does not dilute Indigenous perspectives but instead amplifies them within global discourse.

Sustaining indigenization therefore requires a reflexive balance: strengthening institutional capacities to support locally grounded research while cultivating intellectual confidence to contribute indigenous categories of thought to international scholarship. This balance positions indigenization not as a retreat into parochialism, but as a transformative project—one that advances nation-building by addressing local concerns and simultaneously enriches global social science through knowledge pluralism. In this way, indigenization becomes both strategy of decolonization and a pathway toward a more inclusive and resonant global sociology.

Conclusion

The indigenization and decolonization of social sciences must be understood not as a destination or a finite task, but as a dynamic, evolving praxis—an ongoing journey that requires sustained intellectual vigilance, institutional commitment, and pedagogical innovation. This paper has argued that indigenization functions

simultaneously as a normative vision for reclaiming intellectual sovereignty, a structural agenda for building context-sensitive research frameworks based on local histories and lived realities, and a comparative project that insists indigenous categories enrich rather than retreat from global conversations.

The success of this enterprise depends on a delicate equilibrium: nurturing 'native categories of thought' while remaining critically open to the horizons of global knowledge pluralism. In doing so, indigenization advances nation-building, enriches global discourse, and redefines the role of social science as a transformative force in the society. By dismantling entrenched hierarchies and centring the lived realities of caste, gender, and subaltern voices, indigenization ensures that scholarship remains reflexive and inclusive. Ultimately, by holding together the local and the global, indigenization reimagines social science as a plural, transformative enterprise—one that not only advances nation-building but also contributes to a more equitable and dialogical world of knowledge.

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