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Educational Visions and Everyday Practices, Inside and Outside The Classroom: A Sociologist's Reflections

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Abstract: *This paper seeks to show how the minutiae of everyday sociology and the contours of education policies are inextricably connected to global political economy and geopolitics; as much as to domestic state market dynamics and the state's ideological vision. In a fashion, it is a participant observer's story, that began as a student of sociology in the late 1970s to a teaching career stretching more than three decades, that ended formally in 2021. The central argument of this paper is that macro structures of neoliberalism, authoritarianism, populism and the micro spaces of everyday academia and classroom are closely connected. Macro processes shape micro spaces. And in the current period, actively recast them as sites that reproduce the larger structures. That Indian education has a long history of rote learning, particularly in the social sciences that makes the task of macro structures easier. It is this connection between vision at the macro level and practices at the micro that this paper seeks to elaborate. The paper seeks to convey this understanding in three broad sections, namely: (I) Introduction where I seek to explain the rationale for this paper and my chosen approach to understand the practice of sociology on a reflective note; (II) Concepts, Contexts, Reification and Sentiments; and (III) The Classroom: Inside, Outside, the Past and Present.*

Keywords: educational vision, everyday practices, state, market, authoritarianism, populism, neoliberalism, social media, classroom, reification, rote learning, concepts and contexts, decoloniality, common-sense and sociological knowledge

I

Introduction

This is a paper that reflects upon the everyday practice of sociology from the ordinary classroom context. It is in a sense a participant observer's story, as a student of sociology in the late 1970s to a teaching career stretching more than three decades, ending formally at the end of 2021. My engagement with the discipline has remained even after my formal retirement¹ even as I have observed the Indian educational scenario changing dramatically, almost on a daily basis. This changed vision with its early beginnings of neoliberalism (still low key in India) in the late 1980s at the global and state level towards education necessarily impacted everyday classroom practices. Likewise, the authoritarian vision of a hegemonic cultural nationalist regime since 2014 (already present, though less strident in many states of India) altered both content and culture of the classroom at one end and larger academic world at the other. It is this connection between vision at the macro level and practices at the micro that this paper rests upon and proceeds. Reflecting this, the paper is divided into three broad sections, namely: (I) Introduction where I seek to explain the rationale for this paper and my chosen approach to understanding the practice of sociology on a reflective note; (II) Concepts, Contexts, Reification and Sentiments; and (III) The Classroom: Inside, Outside, the Past and Present.

In these three sections one shifts to and fro from the everyday, ordinary, micro dynamics of the classroom to the larger dynamics of political economy, of state and market, and geopolitics. I see this focus on interrelatedness as central to the sociological perspective which I believe is about looking behind the visible and veering away from empiricism at one end and grand abstract theory on the other- both which to my mind leads to reification of concepts, a point that I explore in Section II. Readers will see that much of my deepening

interest in discipline emerged in the context of the classroom, a point that runs through this paper. It is significant that as I write in the middle of 2026, there is a buzz in public discourse, vetted by both state and market, that has declared the classroom itself as obsolete. I address this in Section III. Given the inter-connections between contexts, concepts and classrooms, discussion of themes shall necessarily cut across sections.

I take the privilege of my age to begin and proceed on a biographical note in the vein that C. Wright Mills invokes the intersection of biography and history,ⁱⁱ I plot my biographical engagement with the discipline of sociology across five decades. For fifty years is a long time and India as a country, its higher education and sociology as a discipline has dramatically changed. Even as some issues such as a tendency to reify concepts and privilege rote learning have been constants. This I argue has been the bane of our educational practice, paving the ground for the intellectual and political capture of 'thinking' itself, if I may be a bit dramatic. My personal trouble dates back to my first exposure to sociology in my MA programme in Jawaharlal University (JNU) in 1977. I was unable to make full sense of those early lectures and the recommended texts in sociology, then steeped in structural functionalismⁱⁱⁱ. Parson's grand theory confounded me. In my recounting therefore is the attempt to make my personal trouble a public issue. That interest grew to a pedagogic concern as I began teaching in late 1987 and to undergraduates from 1990 to postgraduates. As the years unfolded this inchoate sense of not being able to fully connect with the discipline grew to be a serious interest in the practice of sociology in India. (Chaudhuri 2003, 2010, 2018).

This in turn led me to explore the way we understand the discipline of sociology, its intellectual traditions, and the dominant ways that it was theoretically and methodologically structured in India. I wondered about the approach that some sociologists vouched for- that one can enter the "field"; and it is the "field" that would offer us authentic knowledge. While completely in agreement that we need to immerse ourselves amidst those whom we study; that fieldwork is as much about learning and unlearning, a nagging doubt remained. It was about

the limits of what we see and sense, and what we don't. It is about the fundamental question whether there is a pre-conceptual space from which we can begin our investigation even available? Is observation neutral? Why was caste and gender injustice cognitively invisible for so long? Caste and gender were always there- empirically observable. Why did their discriminatory and exploitative dimension become visible only when anti caste movements, feminist movements and critical caste writings raise it? Likewise, we find in Indian sociology a consistent silence on the class question. Classes exist in the field. As a student, I recall the class question appeared to be necessarily about the working class, the "other" to the middle class. In hindsight, this is much like caste being about Dalits and OBS, not the purported twice born castes. As middle-class sociologists it may not be wrong to state that the cognitive lenses to see classes in relationship to each other and in context of the larger social formation is weak, if not almost absent. The strong tendency in Indian sociology to stay away from Marxist analysis, often associated with class analysis, is a theme that perhaps I can discuss in another paper. That it was linked to the way sociology developed in India, its early links with social anthropology and later the active role of American establishment is a story that needs to be told. This indeed is a pattern evident in much of South Asia. (Chaudhuri 2026)

II

Concepts, Contexts, Reification and Sentiments

I have written on the puzzlement I felt when I encountered theory and concepts in sociology. I recall my early days as a student, new and unsure in sociology, a subject that I knew nothing about. I was told to read up on basic concepts so that I could follow both classroom lectures as well as prescribed readings. The clarity that I expected to get from reading up on basic concepts however remained elusive. The certainty that I expected after reading up an array of concepts and many definitions escaped me. In hindsight I do not think my incomprehension was entirely a personal story. Over the years I felt that this puzzlement stemmed partly from the way we teach and understand concepts. A central problem that arises is that concepts in

sociology often acquire an opaque quality. Instead of concepts helping students to 'see' behind the façade, concepts become reified, rendered obdurate objects, that you could not pierce through. This reification or fetishism of concepts is rooted in Marxist theory of "commodity fetishism". It is the process where social relations, human activity, and abstract ideas are mistaken for objective, inherent properties of things.

What is missed out is that concepts are articulated by thinkers with definite biographies as they struggle to make sense of societies they live in, the concepts in circulation- some which they draw from, some of which they challenge. What needs repeated emphasis is that there is no immaculate conception of social theories. They emerge in specific historical contexts and are constitutive of economic, political, social, cultural, institutional and intellectual processes. We need to understand not just the contexts within which theories arise but also the entangled routes through which they travel. This demands careful examination of both contexts of production, circulation and reception of theories.

Our pedagogic practises play no mean role in reification of concepts. There is a widely held idea that a concept is a given, frozen in the syllabi and ready to be consumed and applied. It accompanies a conception of the classroom as a discrete and closed sphere, geared to examinations and acquisition of degrees and unrelated to the world at large. Further concepts are embedded within specific theoretical formulations, each with their often, distinct domain assumptions. These need explication as we seek to make sense of the concepts and their inter-connections. Tracing out these connections help us think and 'conceptualize'. This may be a more productive way than to proceed with a 'fixed' idea of a concept and apply it, often with illustrative empirical evidence to 'show' or 'demonstrate' the 'concept'. In current times where Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) is the accepted mode of evaluation, the reification gets compounded and most importantly seen as legitimate by state powers. For it is they who decide what is authentic knowledge.

Getting definitions right is not the same as getting concepts right. I began with my search for clarity by reading up on definitions of basic

concepts. This road I discovered was an illusory one. Definitions, often learnt by rote bear no family resemblance to understanding concepts as analytical tools to understand society. Given our long culture of received knowledge, it is not surprising that this has always been a trend in the everyday practice of sociology. (Chaudhuri 2003) This is what Paulo Freire termed the banking method whereby we have the oppressive "depositing" of information (hence the term 'banking') by teachers into their students. It is in the spirit of copy paste times, that the New Education Policy talks of playful classrooms here and there, accompanied by ideas and practice that are contrary to its very spirit. The propaganda on the extraordinary initiative of NEP is everywhere on social media and multiple websites. A typical one reads:

A walk through a typical Indian classroom today reveals a landscape shaped by digital equity, competency-based assessments, and a more flexible curriculum. The policy's intent to move from rote learning to competency-based education has begun translating into visible structural and pedagogical changes across schools. While implementation remains uneven, the direction is unmistakable.^{iv}

That this rosy picture does not seem to correspond with the Niti Ayog's recent report is another story. ^v The banking approach and rote learning has not just remained but grown.

Its salience however has grown with an increased thrust to make things short and simple. The Internet has accelerated this process. Shorts of already short information is the flavour of the times. One of the reasons for making things 'simple' was the assumption that it would help reach out to a wider section of society. This rests on a misplaced and elitist view that the mass of students would not be able to complex issues and comprehend conceptual questions. The onus of not comprehending I strongly believe rests not on students but on our pedagogic practices. Another reason for the popularity of the idea that 'recalling definitions' is equal to 'knowing' is that such an approach facilitates the growing trend towards multiple-choice questions, a method seen as both 'objective' and 'easy' to evaluate and tabulate. Students thus must tick given options, which would be right or wrong,

presumably by fixed and 'objective' criteria. The story however does not necessarily play to script. Even 'facts', leave alone 'concepts' are very difficult to nail. This as I elaborate a little later is in the very nature of the social sciences in general and sociology in specific.

An incident throws light on the contentious nature of 'facts', 'objectivity' and 'neutrality'. In Board examinations, held in November-December 2020, a controversy erupted over a multiple-choice question in the Class 12 Sociology examination that said: "The unprecedented scale and spread of anti-Muslim violence in Gujarat in 2002 took place under which government?" The options offered to answer this question were: "Congress", "BJP", "Democratic" and "Republican". The Central Board of School Education (CBSE) stated that "question" was "inappropriate" and the questions should be academic-oriented only and not touch upon domains that could harm sentiments of people based on social and political choices. The very choice of options given was criticised by some. The board issued an apology and action was taken against the paper setters.^{vi} The rationale for multiple-choice questions (MCQ) is premised upon an idea of objective questions. This rests on a slippery terrain. The relationship between neutrality and objectivity is fraught. And a fact-based question can appear to tread dangerously on the sentiments of people by the state. The desire for 'neutral' and 'objective' knowledge sounds persuasive but misses the point that social sciences proceed with methodological debates that prise open the very idea of 'facts' as givens, or definitions as fixed. This has been a core methodological debate in the discipline of sociology.

Social scientists are perforce members of society. This makes the study of the 'social' an entirely different exercise from the study of the 'physical' world. Emile Durkheim describes the impossibility of humans who are not concept bearers. This is how he explains this so eloquently in *The Rules of Sociological Method*:

Men did not wait on the coming of social science to have ideas about law, morality, the family, the state or society itself, for such ideas were indispensable to their lives. It is above all in sociology that these preconceptions are capable of holding

sway over the mind, substituting themselves for things. Indeed, social things are only realised by men: they are the product of human activity. As members of society, we not only have conceptions/ideas/concepts about society but are deeply attached to them. What makes emancipation from such notions peculiarly difficult in sociology is that sentiment so often intervenes. We enthuse over our political and religious beliefs and moral practices very differently from the way we do over the objects of the physical world. Consequently, this emotional quality is transmitted to the way in which we conceive and explain our beliefs. (Durkheim 1982) https://monoskop.org/images/1/1e/Durkheim_Emile_The_Rules_of_Sociological_Method_1982.pdf (1895)

Thus, Durkheim pleaded to get rid of "idols" and preconceptions. Marx before him, in his critique of German Idealism articulates the first premises of Materialist Method and states not to begin with abstractions, nor arbitrary points. But to begin with the concrete, the acting, labouring person who in her/his engagement with what exists, creates new objects. By "producing their means of subsistence" they indirectly produce their actual material life. (Marx) The plough drawn by the cow, and much later the tractor, and even later steam engine, and so on... to the Internet and now AI, our actual material conditions change just as the ways we organize for work and leisure does. There is no space to elaborate how this works in a digital age where people watch their phone even as they sit together, but it may be productive to return to history and to classical texts. A quote from Marx on mode of production that I enjoyed discussing in theory classes is worth invoking here. Perhaps it offers us a window to understand our contemporary lives.

This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the production of the physical existence of individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part. ...The nature of individuals thus depends on the material conditions determining their production. Marx 1932 (1845-46))

In the modern period the dominant material conditions were structured by capitalism. India was one who entered this, or drawn into this, through a colonially mediated development, a historical process that radically destroyed Indian agriculture, artisanal production, trade leading to widespread dispossession, forced migration, famines and plagues leaving a devastated economy and a wounded cultural pride. Central also in this process was the emergence of a new western educated middle class, caught between a deep aspiration to be like the west, yet inspired to articulate their own distinct culture and identity. This foray into colonial history is not a digression. It helps us fill in the details of what constituted our colonial contexts. This is particularly important in the current context where decoloniality has become a buzzword in the global north, often with little historical sense of what colonialism meant for people who lived in a colonized world- to their livelihood, economy, culture, identity and dignity. Here in India, it has been appropriated for an aggressive assertion of triumphant nationalism to impose a hegemonic knowledge system.

What is common to both Marx and Durkheim and to modern social sciences, and sociology is to question the taken for granted, the ideas in circulation and think through where and how we study a phenomena. This is why most sociology textbooks begin with a distinction between common sense and sociological knowledge. Unfortunately, we notice today in India and globally a radical break with this premise. Common sense ideas and sociological knowledge about society have become one and the same. Stereotypes and prejudices have acquired legitimacy in times where populism reigns. Textbooks and classes are bound to resonate with this. It has reduced knowledge to a sham- hollow, superficial, trite, banal, rhetorical where evidence based knowledge have no space left. The reification of concepts has been accelerated by the MCQ model of learning. This mode has been legitimised by regimes that despise serious scholarship, or even worse do not have the know-how to distinguish between comic strip and scholarly versions of history, religion or culture.

The *search for certainty* (and the premises on which MCQ in sociology rests) with which I entered the course on Basic Concepts

many decades ago in the late 1970s is antithetical to sociology. For in sociology, we move away from the “of course statements” to asking, “says who?” Concepts help us to see through and peer behind the facade. You may be wondering why the scholars I refer to (Marx and Durkheim) are from a distant era. And some may wonder why one should drag them in disputes which are done and resolved with. Many of the challenges mentioned in this essay in our encounter with concepts persist today. And even as new terms flow into our crowded conceptual toolbox, we may still have the same taken for granted approach to new concepts such as hybridity, intersectionality and governmentality, performativity, resistance, or the concepts of the all-encompassing Indian Knowledge Systems ((IKS) such as Purushartha, Panch Mahakosh, Ashtangik Marg, Para Vidya and Aparā Vidya, Tri Ratna, Trigunas. Treat them as fixed givens, flat, undisputed, ready to be used. The basic point that I am trying to make is that these concepts have deep roots, philosophical frameworks, histories and contestations. Once presented in its reified form, its flat superficiality creates conditions that ensure that no thoughtful questions of truth and justice, enquiry and engagement can be raised. Just naming them will suffice.

III

The Classroom: Inside, Outside, the Past and Present

Education is changing. The classroom has been declared obsolete. A relic from the times of the Industrial Revolution. For a person like me for whom the classroom was the most precious space for learning, confusion, dialogue, questioning, this sounds like the very doors of critical thinking are being shut. Let me first reflect on the classroom and then return to the matter of classrooms being obsolete. As I mentioned earlier, my initial curiosity in the way that the discipline was taught, and research emerged from the classroom, first as a student and then as a teacher. However, I understood early that the classroom did not exist as an isolate, that however local it may appear, it could not be understood without taking into account the larger world, the global and national that shaped it. The world outside was large and complex. What directly and visibly impinged on what

transpired in the classroom were state policies on education on one hand and the vision and training of those sociologists who taught us on the other.

This story is not complete however without taking cognizance of the larger world order that was defined by the Cold War, growing influence of America as a hegemon in the world order, and American sociology. Closer home we need to pay the attention to the Indian state and its vision. This state vision after independence in 1947 was constituted by dominant ideas of the national movement that was manifest in the Indian Constitution. Central was its pledge towards liberty, equality, fraternity and social justice. The NCERT textbooks always carried the Preamble on the first page. The vision was there. But often in the reified world of concepts, they over the years remained just words. I will return to the vision of the 1949 Commission for Higher Education to highlight what the constitutional vision meant. I read the JNU Act and wrote the piece on CSSS (Chaudhuri 2011) much before I read the 1949 Education Report. It is clear to me in hindsight where the vision came from and how that played out in the extraordinary free and creative classroom spaces that were created.

I have written on the curious mix of Parson and the Constitutional vision of the Centre for the Study of Social Systems (CSSS). (Chaudhuri 2011) The first course I taught in JNU in 1990 was titled “Concepts for Social Change in India” where the practice was to discuss concepts such as westernization, sankritization, modernization. That same nagging doubt cropped up. How do teach the concepts without discussing the history of Indian colonialism, its devastation and its role in the making of Indian middle class- not quite like the French middle class or the western so succinctly described by D.P. Mukherjee. Given the extraordinary sense of freedom that we enjoyed in the classroom in JNU, we could structure our course as we wish. And thus, my course began with colonialism, its nature and impact-both intended and unintended.

In recent years with a buzz on decoloniality we need to rethink what it means to us. I have argued elsewhere that the global has been in our

local much before globalization led the global north to ask questions about decoloniality and internationalization of curriculum.

Indian sociology’s intellectual legacy is intricately tied up with colonial rule, Orientalism and Indology. (Chaudhuri 2024, 2025,) All shared a steadfast fast focus on India’s unique culture. Debates for an Indian sociology in the pages of *Contribution to Indian Sociology* (CIS) that was launched in 1957 by Louis Dumont from Paris and David Pocock from Oxford left their intellectual mark. (Madan 2008) The global was always present in our local/national, albeit in different ways. British social anthropology had greater influence in some institutions, American sociology in others. What was constant was the dominance of some variant of structural functionalism and a conscious distancing from Marxism. And the idea of a constant Indian culture in change and continuity.

The global north was omnipresent in our local every day, much before globalization stormed into our lives. Its presence was larger than life in our curriculum. Teaching a course on women and society in the 1990s, I felt uncomfortable to begin with the mandatory reference to liberal, socialist and radical feminist theories in western textbooks. It made more sense to me to begin with history. (Chaudhuri 2002) The buzz about multiple modernity had still not reached our shores nor was provincializing Europe a heard of phrase. Nor had third world feminism become an essential add on to internationalize curriculum in the Global North. We were still struggling to argue that our global histories have differently played out. And our modernity was therefore different, just as our feminist histories were. (Chaudhuri 2004) My point is not that western feminist theories had not arrived here. But that the big and small ways that they travelled and settled here were different. The story of globalization was no different.

The point however that this paper seeks to reiterate here is that the minutiae of everyday sociology and the contours of education policies are inextricably connected to global political economy and geopolitics; as much as to state market dynamics within the country, and the state’s own ideological vision. Critiques of state and non-state institutions were central to social sciences. Sociologists may have had

differing views on caste, but the differences were recorded, encouraging further debate. State action, if considered wrong, were critiqued. The Emergency declared by the Indian government (1975 - 77) for instance was critiqued. The concept of civil rights and separation of powers were explicated by the analysis of the event. The storyline is different now. Let me quote the manner that the Emergency was depicted in the NCERT textbook, interestingly during a Congress regime which had invoked the Emergency.

The year was 2007. Professor Krishna Kumar, an eminent thinker on education and then Director of the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), was leading a complete overhaul of school textbooks. Professor Suhas Palshikar and I were invited to lead the rewriting of Political Science textbooks for classes IX to XII. Those were heady days. Inspired by the idea of radical pedagogy, we set out to change the content, the format and the look-and-feel of the school textbooks of what used to be called 'Civics'. We decided that high school students must not be treated as infants, that textbooks in Political Science must not shy away from politics, and that we must not brush inconvenient truth under the carpet. We enjoyed amazing freedom, thanks to the ecosystem set up by Professor Kumar. This included the gentle scholar, Professor Hari Vasudevan, who oversaw the social sciences textbooks and the broad-minded National Monitoring Team headed by Professors Mrinal Miri and G.P. Deshpande. All this was tested in the chapter on Emergency in the class XII textbook "India Since Independence". (Yadav 2021)

Texts to be taught in classrooms today are not vetted on the grounds of veracity, but on grounds of 'sentiments being hurt' – a claim that possible can make sense if prejudicial and wrong comments were made on a community, contravening Constitutional norms. But a recent event suggests that the Court's sentiments can be hurt too. We now live in a state subsumed academia. Reference to "corruption at various levels of the judiciary" mentioned in NCERT Class VIII

textbooks were directed to be removed. This section "should not have been written", sources said, declaring that highlighting such aspects is "not appropriate" and "*inspirational things*" should have been written instead. Sources also said, quoting a former Chief Justice, BR Gavai, "is not right" and "is not appropriate". It was pointed out the current Chief Justice had also expressed displeasure.^{vii} In a democracy it is a vigilant media and academia that keeps freedom and critical thinking alive but here the matter is seen as "defamation of the institution".^{viii}

I have argued elsewhere that academia in India is being transformed by the twin structures of majoritarian authoritarianism and neoliberalism. Authoritarianism curtails academic freedom like the way it did, with a criticism of MCQ questions pertaining to Gujarat riots or the discussion on corruption in judiciary. Neoliberalism aids authoritarianism. And it works in sync through managerialism.

Indeed, it is the managerial vision now speaks for education and the classroom. Let me draw from Prakash Nair, President & CEO at Education Design International on December 26, 2024, who shares a LinkedIn post that declares "Classrooms are Obsolete". He states that the problem lies in the fact that "the overwhelming majority of millions of students across the globe spend most of their academic day in classrooms" for "the classroom has been obsolete for several decades" which is "not just my opinion" but an "established science". He worries that "classroom-based schools could permanently sink our chances of rebuilding our economy and restoring our shrinking *middle class to its glory days*". What he offers is a set of recommendations:

(1) Personalized (2) Safe and secure; (3) Inquiry-based; (4) Student-directed; (5) Collaborative; (6) Interdisciplinary; (7) Rigorous and hands-on; (8) Embodying a culture of excellence and high expectations; (9) Environmentally conscious; (10) Offering strong connections to the local community and business; (11) Globally networked (12) Setting the stage for lifelong learning.

The list is smart. It is neat. Has the right buzzwords. It is simple. And flat as is populist discourse in general and self-help books. I find of special interest the way that the model of profit generation dominates in these new “initiatives would not necessarily get rid of classrooms but instead redesign and refurbish them to operate as “learning studios” and “learning suites” alongside common areas reclaimed from hallways that vastly expand available space and allow better teaching and learning.

To understand such a policy, one has to shift lens to the macro processes unleashed by neoliberalism where the educational sector is now an industry subject to the same rules of profit maximization as any other industry. The industry is the prime stakeholder, students are customers and in this scheme of things teachers service providers. Accompanying this neoliberal recasting, we are witness to the onslaught of an authoritarian regime with absolute commitment to a majoritarian cultural nationalist perspective. The digital works for both neoliberalism and authoritarianism. Content vetted ideologically floods the virtual space.

The current regime is populist, authoritarian and majoritarian. Populism as we know is deeply hostile to serious scholarships which they identify as elite. It is not surprising therefore that in these populist times the common-sense views of people (could be explicit hate speech) find greater space in public discourse and increasingly academic space as both get completely taken over by the current regime. The extraordinary spread of social media in the contemporary world, its amplified messages have worked in sync with the ideological and institutional recasting of education in India from 2014.

This has intensified the already prevailing practice in Indian sociology wherein common-sense ideas merge seamlessly into academic sociology. To study common sense of the common people and yet break from it has been a central challenge to sociology and anthropology. In India's unequal educational system, in its everyday practice, theory is often an add on, a fixed product to be applied, rather than an analytical process to question the taken for granted. (Chaudhuri and Thakur 2018) Common sense and social science

knowledge thus often seamlessly fuse. This may not be our problem alone for as Bourdieu observes “intellectuals, like everyone else, constantly peddle prejudices, stereotypes, received ideas, and hastily simplistic representations which are fuelled by the chance happenings of everyday life. (Bourdieu 1999: 220)

This process however has accelerated in social media times and in 2021, with the Pandemic accelerating online learning, we find writings on ResearchGate, Facebook and Twitter that may have not in earlier times breached the gatekeepers of academic sociology. I found on ResearchGate a paper that writes how our “culture and traditions ... that hold a special significance with respect to its uniqueness” has been “disturbed to the varying degrees in lieu of globalization”. (Mohapatra 2017 emphasis mine) The tenor of the above statements may not be expressed with any academic finesse, but such views are present in higher echelons in Indian sociology. The challenge lies in the yawning gap between high end academic scholarship, everyday sociology and the larger public. In today's majoritarian and populist India, many of these widely circulating common sense ideas constitute legitimate knowledge^{ix}. And then we have the unprecedented and institutionalised ‘knowledge’ spread by WhatsApp University^x which is a satirical term for the rapid spread of misinformation, forwarded messages, and fake news via social media, particularly WhatsApp. Criticism of this is voiced. But drowned in the din and a world where we all live in echo chambers. Some are state sanctioned and approved. Others rendered anti national and irrelevant.

In the golden age of misinformation, where libraries have been replaced by search tools and newspapers by headlines that fit the ‘Breaking News’ notification, a new, prestigious institution has emerged. It has no campus, no faculty, and absolutely no fact-checkers...It is WhatsApp University, a premier centre of higher learning where everyone is a professor, and truth is entirely optional. In fact, WhatsApp University is the only ivy-league institution that requires no tuition fee, no entrance exams, and absolutely no critical thinking.^{xi}

To even imagine the task of scholar in such times is a huge challenge as Neera Chandoke argues below.

The task of a scholar is not only to coin clever sound-bites. Intellectuals have to bring a historical and comparative perspective to bear upon the present. Their job is to tell us what the historical processes that brought us from 'there' to 'here' are, identify political problems, and, if possible, help resolve them. But reflection, analysis, critique and conceptualisation need stable political contexts. We must know of what we speak when we speak of categories that allow us to tidy, challenge and remake our worlds. We must be sure of the empirical referents we address. (Chandoke 2019 emphasis mine)

We live in times where the vision once spelt out in the Radhakrishnan Report, the first report on Higher Education in independent India is a faint memory; or perhaps not even that.

We must have a conception of the social order for which we are educating our youth. We know what Hitler did in six years with the German youth. The Russians are clear in their minds about the kind of society for which they are educating and the qualities required in their citizens. They tried to remake man in a new image. Our educational system must find its guiding principle in the aims of the social order for which it prepares, in the nature of the civilisation it hopes to build. (p.31)

Then follows in an explicit fashion of the social philosophy embodied in the Indian Constitution. It informed the country's future and the role of education in that.

The outlines of the social philosophy which should govern all our institutions, educational as well as economic and political, are indicated in the preamble to our Draft Constitution. It reads :- "WE, THE PEOPLE OF INDIA, having solemnly resolved to constitute India into a SOVEREIGN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC and to secure to all its citizens ; JUSTICE, social, economic and political ; LIBERTY of thought, expression, belief, faith and worship;

EQUALITY of status and opportunity ; and to promote among them all 'FRATERNITY' assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity of the Nation ; IN OUR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY this of..... (.... day of August, 1949 A.D.) do HEREBY ADOPT, ENACT AND GIVE TO OURSELVES THIS CONSTITUTION". We are engaged in a quest for democracy through the realisation of justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.

It goes on to emphasise “there can be no democratic freedom without social justice which demands the freeing of the individual from poverty, unemployment, malnutrition and ignorance”. Further this is not enough. “We must cultivate the art of human relationships, the ability to live and work together overcoming the dividing forces of the time”. (31-32)

The idea of Fraternity is foregrounded and seen at two levels, the national and the international. It repudiates the totalitarian principle in all its forms, viz., that the individual as such is useless and that he must be either destroyed or converted into an efficient unit in the power-machine of the State. Democracy affirms that each individual is a unique adventure of life. The function of education is the guidance of this adventure to the realisation of the potentialities of each individual in the face of the actual world of men and things. It aims at the development of the individual, the discovery, training and utilisation of his special talents. Not surprisingly the classroom was seen not merely as a space for rote learning, but as a vibrant, holistic environment designed to foster critical thinking, moral character, and democratic values in students. It emphasized moving away from passive lecturing toward an interactive and comprehensive learning experience.

Today we stand mute witness with callous attack on individual intellectuals came hand-in-hand with one on the ideal of the public university itself. Once imagined as independent India's ‘organs of civilization,’ ‘sanctuaries of the inner life of the nation,’ where everything would be ‘brought to the test of reason, venerable theologies, ancient political institutions, time honoured social

arrangements, a thousand things that a generation ago looked as fixed as the hills' (Government of India 1950: 30) Now, the public university became the site of surveillance, control and repression. The private too has a story that is not devoid of this, apart from the crass commercialization of education. Sociology in such a context is expected to be carriers of "inspirational" stories. Its disciplinary task of questioning the taken for granted, central to democracy is now suspect. Concepts now flourish for ticking the MCQ tests. We are caught between metrics and majoritarianism.

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ⁱ My two years’ experience as the President of the Indian Sociological Society (ISS) (2024-2025) offered me a unique vantage point to observe and participate in both the everyday practice of sociology and the changing understanding of the discipline itself that stemmed from a vision of academia as a direct apparatus of the state.

ⁱⁱ “The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two within society. That is its task and its promise. ... Perhaps the most fruitful distinction with which the sociological imagination works is between ‘the personal troubles of milieu’ and ‘the public issues of social structure.’ This distinction is an essential tool of the sociological imagination and a feature of all classic work in social science”. Mills 1959.

ⁱⁱⁱ I have argued that structural functionalism was regarded as synonymous with sociology itself. Other trends always needed a qualification such as Marxist sociology, or Feminist sociology or Dalit sociology. See Chaudhuri 2018.

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Understanding Lohia's Political Sociology: Intersectionality of Caste, Class, Gender and Language

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Abstract: *Rammanohar Lohia contributed significantly to the formulation of an intersectionalist approach for understanding the inequalities, exclusions and exploitations in the power system of India. This was highly significant for interrogating the dynamics of power as well as the key determinants of the matrix of power- caste, class, gender and language. His perspective on the making of the Indian ruling classes and the power pyramid followed from an understanding of the linkages between these factors. Sadly, his model for building an egalitarian and prosperous social system through a set of interrelated socio-economic programmes, including preferential treatment of the backward sections, has found very few takers in its entirety.*

Keywords: Intersectionality, Caste, Class, Gender, Language

There has been a debate for long among social scientists, political leaders, social reformers and policymakers about the nature of the stratification system and social change in India. It has been related to differences in the understanding of mobility patterns, systems of inclusion and exclusion, and the socio-economic and cultural organisation of power in modern Indian society. The debate basically revolves around questions of the relative significance of caste, class and gender. Attention is paid to the role of education, occupation, language, ethnicity, village communities, region, religion and the processes of modernisation (including urbanisation