

MIDS WORKING PAPER NO. 246

**WITH AND
BEYOND
SOCIOLOGY
AND INDIAN
KNOWLEDGE**

BHARAT HIND INDIA VISHWA,
UPANISHADIC SOCIOLOGY
AND PLANETARY
CONVERSATIONS

ANANTA KUMAR GIRI

MIDS Working Paper No. 246

March 2025

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Vishwa, Upanishadic Sociology and Planetary Conversations*

by Ananta Kumar Giri

Published by

Madras Institute of Development Studies

79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Adyar
Chennai 600020 India

Phone: 044 2441 1574/2589/9771

pub@mids.ac.in | www.mids.ac.in

With and Beyond Sociology and Indian Knowledge

*Bharat Hind India Vishwa, Upanishadic
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Ananta Kumar Giri¹

Abstract

There is a now concern for linking many disciplines to Indian knowledge system and as a part of this, there is a call for making a Bharatiya sociology. This article engages with this discourse and critically examines its one-sided formulation of Bharatiya sociology and cultivates vision and pathways of plural Bharat Hind India Viswa sociology. It discusses the works of G. C. Pande, Ramashray Roy, J. P. S. Uberoi and Chitta Ranjan Das who embody creative cultivation of Indian pathways of historical, sociological and philosophical knowledge as well as world traditions of knowledge going beyond one-sided ethnocentrism and Eurocentrism. This paper then provides a brief dialogue between sociological mode of knowledge and the Upanishadic mode and cultivates pathways of an Upanishadic sociology. It then pleads for cultivating planetary conversations on the part of sociology and other parts of the world where we learn together rather than assert our own views and standpoints.

Keywords: Sociology and Indian knowledge, Upanishadic sociology, *sraddha*, power, trans-civilisational dialogues, planetary conversations

¹ Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies.

India as a cultural are will be nowhere, I think in the world of knowledge, the sciences and the arts, if it does not first defy the European monopoly of scientific method, established in modern times. It is no solution to propose to wait until we should ourselves become Europeans.

— J. P. S. Uberoi (1984, p. 9), *The Other Mind of Europe: Goethe as a Scientist*

The order of our social world is that of value-based norms arising ultimately from the idea of the person as the supreme value. The being or reality of person is in self-consciousness which contains within itself a tension between ideality and actuality. Correspondingly, the categories relevant to the comprehension of social reality can only be definitions of norms based upon value which itself truly apprehended in terms of self-enlightenment.

— G. C. Pande (1982), *The Nature of Social Categories*

To confine oneself to the individual alone is to not do justice to the notion of purusartha. The idea of dharma in traditional thought in India tries to consider the purusartha of society, but the very fact that it does not know how to deal with law and polity on the one hand, and moksa on the other, shows that it was not able to deal with the problem effectively. In fact, it did not formulate the idea of a collective purusartha without which the real problems of a plurality of jivas who are aware of each other for the realization of their own purusarthas cannot even be formulated, let alone understood.

— Daya Krishna (1996, p. 149), *The Problematic and Conceptual Structure of Classical Indian Thought about Man, Society and Polity*

An individual's capacity to make sense of the world [...] presupposes the existence of collective traditions; but individuals must be able to experiment with these collective traditions by being allowed to live at their limits.

— Veena Das (1995, p. 116), *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective On Contemporary India*

Introduction and Invitation

Revisiting sociology calls for a foundational interrogation of the foundations of sociology—its Eurocentric formation and continued Euro-American domination. It necessitates dialogue with multiple traditions of social, political and philosophical thoughts from across the world including Indian traditions of thought and knowledge systems. However, this is not one of uncritical replacement of modern sociological knowledge with many problems with uncritical and valorised ethnocentrism of many kinds including such assertions by some that all the wisdom of the world is already in the Vedas. The challenge here is to pursue responsible and rigorous learning and to gain in-depth understanding of Indian traditions of social thought, sociological reflections and world traditions of knowledge including Euro-American traditions. It demands open and unbiased *sadhana* of learning of Indian traditions, Euro-American traditions, African, South American and other traditions of social thought. It also calls for rethinking Indian, Euro-American, African and other traditions and knowledge systems as plural and part of world traditions historically and contemporaneously. We need to realise India as *Bharatavarsha*—Bharata flowing through time, a dynamic and meditative movement with time (Devy, 2023; Giri, 2012, 2022). India, which is Bharat, is *Bharatavarsha* and is simultaneously Al-Hind. Thus, the dialogue between sociology and Indian traditions encourages us to realise India as Bharat Hind India. As it is part of the world, we need to realise India as Bharat Hind India Viswa—world. Such a plural realisation of India urges us to recognise the plural streams of Indian knowledge—Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Christian, Jain, indigenous and six philosophical streams of India. With this plural realisation of India and Indian knowledge systems, I discuss the dialogue between Upanishad and sociology, cultivate pathways of Upanishadic sociology, and examine the works of GC Pande, Ramashray Roy, JPS Uberoi and Chitta Ranjan Das, which can help us cultivate our own creative

theories and pathways of Bharat Hind India Viswa sociology and social sciences. It can also help us cultivate planetary conversations regarding themes, methods and theories of self, culture, society and the world.

From Bharatiya Sociology to Bharat Hind India Viswa Sociology

The contemporary discourse of Bharatiya sociology is linked to the current geopolitical and ideological valorisation of India that is Bharat. However, we need to recognise the limits of self-valorisation and strive to understand Bharat Hind India in its integral space-time linkage and vastitude. The contemporary discourse of Bharatiya sociology is also not isolated from the contemporary geopolitical valorisation of the nation-state model of looking at Indian society and history including a conscious or unconscious contemporary majoritarian slant in politics and ideological mobilisation of Indian society and thought along Hindutva lines.¹ Bharat, which is India, as it mentioned in our Constitution, is also Bharat Hind India Viswa. We need to recognise our singular names as integrally plural, and this plurality is not just a noun but also a verb—a meditative verb of co-realisation, where nouns and verbs challenge themselves for creative and critical co-realizations (cf. Giri, 2012).² Bharatiya sociology needs to draw upon and engage with the plural constitution of contemporary India historically and contemporaneously. Here, the discourse of the idea of India offered by political scientist Sunil Khilnani (1999) appears inadequate. Khilnani adopts a constructivist approach to India emerging out of post-independent Nehruvian strivings and imagination. However, post-independent India existed before British colonisation and struggles for freedom albeit in different forms. It is also not helpful to view India only in terms of argumentative traditions or key debates as in the works of thinkers such as Amartya Sen (2005, 2021) and Bhikhu Parekh (2016). We

need to understand India as an emerging journey of realisation and pluralisation emerging with the flow of space and time and moving interactions between and across regions and the wider national, transnational and planetary environments. In this journey, we realise that Bharat has simultaneous layers of presence of Bharat, Hind, India and the world. At one point, India was described as *Al-Hind* by the Arabs, and the complex interaction between Arabic streams and Indian socio-historical reality through travel, trade, transmission of ideas and religions, invasion, acculturation and establishment of empires, such as Mughal empire, is part of an undeniable reality of Bharatiya Indian reality today including what Khitimohan Sen calls the *jukta sadhana* (the joint *sadhana*) of Hindus and Muslims (see Sen, K. M., 2020; Sen, A., 2021). Similarly, the post-Mughal phase of Bharatiya society and history, when India came to be known as India, is also a living part of our contemporary Bharatiya Indian reality through difficult and complex histories of colonisation and struggles for freedom, Swaraj and world liberation. In all these phases, Bharat Hind India has been part of *Viswa*—world—in manifold ways with multi-dimensional interactions, sharing and co-learning including challenges of conflicts of traditions and disjunctions. Naming India as Bharat without a deep acknowledgement of our plural histories and co-constitutive contemporary present would not help us to cultivate pathways of creative and critical sociology of Bharat Hind India Viswa.

Bharat Hind India Viswa throughout histories has also manifested through creative regional formations, and all the regions of India have their own trajectories of regional, national and translational formations. For example, Kalinga in the eastern part of Bharat Hind India Viswa had maritime networks and cultural transactions with East Asia as the Tamil country. Kerala and Gujarat had and have vibrant links with West Asia. To understand Bharat historically and contemporaneously, we need to understand regional, national and transnational formations such as Kalinga

India South-East Asia Viswa formation. Contemporary regional transnational diaspora formations also can be viewed from this point of view. For Bharatiya Hind India Viswa sociology, we need to regionalise Bharatiya Hind India Viswa and realise manifold histories and contemporary dynamics of regional, national and transnational Bharat Hind India Viswa.³

Bharat Hind India Viswa Sociology and the Challenges of Love, Labour and Learning

Bharat Hind India Viswa sociology needs to go beyond the post-traditional telos of modernistic sociology, which assumes that modern society has already moved beyond tradition and that modernity (cf. Beck et al., 1994) has triumphed over tradition and engage with living traditions of Bharat Hind India Viswa. Here, our called-for sociology needs to draw upon plural traditions, religions and philosophies of Bharat Hind India Viswa. Contrary to the contemporary perception of Indian sociology being totally blind to Indian traditions such as the heritage of Sanskritic knowledge, many Indian sociologists of yesteryears have indeed drawn from sources such as Sanskritic knowledge (Beteille, 2004, p. 46)⁴ as others could have drawn from other classical sources such as Arabic, Persian, Tamil and Odia. Unfortunately, in contemporary Indian sociology, this is rare as many of us lack knowledge of Sanskrit and other classical languages. Many of us also lack a living knowledge of our own mother languages such as Odia and Hindi, and we do not write in our mother languages. When we write sociology in our mother languages, most of it is for undergraduate students lacking original insights and standards of world excellence. For a creative and critical practice of Bharat Hind India Viswa sociology, when we emphasise the significance of learning languages such as Sanskrit, we should not forget the way the contemporary discourse of Sanskrit was produced by the Orientalists and the colonial powers (cf. Das, 2004, pp. 2-3) and we

also should not forget our responsibility of learning our other classical languages of Bharat Hind India such as Tamil, Odia, Arabic and Persian and other world languages such as English, German, Chinese, Spanish, Russian and Japanese, as called for in National Education Policy. Contemporary Indian sociologists need to work on and with India and the world beyond their comfort zones of entrenched parochialism, and for this, we need to learn other mother languages of India other than the ones we have been born in and other world languages. The discourse of Bharatiya sociology without this integral love, labour and learning of plural life worlds and life words of India and the world cannot help us much to come out of our conditions of self-glorifying closures and entrenched parochialism where 99.99% of Indian social scientists do not do empirical work outside the 50-kilometre radius of where they are born (see Giri, 2003, 2012; Uberoi, 2019).

Dialogue of Traditions, Failures and the Calling of Transmodern Transmutations

Through our love, labour and learning of traditions, across India and the world, we can then revisit contemporary sociologies, including their dominant modernistic avatars, and open some of their assumptions to cross-cultural dialogues and co-creative transmutations. Sociology has to open itself to transcivilisational dialogues and planetary conversations as to the very themes of thinking about self, culture and society. So far, the globalisation of sociology has meant the globalisation of themes and methods of modernist sociology, which makes an easy equation between sociology and modernity. For sociologists such as Giddens, Beck and Beteille, sociology is a modern discipline. However, if sociology blindly follows the post-traditional teleology of modernity, how can it study varieties of forms of life—traditional, modern and postmodern? These varieties of forms of life exist not only in the so-called traditional societies such as India or Lapland but also in all

contemporary societies—India, Indonesia, Sweden, France, England, Germany, Singapore, China or the United States. To understand this, we need to move beyond the oppositional categories of tradition and modernity and the triumphant modernistic construction of post-traditional telos of dominant modernistic sociology and realise the significance of what Enrique Dussel (2017) calls transmodernity. Our contemporary condition is a condition of transmodernity, where we recognise the limits of both tradition and modernity such as modernistic silence on the violence of nation-state and traditionalist silence on annihilation of human dignity and social death through caste systems and systems of gender exclusion, sometimes citing texts such as Manu Sahmita as sources of legitimation (Athavale, 1975, p. 84). Realising the limits of both tradition and modernity, we in our contemporary world strive to cultivate self, society, nation and the world as creative formations of human and planetary flourishing, and for this, we need to learn from failures of both tradition and modernity including failures of traditional and modern India and modern West and not be foot soldiers of slogans of glorification of past and present (see Dreze & Sen, 2013).⁵ Bharat Hind India Viswa sociology needs to learn from failures of both tradition and modernity—India and the West—and take part in creative transmodern transmutations of self, culture, society, knowledge and the world.

This calls for dialogue across traditions and civilisations and planetary conversations. For example, in modernistic Euro-American sociology, power is considered an important part of the constitution of self, culture and society, but in Indian spiritual traditions, it is not only power but also *sraddha*—love and reverence for life. For instance, the Bhagavad Gita, one of the texts of life in Indian traditions, states: *Sraddha Mayo Ayam Purusha, Jo Jat Sraddha So Eba Sa*, meaning the Purusha—the human person—is characterised by *sraddha*. One is what one loves. These lines also offer some presuppositions about self, culture and society as the

presupposition about power offered by Max Weber and Michel Foucault and justification offered by Jurgen Habermas. Conversely, some of the most enchanting formulations about self, culture and society in Indian spiritual traditions fail to address and transform the sociological condition of power in the direction of radical democracy. Thus, what is called for is not a one-sided valorisation of certain aspects of one's culture such as spirituality from India and power from the West but a mutual confrontation of one's presuppositions and broadening our universe of discourse. This is an urgent task for Bharat Hind India Viswa sociology, which calls for the *sadhana* of love, labour and learning, which cannot be substituted by any quick salvation-guaranteeing sloganeering.

Bharat Hind India Viswa Sociology: G. C. Pande, Ramashray Roy, J.P.S. Uberoi and Chitta Ranjan Das

G. C. Pande is a creative historian, philosopher, poet and social thinker, who helps us cultivate pathways of Bharat Hind India Viswa sociology. For Pande, sociological knowledge is not just knowledge of society and the other but self and *Atman*. Pande's (1994) seminal work, *Bharatiya Samaj: Eitihāsik aur Tattvic Vivechana* (Indian Society: Historical and Theoretical Reflections) calls for careful consideration. For Pande, sociology deals with human beings and the knowledge of human life is linked to their *atmabodha*—self-knowledge—and, in fact, should be based on it. However, the self in Pande's thinking is not merely a societal being or even a reflective self—a la Giddens (1991)—but a soul, which is primarily transcendental and divine. It seems closer to the Heideggerian *Dasein* (cf. Dallmayr, 1993) and self in Charles Taylor's (1989) meditations on *Sources of Self*, and it can be creatively thought together with Alain Touraine's perspective of the sociology of subjects, which is not just a reproduction of the functional and the systemic logic of society (see Touraine, 1996, 2007). Drawing inspiration from Pande and Indian traditions, sociology becomes a

study of the work of soul in the field called society. Here, the soul is not a mere object of knowledge; it is also its subject. Pande makes clear that in a deeper sense, while being the subject of knowledge, it is also not totally subjective. Soul occupies an intermediary space between the subjective and objective dimensions of the seeking of knowledge. Even then, attention to the soul dimension of self and society can be trapped in what Daya Krishna calls an Atman-centric predicament without attending to soul's integral manifold relationships including the challenge of ethics, aesthetics and responsibility (see Krishna, 2018; Giri, 2018).

Pande discusses the implication of taking the *atmabodh* or sense of self of human beings seriously in the study of society. Once we turn to the inner world of persons, the evidence of the external world becomes less helpful. Here, Pande builds upon the distinction between *Purusha* and *Prakriti* in the Indian tradition and argues that the Being of the *Purusha*—the soul of the person—is not governed by the objective and norm-governed *Prakriti*. It is governed by the autonomy of consciousness, a consciousness characterised by *swatantrata* (independence) and *atmarthata* (consciousness, conscious of its own significance) (Pande, 1994, p. 27). Pande (1994) admits that the study of society clearly means studying the observable action of individuals in the field of society but the transcendental worldviews which inspire human beings is not a matter of direct observation.

In his book, Pande also presents an important discussion of *Sadhana* and *Bidhana* in the study of society and Indian society. Pande argues that society consists of two intertwining streams: one is the stream of *sadhana*—creative quest—and the other is the stream of *bidhana* or regulation (see Tagore, 1915). Modern sociology gives primacy to the world of social regulation epitomised by the Durkheimian principle that society consists of coercive social facts of which individuals are bonded/bound bearers. Pande here

urges us to realise the significance of *sadhana* in the constitution, functioning and transformation of societies. Over the years, social inquiry has reoriented itself from an emphasis on structure to a focus on practice (Bourdieu, 1977; Ortner, 1984). However, *sadhana* refers not merely to the logic of practice—a la Bourdieu; it refers to the world of ideal practice and a continued striving to realise this ideal in relationships. *Sadhana* is the practice of individuals, which is governed by an ideal vision of self and society. While transformation is outside the realm of modern sociological theory of practice, for example, as it is in the case of the work of Bourdieu (see Fox, 1984), it is at the heart of *sadhana*. Pande argues that Indian society should not only be studied through the prism of its world of regulations, such as the caste system, but also through its *sadhana*, such as its spiritual movements.

For Pande, taking *sadhana* seriously in the study of society means that we would have to attend to the distinction between *sreya* and *preya* in human life. *Sreya* refers to the world of ‘ought’, while *preya* refers to the world of pleasure. In modern sociology, *sreya* is the logical culmination of *preya*, whereas in the traditional perspective, *sreya* has autonomy of its own; it has a locus in the transcendental dimension of self, society and cosmos. Pande seems to suggest that *sreya* has a universal significance. However, how do individuals perceive *sreya* in their lives? Is *sreya* the same for different people? How do people struggle with their *preyas* as they seek for the realisation of *sreya* and *preya*? Keeping in view the transformation in the discourse of desire at the contemporary juncture, can we also find *preya* in the *sreya* and *sreya* in the *preya*?

Pande’s engagement with the theoretical and sociological in our paths of knowing encourages us to relate the empirical with trans-empirical, soul dimension with the sociological dimension and civil society with the moral and the spiritual, which resonates with contemporary thinkers such as Ramashray Roy, J.P.S. Uberoi

and Chitta Ranjan Das. In his *Beyond Ego's Domain: Being and Order in the Vedas*, Ramashray Roy raises fundamental challenges to the Eurocentric conceptualisation of the public without attention to the soul dimension:

[Public order is threatened by the split between] man's concern for his own good and that for the good of others. But can this threat to the public order be mitigated, if not completely eliminated, by the installation of the Polis? [...] For Aristotle, transcendence of self-interest is consequent upon participation in public affairs [but] the shortcomings associated with personal character cannot be expected to be rectified by the public realm, if it lacks necessary support from individuals reborn as citizens. To be reborn as a person who, rising above his self-interest, becomes attentive to and actively seeks to pursue collective good, is, then, to willingly accept a life dedicated to the cultivation of *dharma* (Roy, 1999, p. 5).

J. P. S Uberoi (1996) is a creative sociologist, philosopher and transdisciplinary thinker, who in his many works, including *Religion, Civil Society and the State*, cultivates pathways of a new sociological method that is not an extension of modernistic post-traditional telos and its one-dimensional Eurocentric secularist opposition between the religious and the secular. According to Uberoi (2003), civil society is not just an aspect of the secular, anti-religious and post-religious public sphere but is a product of socio-religious and spiritual reform, as well as revolutionary movements within and across religions in both Europe and India. For Uberoi, while in modern Western and Eurocentric conceptions of civil society, it is either heroes or victims who constitute the elementary structure of civil society; such a view is limiting as civil society is constituted by those who can resist unjust laws of state, religion, society and civil society through visions and pathways of loving self-sacrifice or martyrdom. Self-sacrifice here is part of renunciation, which challenges the logic of both hierarchy and equality such as Louis Dumont's construction of India as *Homo Hierarchicus* and the

West as *Homo Equalis* because they are individuals and social movements in both India and the West who challenge annihilating structuration of hierarchy in the so-called traditional societies and masquerading hierarchy in the name of equality as it is also part of the story of the so-called modern West which modernistic sociology has not fundamentally interrogated (Fuchs, 2024; Touraine, 2000). It can also be linked to Pande's pointer to self-discovery and realisation of self-*atmabodh*. For Uberoi, it is the martyrs who constitute civil society through their visions and practices of loving self-sacrifice. The elementary structure of martyrdom is "manifestly the non-dualism of loving self-sacrifice...but equally, it is the responsibility of 'arising to bear witness' on the duality of the true and false, religion and irreligion, liberation and bondage" (1996, p. 130). Furthermore, "The martyr is one who must love his enemy in some sense since he or she is the perfect witness (*saheed-ul-kamil*) that God, who at this time takes an interest in history and politics, does not want his servant to suppose, as the dualist would, that Satanism has any true independent existence, and so *dharmayudhya*, the righteous war, can be transformed into *satyagraha*" (1996, p. 124). What Uberoi writes about Antigone, the first martyr of the world, deserves our careful attention as it is linked with the project of martyrdom in both Gandhism and Sikhism and can connect to the power and tapasya with Divine Mother in Tantra and other Indian and world traditions:

I think that perhaps the world's first martyr of truth and non-violence was a Greek, Antigone, a European and a woman, best known to us as depicted by Sophocles, c.500 B.C. Antigone, who preceded both Socrates and Jesus, wanted the integration of religion and society to be upheld by her *freedom of conscience* and immemorial usage, the custom of civil society, while Creon, the King, wished his reasons of state to be separate from, and to override, both religion and society. I will not attempt to decide which of the two points of view is modern for Europe, but it is Antigone's that is closest to Sikhism and Indian modernity. She had established the truth that no power on earth can make the self do anything

against its nature, except indirectly confer martyrdom on it, which is also the basis of Gandhism in politics (Uberoi, 1996, p. 88).

Chitta Ranjan Das is a contemporary of G.C. Pande and, like Pande, is a deep seeker with foundations of Indian cultures and world civilisations. Like Pande writing his engagement with sociological thought in Hindi, Das is one of the earliest in post-independent India to write a treatise on sociology, social change and social development in Odia entitled *Samaja: Paribatana o Bikasha* (Society: Change and Development) (Das, 1966). Das had studied philosophy and other subjects at Santiniketan and had studied Psychology and Cultural Anthropology at Copenhagen University in Denmark. In his *Samaja: Paribartana of Bikasha* (Society: Development and Change), Das looks at sociological method and theorising from both Indian and Western perspectives, engaging with both, finding their limitations and need for creative works beyond. Das challenges us to realise that thinkers in Indian traditions while engaging with texts and life worlds have never just reproduced what is written there in the text or what is accepted as customary or *sadachara* (good conduct) as spoken about in *Manu Sahmita*. From Buddha to Adi Shankara to Gandhi and Bionba, Indian thinkers have offered radical reinterpretations of meaning and pathways of existing texts and pathways of new *sadhana* and struggle needed, and it is these which have kept Indian traditions of thought and *sadhana* alive and not just reproduction of ossified structures of texts and traditions.

Almost forty-five years after his book on sociology and social change in Odia, Das (2010) has also gifted us a book in the field of psychology in Odia called *Byakti o Byaktitya* (Person and Personality). Like his sociology book, this is not merely an academic psychology book as it brings together his lifelong maturation in the fields of philosophy, literature, sociological studies, historical studies and spiritual seeking. In this work, he urges us to recognise

that personality is an emergent wholeness in man that emerges as part of an incessant quest; it is not to adapt to things as they are especially when society and external environment are not conducive to the realisation of his or her potential. To be a person is not just to adapt to a society if it is sick and pathological but to try to change it. Chitta Ranjan challenges the acceptable definition of normality, pathology and therapy. Building upon Abraham Maslow's concept of metapathology and higher grumbling, he urges us to grumble at the existing ugliness, indignity and desecration of life. Chitta Ranjan's call for a new realisation of personality, which would also contribute to the realisation of society as a healthy wholeness by first realising its pathology and sickness also finds a resonance in many creative thinkers, for example, in the work of Axel Honneth of the critical theory tradition in Europe (Das, 2007, pp. 34-37).

Das's work points to many transversal conversations across boundaries, for example, between Indian critical thinking and critical theory of European traditions such as the Frankfurt School.⁶ Das' undergraduate thesis in 1948 was on Spinoza in which he finds cross-currents of interactions between the Bhagavad Gita, Buddhism and the philosophy of Spinoza (Das, 2009). Over the next 74 years until his passing away in 2011, Das engaged with deep thinkers from Europe and around the world and wrote on Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo, Swami Vivekananda, Nabakrushna Choudhury, Biswanath Patnaik—leader of the *Bhu Satyagraha* (land Satyagraha movement)—and others. He translated works from across the world to Odia translating Boris Pasternak, Carl Gjellerup—the Nobel laureate Danish writer of *Pilgrim Kamanita*, Sri Aurobindo, Gandhi, Tagore and others to Odia (see Giri & Marquez, 2020).

For contemporary practices of Bharat Hind India Viswa sociology, we need to walk and meditate with creative works of seekers such as Das and traditions of radical and revolutionary

interpretations of texts and life worlds as exemplified by Buddha, Sankara, Gandhi, Vinoba, Ashgar Ali Engineer (2011) and Maulana Wahiduddin Khan (2014). In terms of sociological method, for Das, we should not be slaves of unreflective methods—Indian or Western, what Das calls methodolatry, the idolatry of method. Das (2009, pp. 577–578) tells us:

Methods, in whatever we study, pertain to what has come now to be known as methodology. But the importance of following a methodology should not tempt us what may be a methodolatry. Methods are useful, but they are not sacrosanct. Science degenerates to scientism, if we are almost morbidly keen about prescribed methods, according to Viktor Frankl, the logotherapist. In the same way Frankl seems to warn us about psychologism, sociologism and the like. Thus, when one happens to go over-serious about methods, one does run the risk of deviating into grim sociologism. Then methods become frontal and conspire to take us away from our real footings.

The works of G.C. Pande, Ramashray Roy, J.P.S. Uberoi and Chitta Ranjan Das which also can be brought in conversation with border crossing works of Daya Krishna,⁷ J.N. Mohanty and Veena Das (space does not permit further discussion about their works here) provide us rich reference points for dialogues and interlinked further critical conversations on self, society, nature and method. Bharatiya sociology as part of Bharat Hind India Viswa sociology needs to engage with such dialogues and contemporary rethinking and reconstruction of elements such as self-knowledge and self-validity as simultaneously co-knowledge and mutual validity through a series of creative and critical steps of interpretative validity and ecology of trust of science and spirituality in our communities of discourse, learning and seeking.

Upanishadic Sociology

Michel Foucault (1969) in his influential *Archaeology of Knowledge* talks about how the archaeology of knowledge involves studying texts in the archives and interrogating the monuments that have been erected in the name of knowledge and power which also challenges us to ask ourselves whether we are consciously or unconsciously perpetrating acts of monumentalisation in the name of Bharatiyata and Bharatiya sociology. However, Foucault's archaeology of knowledge does not involve engagement with movements. We need a new archaeology of knowledge that involves engagement with not only texts and monuments but also movements, and these movements are multi-dimensional. These are movements of ideas and political and spiritual movements. They are also movements of consciousness. We need a new archaeology of knowledge, which is the archaeology of life consisting of engagement with texts, monuments and movements, which also involves movements of love, labour and learning across different layers and realities of Bharat Hind India Viswa.

Conversations bring us near as we sit together and learn together. This is the spirit of Upanishad, sitting near and conversing together. However, this sitting near is not only physical and literal. We can speak with each other in spirit and heart even if we are not able to sit together physically. Sitting near creates a luminal space beyond the spaces of familiar hierarchies, and it becomes a space time where what is far becomes near. For Sri Aurobindo, Veda does not refer only to the existing Veda but the very practice and *sadhana* of knowing, which helps us realise Brahman and his or her manifold manifestations (Sri Aurobindo, 1997). Similarly, we can recognise Upanishad as referring not only to the existing Upanishads but also to experience and knowledge created when we sit and learn together, which is also a space and time of intimate and intuitive speech and thinking as Debasish Banerjee (2020), a contemporary

philosopher and scholar of Sri Aurobindo and the Upanishads, helps us realise. Banerjee (p. xxi) also states: “But this sitting close was not merely a shared subcultural identity but a being minor in two deeper ways (1) a sustained countercultural critique of doxic reductions of the Veda at the service of materialistic ends or social hierarchies; and (2) language devices to sidestep such reductions, by cleaving close to the goal of truth-experience”. Thus, the Upanishadic critique of hierarchic ossification of the Vedic in thought and social systems and cultivation of a new relationship with language, self and society where it helps us realise our potential for co-realisation with mutual seeking of beauty, dignity and dialogue rather than be imprisoned in hierarchies of power, caste classification, rituals and totalising and exclusionary productions of Bharat and Bharatiya knowledge is helpful here. The anti-hierarchical thrust of the Upanishads can help us relate to such movements of thinking as discourse ethics of Jurgen Habermas (1990), where by engaging in mutual discussion and argumentation, familiar institutions of society turn into “instances of problematic justice. Habermasian discourse ethics does need listening and spiritual self-cultivation and a new practice of language—intimate and intuitive—and here, it can learn from the Upanishadic *sadhana* with language, self and society, which also resonates with pre-Socratic journey and cultivation with language where it is not just propositional and logical but contemplative—engaged with realisation of a contemplative living and co-existence rather than logical arguments alone (Banerjee, 2020). At the same time, the Upanishadic can also be enriched by a critique of existing organisation of power and knowledge, which Habermasian discourse ethics challenges us to realise as does Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge.

The Upanishadic conversations create spaces and times of intimate and intuitive speech, conversation, listening and meditative thinking, which helps us create and realise new

experience and knowledge with and for self, other, culture and the world. Sociology as conversation cultivating such Upanishadic visions and practices thus becomes an Upanishad, an Upanishad of not only society but also of life. Sri Aurobindo states that “The Upanishads are epic hymns of self-knowledge and world-knowledge and God-knowledge” (Sri Aurobindo, 1971, p. 4). For Sri Aurobindo, the poetic sentences of Upanishads are full of “revealing power and suggestive thought-color that discover a whole infinite through a finite image” (p. 5). Some of the prose Upanishads offer “vivid narrative”, which can resonate with anthropological and sociological practice of description, but they also offer glimpses of “that extraordinary stir and movement of spiritual inquiry and passion for the highest knowledge which made the Upanishads possible” (p. 12). An Upanishadic sociology can combine sociological practices of description, explanation and understanding with a spiritual quest understood in an open way and not in a dogmatic or in a pejorative sense (see Giri, 2013).

Upanishadic Sociology and Planetary Conversations

An Upanishadic sociology creates fields and circles of learning and encounters in which we take part as seekers and learners rather than as carriers of *apriori* hierarchies of knowledge such as Eurocentric privileging of modern scientific knowledge and neglect of knowledge and epistemic and ontological traditions from other parts of the world (see de Sousa Santos, 2014). Upanishadic sociology interrogates and transforms hierarchies of knowledge and creates conditions and movements where we all interested seekers and learners take part in conversations as equal and dignified partners. This is the horizontal aspect of conversations, which is also accompanied by a vertical dimension, where as partners of and participants in conversations, we are not afraid to bring some of the unique emphases of our initial cultural,

philosophical, sociological and intellectual traditions to our fields and circles of conversations. For example, modern Western epistemology and modern sociological method have given primacy to reason, but it does not give equal importance to intuition; however, Edmund Husserl, the father of the phenomenological movement, challenges us to understand the work of “living intuition” in our lives (see Mohanty, 2002). Also, in Indian intellectual traditions, there is an emphasis on intuition and not only on reason as, for example, in the works of Sri Aurobindo. Thus, while the horizontal aspect of conversation encourages us to take part in a conversation with horizontal equality and terms of discourse such as reason, the vertical aspect of conversation challenges us to bring to our conversation and consciousness those aspects, which are not recognised enough in our dominant terms of conversation such as intuition and cultivate it further (cf. Chimakonam 2017)

Concluding Thoughts

The contemporary move towards *Bharatiya* sociology is an acknowledgement of the crisis of contemporary modes of sociological knowledge in India and the world, which borders on conditions of hopelessness in terms of existing conditions and discourses of knowledge, power and institutional bottlenecks and irrelevance (see Thakur, 2024). In this context, our *sadhana* of love, labour and learning and conversations within and across borders create spaces and times of hope. This hope is ecological rather than egological as it arises from ecology of knowledge of Bharat Hind India Viswa and ecologies of knowledges and experiments of the world. Our hope with India and the world arises out of our realisation that we are part of Bharat Hind India Viswa and with all our challenges in societies and histories, we have not been bereft of creative and critical *sadhana* and struggles of re-interpretation, reconstructions and revolutionary transformations of our ways of

knowing, being and organisation of self, culture, society, nation, state and our interlinked world.

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Endnotes

¹ In cultivating pathways of Bharatiya sociology, it is helpful to keep in mind what Veena Das calls dangers of gatekeeping concepts, which produce aprior totalising frames and logics of authenticity:

The editorial advisors to the *Companion* and I did not conceptualize it as a project that could represent a national tradition but rather as a work that could delineate the tensions and contradictions between different stakes that scholars, administrators, and others had in the study of Indian society. It is the conversations and even the clash in these perspectives that shaped the understanding of social phenomena in India and contributed to the development of theory in these disciplines. In planning the *Companion*, I specifically rejected any gatekeeping concepts that would recognize only certain kinds of questions or concepts as ‘authentic.’ I believe that forms of power certainly shaped knowledge in the social sciences in India but public debate, translation between different kinds of concerns, and innovations resulting from conversations between Indian scholars and their counterparts in other countries, also played a major role in shaping the sociology and social anthropology in India (Das, 2004, p. 1)

² Here what G. N. Devy (2024, p. 4) writes deserves our careful consideration:

It is necessary, therefore, to be mindful that the ‘idea of India’ cannot but be a plural noun, with the range of plurality increasing as one tends to comprehend India over increasingly larger durations of time. However, there is a certain advantage in casting the ‘idea of India’ over an extended period, for such a perspective facilitates a clearer understanding of its long and seemingly continuous trajectory.

³ Scholars such as Arjun Appadurai (1986) had long ago raised the issue of centre and periphery in anthropological theorising. Dipesh Chakraborty (2000) in this context had urged us to provincialise Europe, but the project of provincialising Europe is not enough, and we need to find universal and transversal theoretical implications of our so-called provinces. It is not enough to provincialise Europe; we should also provincialise and regionalise India. We need to undertake a journey of simultaneous provincialisation, regionalisation and transversalisation of India, which is different from the dominant discourse of universalisation, which suffers from Eurocentric closure. Here, we can draw inspiration from current initiatives such as the People’s Linguistic Survey of India cultivated by activist theorists such as Ganesh Devy (2018).

⁴ Here what Andre Beteille, a doyen of contemporary Indian and world sociology, who himself has not necessarily built upon multiple traditions of India writes deserves our careful consideration:

Sociologists and anthropologists, whether Indian or western, have sought to integrate the findings of classical studies with their work on contemporary India much more widely and actively than has been the case

with sociological studies of contemporary western societies. Among the outstanding names are G.S. Ghurye, N.K. Bose, Irawati Karve, Louis Dumont. Several prominent members of the first and second generation Indian sociologists—Benoy Sarkar, G.S. Ghurye, K.P. Chattopadhyaya, K.M. Kapadia, and Irawati Karve—were either trained as Sanskritists or well versed in classical literature. They tried to use their familiarity with that literature in their investigation of contemporary forms of family, marriage, kinship, clan, caste, sect, and religion. In European and, even more in American sociology, tradition is a specialized topic of inquiry [...]; in the sociology of India, it features as a general concern in the study of many different topics (Beteille, 2004, p. 46).

⁵ Here, what Habermas (1998, p. 13) writes is helpful:

History may at best be a critical teacher who tells us how we ought *not* to do things. Of course, it can advise in this way only if we admit to ourselves that we have failed. In order to learn from history, we must not allow ourselves to push unsolved problems aside or repress them; we must remain open to critical experiences—otherwise we will not even perceive historical events as counter-evidence, *as proof of shattered expectations*.

⁶ In his reflections on D. P. Mukherjee, S. P. Nagendra (1996) explored the possible resonance between Mukherjee's critique and that of the Frankfurt School.

⁷ Daya Krishna (2018) calls for engaging with both the Atman-centric and socio-centric perspectives in the study of society.

Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS) was founded in 1971 by Malcolm S. Adiseshiah. It studies development problems of India, with a special focus on Tamilnadu. Since 1977, MIDS is a national institute funded jointly by the Indian Council of Social Science Research (ICSSR) and the Government of Tamilnadu.



Madras
Institute of
Development
Studies

79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar
Adyar, Chennai 600020, India
Phone: 044-2441 1574 / 2589 / 9771
pub@mids.ac.in | www.mids.ac.in