

# Sociology and Common Sense

Andre Beteille

*Besides the empirical grounding in careful observation and description of facts, sociology as a discipline is characterised by its rigorous search for interconnections among different domains of society and its systematic use of comparisons. These preoccupations make sociology anti-utopian in its claims and anti-fatalistic in its orientation, and distinguish its 'generalised' knowledge from localised commonsensical knowledge.*

SOCIOLOGY in contemporary India is a loosely-defined field of intellectual activity. There are pervasive disagreements about its aims, its scope, its approach, its methods, its concepts and its very subject matter. Many would say that it is at best a subject, and not quite - or not yet - a discipline. There are professors of sociology who not only disapprove of the subject as it exists but are doubtful about the very possibility of its existence; and there are laymen with only a passing acquaintance with its vocabulary who speak confidently about its aims, objectives, methods and procedures. If I began to give an account of the unsolicited advice I have received about what kinds of sociological studies I should undertake and how I should conduct them from civil servants, bank managers, engineers, social workers, even society ladies, I would hardly have time for anything else. No sensible citizen would dream of offering that kind of advice to a chemist, a geologist or even an economist; sociology seems by contrast to be grist to everybody's mill. Part of the ambiguity and uncertainty characteristic of the subject arises from the fact that it touches the everyday experience of the ordinary person at so many points; and it often appears so close to common sense that there is an inevitable tendency to use the one in place of the other.

On this occasion I shall confine myself largely to academic sociology or the discipline that is pursued under that name in the universities and institutes of research. This is not to suggest that the subject can have no place outside of academic institutions. Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, two of the most influential sociologists of the 19th century, had little to do with universities, and Max Weber who came after them did much of his work outside the university. At the same time, sociology has been a recognised academic discipline in India for more than 70 years, and there has been a virtual explosion of the subject in universities and research institutes since independence. It may be useful to look at the work being done in these centres of study and research before enquiring into the relationship of the subject to the wider intellectual currents in society.

I wish to argue that for all its own unresolved, and in some cases unresolvable, differences, sociology is **distinct** from

common sense. It has a body of **concepts, methods and data**, no matter how loosely held together, for which **common sense** of even the most acute and well-informed kind **cannot** be a **substitute**. For one thing, **sociological knowledge aims to be general if not universal**, whereas **common sense is particular and localised**. Educated, middle-class Bengalis, like other educated or uneducated people any where, tacitly assume that their common sense is common sense as such or the common sense of mankind. An important contribution of sociology has been to show **that common sense is in fact highly variable, subject to the constraints of time and place as well as other, more specifically social constraints**.

To say that sociology is distinct from common sense is not to suggest that it should seek deliberately to be arcane or esoteric. Because it is so difficult to disengage oneself from common sense in the analysis of the human condition, and particularly in the study of one's own society, professional sociologists are frequently tempted to take recourse to needless conceptual and verbal sleight of hand. This is an occupational hazard that must be kept under constant scrutiny. N K Bose used to say that there are two kinds of scientists, those who make complex things simple and those who make simple things complex, and that his preference was for the former. We must surely deplore the mystification of the simple through the display of technical virtuosity; but we must also recognise that common sense is not always successful, by its own unaided effort, in making complex things simple. Let me make one thing clear: when I say that sociology should be pursued as a serious intellectual discipline, I do not mean at all that it should seek to trump common sense by adopting an inflated style. I am only too conscious of the fact that sociological writing tends to be cluttered with the needless use of heavy academic slang.

Thus, sociology has to steer an uneasy course between two equally unfruitful alternatives; submergence in the common sense of the scholar's own environment, and absorption in a narrow and self-satisfied technical virtuosity unconnected with the substance of social enquiry. I would like to emphasise that nothing will be gained by abandoning either common sense or the

cultivation of technical skills. Just as common sense is full of snares and pitfalls for the unwary sociologist, so too technical virtuosity becomes a distraction when pursued as an end in itself. In what follows I shall have little to say about technical virtuosity, my main concern for the present being with the inter-penetration of sociological knowledge and common sense.

I would like to illustrate the nature of the problem by referring, very briefly, to my experience as a teacher of sociology at the postgraduate level over the last three decades. The question with which I wish to start is why sociology is such a difficult subject to teach. This may appear as an odd question since, compared to the natural sciences or even economics, sociology is regarded by the majority of students as a soft subject chosen principally by those for whom other, more attractive or more difficult options are closed. To be sure, the routine teaching of sociology at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels goes on throughout the country without much apparent exertion from either teachers or students. What I have in mind, on the other hand, is teaching as a serious and unremitting effort to open the mind to new facts and new arguments, and the unsuspected connections among them.

Again, I have in mind not only teachers who are prepared to make the effort, but also students among whom a certain interest in the subject may be presumed to exist. The most serious obstacle to the concentration and deepening of the interest is that the better equipped students soon begin to wonder what there is to learn in sociology except a series of terms and concepts; and, in the sociology of India, a variety of observations on village, caste, joint family, class, community, urbanisation, industrialisation, modernisation, and so on, with which they are already familiar to a greater or lesser extent. Sociology does not have the kind of formal theory that can be readily communicated by the conscientious teacher to an attentive student. It does not confine itself to a body of facts delimited by space and time, as do geography and history to a large extent. It deals with both arguments and facts, but the connections among them often appear loose, open and slippery.

In the absence of a clear and established framework, discussion and argument tend to wander in every direction. This may be a good thing in a research seminar, but it makes both teaching and learning extremely difficult in the classroom. In a research seminar, the discussion has to be confined at least within the boundaries of the topic specified. In MA or undergraduate teaching, on the other hand, one can expect a change of gear from one course to another and, even within the same course, from one topic to another. While students might easily comprehend, item by item, what is being taught or explained, it is often very difficult for them to grasp the connections among the items. It sometimes appears that every argument as well as its opposite is true; and facts can be marshalled, without too much trouble, to support contrary theories.

In my experience, students find it hard to cope with a subject in which the teacher is unable to provide that one correct answer to each important question, whether it is about class, or kinship, or religion, or politics. The laws of physics and, up to a point, the facts of history, no matter how complex or detailed, can generally be stated in terms that can be judged as either right or wrong. In sociology, the situation is often different, with greater room for ambiguity and disagreement. Students who can write fluently use their common sense and a superficial acquaintance with names and opinions to cobble together reasonably persuasive answers. Others who may have struggled with the subject but are handicapped by poverty of expression produce answers that are weak, confused and meandering. The examiner is often unsure whether he is giving credit for a well-written essay or for a good knowledge of the subject. Exactly the same problem arises in evaluating manuscripts for journal articles or books; many a trivial article gets published because it is written in good prose, where one with a more substantial argument, but badly presented, gets rejected.

Among students, the use of common sense (and fluency in language) is most in evidence in papers dealing with India. After all, every Indian student knows something about caste, class, joint family and Hinduism, and if he has some mental agility, he can write a plausible essay on any of these topics without being too far wrong. But such a student soon finds himself out of his depth when he has to deal with such topics as kinship in Africa, or religion in Indonesia, or social mobility in France. Hence I am ill at ease with the patriotic zeal of those scholars who seek to confine the teaching of sociology to materials relating largely to India. No student can learn how to construct a proper sociological argument unless he is taught to handle empirical material relating to every type of

society, his own society as well as other societies.

The most acute pedagogical problem in university departments of sociology in India is to integrate what is taught under sociological theory with what is taught under the sociology of India. So far as I know, there are courses devoted to both major areas in all postgraduate departments of sociology in the country, and so far as I can judge, they are nowhere integrated in even a moderately satisfactory way. I point only to the gravity of the problem without seeking to propose any easy solution to it. The path chosen by most Indian sociologists as they move towards maturity is to steadily jettison the general equipment of sociological knowledge in order to give their undivided attention to the problems of Indian society. I, on the other hand, believe that by turning away from the accumulated concepts, methods and data of sociology in general, we will in the long run only impoverish and not enrich the sociology of India.

In the last 40 years there has been a slow but steady displacement of interest away from the general concepts, methods and theories of sociology towards an enhanced concentration of attention on the current problems of society and politics in India. Again, I would like to draw on my personal experience to make a point. Thirty years ago, when I went to lecture to students of sociology in universities outside Delhi, my hosts were quite happy to hear me speak on general topics: theories of evolution, types of lineage system, relations between status and power, and so on. Now they mostly wish to hear about reservations, caste politics, communalism and secularism.

Virtually the only active intellectual contact professional sociologists have with new developments in theory and method is through their teaching of students at the MA and to some extent the BA (Hons) levels; those who work in specialised institutes of research have largely to do without even that. Research seminars are generally, if not invariably, on topics dealing with India, and there is often a conspicuous absence of a broader comparative or theoretical interest. Then, there are the large annual conferences: these are now devoted almost entirely to current affairs, and the less newsworthy features of even Indian society and culture, and their underlying structures, receive scant attention.

I should now disclose the real reason for my anxiety. It is not only the civil servants, the bank managers and the engineers who present their common sense as sociology. Many professional sociologists do just the same, although they naturally try to give their common sense an air of authority by dressing it up in their own kind of jargon.

Sociology has always and everywhere maintained some concern for current affairs, but that concern does not necessarily drive out other, more academic interests in topics that are remote from the obsessions of newspaper editors and columnists. N K Bose maintained a lifelong interest in the distribution of material traits; G S Ghurye wrote on dual organisation, on 'gotra' and 'charana' of Indian costumes and on ancient cities; Irawati Karve wrote a book on kinship organisation in India. Such topics have a marginal place in the many regional and national seminars and conferences organised by sociologists today; they have largely been driven out by what are believed to be more socially relevant subjects.

There is no doubt that the preoccupation among Indian sociologists, regularly expressed at seminars and conferences, is with the appropriateness of the existing body of sociological knowledge to the understanding of Indian society and culture. These discussions are not so much about methods and techniques of investigation as about the presuppositions of sociological knowledge and about the nature of understanding and explanation. They tend to be presented in highly abstract and speculative terms, and rarely lead to any concrete or workable propositions. Alternative approaches to the study of Indian society can hardly produce results unless they are linked to the disciplined practice of a craft; no new approach has emerged in science and scholarship from the mere desire to have a new approach.

## II

Today, at the close of the 20th century, it is impossible to practice sociology as a serious academic discipline without drawing on the vast reservoir of sociological concepts, methods and theories created by scholars over the last hundred years. This has been mainly, though not solely, the work of western scholars, and like any accumulated body of knowledge, it contains much that is mistaken, distorted and obsolete. Therefore, in the pursuit of his work, the practising sociologist, whether in the west or in India, has to maintain an alert and critical attitude to it. But that is far from saying that he can set it all aside in the hope that a completely new framework can be created *ex nihilo* by some as yet unrecognised genius nourished by the Indian air. Surely, there is room for an Indian perspective, or, better, several Indian perspectives, but to be viable, they have to address themselves to society and culture everywhere, and not just to Indian society and culture.

The builders of modern sociology, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber and others, took the whole of human society in its diverse and changing forms as their subject of study,

even when their primary attention was devoted to their own society. To be sure, their observations on other societies were limited, one-sided and often misleading. But they believed, one and all, that the disciplined application of the sociological method would contribute much to the understanding of their own society; and that this understanding could be deepened and broadened by systematic comparisons between their societies and other societies. They were all convinced that common sense was not enough to reach the understanding they sought, and that they had to fashion new tools of enquiry and analysis to attain their objective.

The sociologist who did most to lay bare the illusion of understanding created by common sense was Emile Durkheim. He argued tirelessly that the systematic investigation of a subject was not possible unless the investigator freed himself from his preconceptions of it. These preconceptions, shaped by a limited experience, are what generally pass for common sense in a given society; they are not only often wrong, but act as impediments to the examination of the available and relevant facts.

Early in his career Durkheim gave a brilliant demonstration of the superiority of his approach over that of common sense through his study of suicide.<sup>1</sup> His argument was that suicide was a social fact whose forms and patterns could not be explained by the known facts of human psychology. Now that we have behind us Durkheim's study and the many others to which it gave rise, this perhaps does not seem a great revelation any longer. But when it first appeared, it did seem startling to discover that social causes were behind what common sense might lead one to believe to be the supremely private or individual act. As is well known, Durkheim pursued systematically the distinction between the *incidence* and the *rate* of suicide, and brought together a wealth of data to show that suicide rates varied systematically between societies, and between religious, occupational and other groups within the same society. Further, while suicide rates were on the whole highly stable, they were also subject to fluctuations due to the operation of social and economic causes which he was able to identify. One of his remarkable findings was that suicide rates go up significantly not only after an economic crash but also after an economic boom.

Not all of Durkheim's observations on suicide have stood the test of time,<sup>2</sup> but that is not the point. The point is that when he had an important insight that appeared to go against common sense, he decided, as a sociologist, to test that insight by systematically assembling a large body of data, and applying to the data, concepts and methods that may also be applied to other domains of life in other parts of the world.

One of Max Weber's most fundamental ideas by which sociology has been enriched everywhere is that the consequences of human action are rarely the same as the intentions of the actors, and that sometimes the two are diametrically opposite. One can say again that it is no great discovery that our actions often miscarry and end in ways that we least expected. But in science and scholarship what counts is not just the original insight, but the significance of the domain to which it is applied, and the methods and data by which the insight is tested. Weber's application of the insight in exploring the relationship between religious values and economic action has produced a rich harvest of detailed and systematic studies by generations of sociologists the world over.<sup>3</sup>

Here I would like to make a brief observation on Weber's approach to religion, partly because of its intrinsic importance and partly because it has been frequently misrepresented. The prevailing view among social theorists until Weber's time was that, for good or evil, religion had served as a source of social stability. This was Marx's view, and because he believed change to be both necessary and desirable, he assigned a negative value to religion. Durkheim, on the other hand, assigned a positive value to the same phenomenon since he believed that stability was essential for social well-being. Weber's originality lay in his investigating, systematically and with a sharp eye for detail, the profound changes brought about in economic life by the breakthrough in religion. In his view, it was neither the commitment to ideal values nor the demands of material existence, but the tension between the two that was the true source of change in society.

### III

What I have tried to stress so far is that sociology is a disciplined and specialised activity in which the role of originality should not be exaggerated. It is a craft that needs patience and care, and a long apprenticeship to acquire. Its concepts and methods are not things that any intelligent person can construct on his own in order to satisfy a passing intellectual urge. Having drawn attention to the empirical grounding of the discipline in the careful observation and description of facts, I would now like to make a few remarks on two of the fundamental preoccupations of sociology, its rigorous search for interconnections among the different domains of society, and its systematic use of comparisons.

Sociology is not about economic life, or political life, or religious life, or domestic life; it is not about class, or about caste, or about community; it is not about the ideal of equality or the practice of inequality. It is about the interconnections among all these and other aspects of social life. This

constitutes what some have been pleased to call the 'functionalist bias' of sociology. While freely admitting to that bias in my own work, I must point out that it does not in any way rest on the presupposition that the interrelations in society are harmonious rather than inharmonious, or stable rather than unstable. It is for this reason that I speak simply of the 'search for interconnections' and not of a 'holistic approach'; for the latter incorporates ideas about a total social structure with which I am out of sympathy. Sociology in the last few decades has been invaded by a kind of mindless Marxism for whose adherents the word 'functionalist' has acted like a red rag to the bull. On the other hand, it is through a long chain of sociological arguments that the very fruitful distinction has emerged between 'social integration' and 'system integration',<sup>4</sup>

The search for interconnections is laborious and time-consuming, and it has its own procedures: survey research, statistical analysis, participant-observation and case studies. It does not always or even generally lead to spectacular results, but meaningful and unsuspected connections can be reached only by sifting through masses of connections that are trivial and easily accessible to common sense. It is in this way that the great advances in sociological knowledge have been made, generally incrementally and only occasionally by a dramatic breakthrough.

The careful and detailed examination of interrelations has shown that sometimes economic factors were important where they were not suspected to be, and at other times the ties of kinship and marriage were seen to have unforeseen consequences for various areas of social life. However, the belief that one single factor or set of factors, whether economic or religious, holds the key to all the interconnections in society has been a hindrance rather than a help in sociological enquiry. Sociology has never been at peace with either the religious interpretation of the world or the materialist interpretation of history.

Patient and systematic studies by sociologists have brought to light many aspects of Indian society where things are not what they seem. I can refer here to only a few examples, and that too very briefly. Shortly after independence a whole range of village monographs began to be published by trained anthropologists, and these have altered our perception of rural India and Indian society in general. M N Srinivas formulated the important distinction between the 'book-view' and the 'field-view' of Indian society,<sup>5</sup> emerging as the leading proponent of the latter, and repeatedly drawing attention to the errors of the former.

Srinivas's most seminal contribution was his exposure of the misrepresentation of caste among educated Indians. He attacked

the conception of caste as a rigid and inflexible system based on the division of Hindu society into the four 'varnas'. He maintained, "The varna-model has produced a wrong and distorted image of caste"<sup>6</sup> He was able to show that far from being absolutely rigid and inflexible, the caste system accommodated distinct forms of social mobility. Further, by drawing attention away from vama to 'jati', he was able to see more clearly than the political commentators of the day that the role of caste was increasing rather than declining in Indian politics.

My own detailed study conducted in Tanjore district more than 30 years ago addressed itself to the view then widely prevalent that the Indian village was a 'little republic.'<sup>7</sup> had little difficulty in showing that the village in which I lived and worked for nearly a year was riddled with inequality and conflict; and my reading of village monographs by other social anthropologists, both Indian and foreign, and my general training as a sociologist convinced me that what I had observed and recorded was general rather than exceptional.

Similarly, the work of my colleague, A M Shah has exposed, through the systematic analysis of a wealth of empirical material, some common misperceptions about changes in the Indian family system," These misperceptions arise partly from a confused conception of the joint family, and partly from insufficient attention to the available evidence. Shah's work shows that the proportion of 'joint-family households' never greatly exceeded that of <sup>4</sup>nuclear-family households'; that in most sectors of contemporary Indian society, urban as well as rural, there are still many joint-family households; and that the average size of the household in the Indian population has remained roughly the same in the last hundred years.

Despite the rich harvest of studies on practically every aspect of Indian society and culture, there is a striking shortage of studies by Indian sociologists of other societies and cultures. Not only that: in their empirical research, most Indian sociologists tend to confine their attention to their regions of origin; Bengalis to West Bengal, Gujaratis to Gujarat, and Tamilians to Tamil Nadu. It is unfortunate that Indian sociologists have taken so little advantage of the comparative method, because it is in the use of that method mainly that sociology scores over common sense.

Since I attach a great deal of importance to the comparative method to the discussion of which I have devoted time and effort,<sup>9</sup> I cannot pass it by without a few brief observations. It is useful to begin with what Durkheim said on the subject. "Comparative sociology", he observed, "is not a special branch of sociology; it is sociology itself".<sup>10</sup>

The sociologist acquires the habit of comparison so that no matter which activity or institution he is examining, he brings to it insights from the study of similar activities and institutions in other societies and cultures. Nor is it merely a matter of habit; rules of procedure have been devised, tested and refined as an essential part of comparative study. There is nothing in the comparative method as such that requires every investigator to cover the entire range of societies, near and distant. As Durkheim put it, comparisons "can include facts borrowed either from a single and unique society, from several societies of the same species, or from several distinct social species".

India, with its large and varied population, offers rich possibilities for comparisons within its own confines. I will conclude this section by referring to two examples of comparisons from my own work, one very restricted and the other very wide in scope. The first was a taluk by taluk comparison in Tanjore district of the relations between the cleavages arising from the ownership, control and use of land, and those arising from caste;<sup>12</sup> it deepened my own understanding of the peculiar combination of factors that leads to class formation in agriculture. The second is a long-standing comparative study of positive discrimination in India and affirmative action in the US; it has enriched my understanding of the distinction between rights and policies, and of the relationship between distributive justice and institutional well-being.<sup>13</sup>

Common sense is not only localised, being bound by time, place, class, community, gender, and so on; it is also unreflective since it does not question its own origins and presuppositions, or at least does not do so deliberately and methodically. As an intellectual discipline, sociology cannot be a creature of common sense; but that does not mean that it should turn its back on it. Our sociology is influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the common sense which is a part of our social environment: to what extent is that common sense in its turn influenced by sociology? Sociology will count for little as an intellectual discipline if its insulation from common sense means that it merely reproduces itself, and sociologists write only for each other. Its success will be judged in the long run by its ability to act back upon common sense and contribute something to its renewal and enrichment.

Common sense is based on a limited range of experience of particular persons in particular places and times. Where it relates to such matters as family, marriage, kinship, work and worship, people are inclined to believe that their way of doing things is the right way or the reasonable way. Other ways of acting in these regards strike them as being not just wrong, but contrary to common

sense. This is because they observe or experience other ways of acting and thinking only in bits and pieces, and not in their entire context. Seeing alien and unfamiliar practices in their proper context often makes those practices appear quite sensible; familiarity with a wide range of practices occasionally makes one's own ingrained ways of acting and thinking appear peculiar if not quixotic. An old Chinese poem says:

When I carefully consider the curious habits  
of dogs,  
I am compelled to conclude that man is  
the superior animal.

When I consider the curious habits of man,  
I confess, my mend. I am puzzled.  
Comparative sociology is a great help in  
acquiring and ipaintaining a sense of  
proportion.

I would like to avoid inviting the charge of making invidious distinctions between disciplines. At the same time, it is essential to draw attention to the peculiar pre-occupation of sociology with the similarities as well as the differences among societies, with comparison as well as contrast. To be sure, historians have recorded diverse beliefs and practices among people at different places and different times over a longer stretch of time than have sociologists. But their characteristic tendency has been to study the diversity of beliefs, practices and institutions severally rather than jointly. It is the rare historian who does comparative history, whereas one cannot really escape from comparison and contrast while doing sociology.

Sociology not only deals with facts from the entire range of human societies, it seeks to place those facts on the same plane of observation and analysis. The educated layman can hardly be expected to master all the facts with which the sociologist deals. He follows at best the method of apt illustration, and no consistent rule of procedure for the selection and arrangement of facts. On the other hand, sociological practice develops a characteristic style of argument that does tend to filter through to wider and wider circles in the course of time. Over the long run, the sociological mode of reasoning has had some effect on thinking about education, about politics, about class and about inequality.

Where sociological reasoning acts upon common sense, it tends to moderate both the Utopian and the fatalistic elements in it. Common sense easily constructs imaginary social arrangements in which there is no inequality, no oppression, no strife and no constraint on individual choice: a world in which society makes it possible "for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise afterdinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic".<sup>14</sup>

Sociology is anti-utopian in its central preoccupation with the disjunction between ideal and reality, between what human beings consider right, proper and desirable, and their actual conditions of existence, not in this or that particular society, but in human societies as such.

Sociology is also anti-fatalistic in its orientation. It does not accept the particular constraints taken for granted by common sense as eternal or immutable. It provides a clearer awareness than common sense of the range of alternative arrangements that have been or may be devised for the attainment of broadly the same ends. No social arrangement, however attractive in appearance, is without some cost. Social costs and benefits are far more difficult to weigh and measure than the purely economic ones. A finely-tuned judgment is essential for this, and that can be formed only through the disciplined and methodical examination of the varieties of actual social arrangements created, adopted and replaced by successive generations.

This leads to the question of value-neutrality or, better, the distinction between value-judgments and judgments of reality in sociology as against common sense. There is now a considerable body of literature, some of it abstract and technical, on this question, although this is not to say that all disagreements on it have been or can be settled among sociologists. By and large, there is agreement among them that questions of fact are distinct from judgments of value, and the two ought to be differentiated as clearly as possible by all the technical means available.<sup>15</sup> The disagreement is about the extent to which the distinction can be consistently maintained in practice, and the best means to be adopted in achieving or approaching that end.

There is an influential tradition in sociological enquiry that views the methods and procedures of the discipline as being, at least in principle, the same as those of the natural sciences. Not only animals, vegetables and minerals, but also men and women and their social arrangements can be made subjects of science.<sup>16</sup> In this tradition, which has generated much useful information and some fruitful analysis, all descriptions and all evaluations are suspect unless they are made in accordance with technical procedures that systematically exclude or at least minimise the investigator's bias; and common sense, in this view, is always a source of potential bias and error.

Not all sociologists view their discipline as a kind of natural science; today perhaps the majority of them view it as a moral science rather than a natural science. One of the problems is keeping values strictly separate from facts in the moral or human sciences is that values themselves are an important part, some would say the most

important part, of their subject matter. In other words, the sociologist has to treat values as facts, as a part of his data, whether he is studying his own society or some other society, or both. But even here, he has to distinguish as clearly as possible the different kinds of facts with which he deals, for instance, the demographic composition of a community as against the religious ideas of its members.

It takes a special kind of discipline - at once intellectual and moral - to insulate the values being investigated by the sociologist from his own personal and social values. In a sense, what the sociologist investigates and the means by which he investigates it are of one piece, more so where the study of one's own society is concerned. This makes the separation between the two particularly urgent on the intellectual plane and particularly difficult on the moral plane. As Max Weber had observed on this question: "Nor need I discuss further whether the distinction between empirical statements of fact and value-judgments is 'difficult' to make. It is."<sup>17</sup> It is here, and particularly in India, that the sociologist is most frequently tempted to let go of his slippery hold over the resources of his discipline and to revert to plain common sense.

There is now an accumulated body of experience as well as reasoned discussion relating to the choices involved in the study of one's own society as well as the study of other cultures. The experience shows the significance in all cases of the standpoint of the investigator; in the human sciences, there is no Archimedean point from which the investigator can examine his subject matter as a completely disengaged observer. The same subject reveals different aspects when investigated from different standpoints: but although different, the results of these investigations need not be contradictory. Indeed, the advance of sociological knowledge becomes possible only when investigations made from different standpoints make themselves available to each other for mutual correction. This is a slow, laborious process that does not, by its very nature, have any final outcome.

In conclusion, it is not true that the sociologist does not or should not express moral preferences. But his moral preferences are or ought to be formed on a somewhat different basis from what is given to each person by his common sense. It may not be possible - or even desirable - for sociology to acquire the intellectual authority to govern the moral choices of the individual members of society. Those choices are in the end matters of individual judgment and individual responsibility. Sociology can only help a little by giving the individual a better sense of the alternatives available, and of the likely costs and benefits of the available alternatives.

[This is the text of the N K Bose Memorial Lecture delivered in Calcutta on June 20, 1996 under the auspices of the Anthropological Survey of India on the occasion of its golden jubilee. I am grateful to the Director of the survey, R K Bhattacharya for inviting me to deliver the lecture. I would also like to thank M N Srinivas for his comments on a draft of the lecture.]

- 1 Emile Durkheim, *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*, The Free Press, Glencoe, 1951.
- 2 See Anthony Giddens, 'A Theory of Suicide' and 'The Suicide Problem in French Sociology' in his *Studies in Social and Political Theory*, Hutchinson, London, 1977, pp 297-332.
- 3 Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1976; see also Gordon Marshall, *In Search of the Spirit of Capitalism: An Essay on Max Weber's Protestant Ethic Thesis*, Hutchinson, London, 1982.
- 4 David Lockwood, 'Social Integration and System Integration' in his *Solidarity and Schism*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, Appendix, pp 399-412.
- 5 M N Srinivas (ed) *India's Villages*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1960. Introduction', pp 1-14.
- 6 M N Srinivas, *Caste in Modern India and Other Essays*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1962, p 66.
- 7 Andre Beteille, *Caste, Class and Power: Changing Patterns of Stratification in a Tanjore Village*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1965; new enlarged edition, Oxford University Press, Delhi, 1996.
- 8 A N Shah, 'Is the Joint Household Disintegrating?', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XXXI, No 9, March 2, 1996, pp 537-42; see also his *The Household Dimension of the Family in India*, Orient Longman, Delhi, 1973.
- 9 Andre Beteille, *Some Observations on the Comparative Method*, CAS A, Amsterdam, 1990; see also my *Society and Politics in India: Essays in a Comparative Perspective*, Athlone Press, London, 1991.
- 10 Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, The Free Press, Glencoe, 1938, p 139.
- 11 Ibid, p 136.
- 12 Andre Beteille, 'Agrarian Relations in Tanjore District, South India', *Sociological Bulletin*, Vol 21, No 2, 1972, pp 122-51.
- 13 Andre Beteille, 'Equality as a Right and as a Policy', *USE Quarterly*, Vol 1, No 1, 1987, pp 75-98; 'Distributive Justice and Institutional Well-Being', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XXVI, Nos II and 12, 1991, pp 591-600.
- 14 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The German Ideology*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1968, p 45.
- 15 Emile Durkheim, 'Value Judgments and Judgments of Reality' in his *Sociology and Philosophy*, The Free Press, Glencoe; 1974, pp 80-97; Max Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, The Free Press, Glencoe, 1949.
- 16 Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, op cit.
- 17 Weber, *The Methodology of the Social Sciences*, op cit, p 9.



# Indian Institute of Management Bangalore

Invites applications for admission to the  
**FELLOW PROGRAMME IN MANAGEMENT (equivalent to Ph.D.)**  
starting July 1997

**The Fellow Programme** is a full time residential doctoral - level programme designed to equip students for careers in teaching, training and research in functional and sectoral areas of management. The Fellow Programme students can select their specialisation from the following areas and sectors :

**AREAS**  Corporate Strategy and Policy  Economics and Social Sciences  
 Marketing  Organisation Behaviour, Personnel Management and Industrial Relations  
 Finance & Control  Production & Operations Management  
 Quantitative Methods, Information Systems & Computers.

**SECTORS**  Agriculture and Rural Development  Education  Energy and Power  Health and Population  
 Human Settlement and Environment Studies  
 International Management  Transportation.

**ELIGIBILITY** \* A Master's Degree with a minimum of 55 per cent marks (or equivalent recognised qualification). Candidates appearing for final degree exams can also apply, provided they complete the examinations and all other requirements for the degree on or before June 30, 1997.

**OR**

\* First Class Bachelor's Degree in Engineering/Technology or a Second Class Bachelor's Degree in Medicine with a minimum of 2 years experience.

In addition, FPM applicants must also satisfy the eligibility requirements of the Post-Graduate Programme of IIMB (For details see CAT advertisement appearing separately). \* PGPs from IIMs with minimum CGPA 4.5/6 or equivalent are exempt from CAT and first year course work.

**FINANCIAL SUPPORT** \* Stipend of Rs. 1800/- or Rs. 2400/- P.M. depending on qualifications and experience to cover average monthly living expenses (including fee, room & board) of about Rs. 1400/-. An annual contingency allowance of Rs. 5000/- will also be provided.

⇒ **HOW TO APPLY:** *Step 1.* Take Common Admission Test (CAT) on 8th December 1996. *Step 2.* Obtain admission forms free of cost from **FPM Office, Indian Institute of Management Bangalore, Bannerghatta Road, Bangalore - 560 076** and apply.

Requests for forms must be accompanied by a self-addressed envelope (size 9"x12") affixed with stamps worth Rs. 11/- and a self-addressed slip.

⇒ **LAST DATES** : 1) To receive requests for application forms : 31st October 1996.  
2) To receive completed application forms : 29th November 1996.