

Institutional Alliance between Sociology and Gender Studies

Story of the Crocodile and Monkey

Sharmila Rege

If the alliance between sociology and gender studies is not to settle into a 'tiredness' and 'relation of convenience', pedagogies that explicitly interrogate the divisions of public and private, reason and emotion, rooted in both, the everyday and history are crucial. Such pedagogies can have the kind of subversive impact on the academy which the alliance between sociology and women's studies was expected to have had on the structures and processes of the academy.

MOST sociologists, today, would agree that the alliance between sociology and gender studies has been mutually beneficial and academically enriching. Yet, the alliance between the two at the levels of the institutional, curricular and pedagogic tells a different story. A story akin to that of the crocodile and the monkey of the *Panchotantra* fame. The crocodile's eyes, tired with routine, come to rest upon an 'active', 'much in news' monkey, perched atop a 'jamun' tree. Befriending the monkey, seems to the crocodile, an easy way out of tiredness- He promises the monkey rides on his stable back into the clear waters. The monkey is relieved - a stable back and access to the wide and deep waters seemed like a good deal. Like all alliances, this one too had its institutional boundaries and the monkey's perennially ticking heart and activity began to be an irritant to the well established institutional structures and processes. "Why not swallow up the monkey's heart and then allow her to ride my back?" the crocodile wondered as he sought a solution to the irritant. He asked the monkey to hand over her heart to him, but the monkey, well aware of the rules of the jungle, feigned innocence and replied 'I am sorry but I do not carry my heart on me - I keep it safe in the trunk of the jamun tree'. Those of us actively engaged in protests and campaigns of the women's movement and working in UGC sponsored women's studies centres, attached to social science departments, learn to mouth these lines of the monkey - as we struggle, on one hand to avoid 'ghettoisation' of women's studies in the academy and on the other hand its professionalisation and esoteric academisation.

In the mid-1980s, for many of us studying sociology in universities in Maharashtra, the setting up of women's studies centres and cells by sociologists or in departments of sociology, had marked our introduction to feminist literature and the women's movements, thereby opening up possibilities

of doing politically engaged social science. As women's studies centres came to be established within universities, some practitioners preferred 'a politics of autonomy of women's studies', while some of us saw the 'recasting of our respective disciplines from gender-sensitive perspectives' as our immediate politics. The much discussed issue of integration vs autonomy of women's studies, often overlooks the fact that the dualism is a false dichotomy [Roseneil 1995]. As feminist researchers and teachers, working in universities, we are required to move across the boundaries of our own discipline and women's studies since most of us teach, both mainstream compulsory courses and the relatively autonomous optional courses in women's studies. Drawing upon the theoretical tools of both, contributions are sought to be made to both - one's discipline and to women's studies. No doubt, this traversing of boundaries in part, arises out of a pragmatism since there are still not many teaching or research positions in women's studies. But we cannot overlook the fact that many of us choose this location of 'two homes' [Roseneil 1995] or 'the outsider within' [Hill-Collins 1991] or 'the heart on the tree' because as Maricia Westkott (1990) has argued, the personal struggle of being both an insider and an outsider is not only a source of knowledge and insight but also a source of self-criticism.

In many ways the interventions of feminists, their critiques of content, method and epistemology of mainstream sociology are crucial and analogous to that of Marxism in an earlier period [Porter 1995]. For many of us, trained in 'objective', 'value-neutral sociology', we discovered the radical roots of sociology via its feminist critiques. As Porter (1995) comments, the founding fathers had brought to the discipline a passion and commitment which emerged from their involvement with the world in which they lived. The alliance between the 'tired' discipline of sociology [Deshpande 1994]

and women's studies had the potential of reviving the passion and engagement. Yet by the 1990s the alliance, now consolidated into courses on 'women and society' and 'sociology of women', has come to be characterised by routine and tiredness. This paper is a story about all this and more - narrated in three seemingly disjunct parts.

Section I of the story, draws upon the growing concern about the 'crisis in sociological research and teaching' (Das 1993; Murthy 1993; Deshpande 1994; Giri 1993, Beteille 1996), and then describes and locates the 'tiredness' of the discipline, especially as it is reflected in curricula and pedagogics. Section II begins with the entry of the monkey from its 'movement' oriented life on the tree, onto the back of the crocodile. It reviews the alliance, at the level of the everyday practices, both institutional and academic. Section III draws upon the experiences of the faculty members and students of the department of sociology at the SNDT Women's University, Mumbai. Since 1992, there had been concerted efforts in this department to overcome the 'tiredness' in the life of the crocodile and to transform the alliance of convenience between the crocodile and the monkey into a meaningful relationship.

I

The Crisis of Tiredness

The sociological community in India has been concerned with the 'state of crisis in sociological research' in India. Das (1993) commenting on this state has drawn attention to the fact that the number of students registered in doctoral programmes is on the increase while ignorance of elementary facts and concepts is on the increase. Standard format PhDs serve as tickets to teaching positions and get published too. Beteille (1996) has highlighted the acute pedagogical problems in university departments of sociology; especially that of integrating the teaching of sociological theory with sociology of India. Several ways of dealing with the crisis have been outlined. G B Venkatesh Murthy (1993) has argued for training workshops for teachers and for putting a stop to the cycle of reciprocity that displaces academic standards. Giri (1993) argues that what we need is a community of discourse rather than a few centres of excellence for research. Deshpande (1994) has underlined the 'collective ineffectiveness' of the sociological community; its lack of response to the primarily social issues of the 1980s; secessionism, communalism and casteism. The 'tiredness' of the discipline is thus established.

Reviewing historically, the 'tiredness' of sociology in universities and colleges in Maharashtra, it is clear that the period following the formation of the state of Maharashtra was marked by what D K

Bedekar has referred to as a 'perverse intellectual freeze' in the sphere of ideas and thought. The late 1960s and early 1970s were marked by intense political activity especially among the youth who constituted Dalit Panthers, Yuvak Kranti Dal, Magowa and the Satyashodhak Communist Party. This had politically radicalised the ambience of college and university campuses. Many of these movements had sought to creatively explore and revive the radical thought of the non-brahman movement in Maharashtra. The sociology curriculum rarely makes a reference to these movements or to the theoretical contributions that emerged during this period from the works of Om vedt (1976) or Sharad Patil (1982), with the result that the inherent 'brahmanism' of the curriculum is not only consolidated, but also 'normalised' as 'objective and macro' sociology.

The 1980s saw the rise of the new asset-rich class of high and middle income urban and rural households as the most significant force at work in the political economy of Maharashtra. This middle class which permeated all sectors of the economy came to be perceived as "an efficient and avid consumer, saver and producer" [Lele 1995]. The socio-economic scene in Maharashtra is marked by a high rate of urbanisation and rise in service sector; the service sector accounts for 46.5 percent of the state domestic product [Palshikar 1997], This has obviously seen a rapid mushrooming of colleges imparting professional and semi-professional degrees. There has been a sharp rise in the number of management schools both in urban centres and towns in the sugar belt. The emergence of 'K G to P G' educational empires in Baramati, Pravaranagar, Kopargaon are all cases in point. This has affected considerably the texture of student enrolment in the social science departments in the universities of Pune, Kolhapur and Marathwada. The expansion of the service sector; thriving on the ideology of liberalisation combined with an accelerated saffronisation in Maharashtra has had at least two major consequences for higher education and the academy. On the one hand, there has been an increasing McDonaldisation [Ritzer 1996] of higher education, a process most obvious in the curriculum of management and computer studies, and less obvious in the social sciences, where it is expressed in 'vocationalisation' perceived in terms of 'pop sociology'. Principles of bureaucracy combined with those of assembly line and scientific management [Ritzer 1996] have expanded from fast food restaurants to the curricula. On the other hand, the BJP-Shiv Sena combine has attempted to appropriate the radical non-brahmanical tradition of Phule and Ambedkar [Pardeshi 1996] while persistently launching attacks on critical thinking both outside and inside the academy. In such a context, practice-oriented critical science is required to engage in a search for spaces that celebrate difference while

enhancing the mutual strength of marginalised people [Lele 1995]. To begin with, the tiredness of the discipline which reflects upon and is reflected in the curricula and pedagogical practices needs to be confronted.

The regional profile on Teaching of Sociology in Western India' [Dhanagare 1993] notes that enrolment of students offering sociology as a 'major' or 'specialisation' subject has been on the decline both at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Students have explained the decline in terms of the failure of the curriculum to sustain interest and the poor quality of instruction; all of which cannot be separated from what they called the 'inferior market value of sociology' [Dhanagare 1993]. The decline, however, has been accompanied by a steady rise in number of candidates registered as 'external' students for courses in sociology. A degree in sociology comes to be viewed as a 'soft part-time option' to be pursued along with regular full-time employment. As a result of this peculiar enrolment pattern, upcoming colleges both in urban and mofussil areas, receiving partial grants do not give priority to sociology, introducing it only as a 'general' course at the undergraduate level. Teachers are appointed on a part-time or even on clock-hour basis, and most often preference may be given to candidates with B Ed degrees, since their service can be employed for teaching subjects other than sociology at the junior college level. With no regular pay-scales and the sword of the national and state level eligibility tests hanging over their heads, teaching and research take a backseat, though the enrolment rates at the PhD level may suggest otherwise. Several university departments in Maharashtra have at present more than 40 candidates registered for the doctoral degree. Research becomes a part-time engagement as national and state level tests, patterned on the lines of the competitive examinations demand attention.

A review of the sociology syllabi in universities in Maharashtra (except the revised courses at the sociology departments in Bombay and SNDT universities) reveals that common to the curriculum at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels are courses derived from three distinct legacies; the theoretical legacy of the founding fathers, the methodological legacy of quantitative techniques and the civic legacy of substantive topics [Baker and Rau 1990]. The courses on general sociology, research methodology and Indian social institutions or Indian social problems that represent these three legacies: when represented in a Venn diagram would appear as disjunct circles.

Reading materials prescribed and recommended in the printed versions of the syllabi are most often sidelined for 'easy to use' watered down 'kunji' or 'guide' versions. These kunjis follow a pattern in which every concept is dealt with, first by listing

a series of definitions followed by characteristics and sometimes 'application' of it in the Indian context. The prescribed reading materials on concepts and theories are largely the mass-marketed, American, self-consciously race and gender 'inclusive' textbooks. Both the prescribed and the kunji miss out the historical, spatio-temporal specificities in the emergence and career of concepts, not to mention the 'politics' underlying their travel to our academic systems and curricula. Readings in courses on Indian society are disproportionately Indological and brahmanical; the writings by and on Phule, Ambedkar, Periyar are almost entirely absent, though these writings may find a place in optional courses on 'weaker sections in Indian society'. This leads to a peculiar situation in which the 'dalit' and 'bahujan' student does not find his/her non-brahmanical everyday lived understanding in the curriculum while for the convent educated, middle class student the brahmanical rendering of Indian society is further enhanced.

At most of the university departments of sociology, 'English' is officially the language of instruction; while students may be allowed to write the examinations in Marathi. At the undergraduate level, sociology is taught both in English and Marathi. More than 60 percent of the students in the post-graduate departments have no comprehension skills in English and largely depend on the undergraduate textbooks or/and are unable to follow the lectures and debates in the classroom. A comparative review of the reading material available in English and Marathi underlines the institutionalised inequalities and their reproduction in systems of higher education. Regional professional bodies such as the Marathi Samajshastra Pari shad have made strong arguments in favour of cultivating sociology in the regional language. Yet what we have seen so far are mainly attempts at translation of paperback textbooks or attempts to make sociology 'relevant' by demonstrating sociological knowledge to be problem-solving. The more nationally and internationally recognised sociologists have reacted to this by stressing 'academic purity' through an esoteric discourse. Both kinds of attempts, one to prove sociology as problem-solving and the other to imbibe a high culture of sociology - are defence mechanisms in which critical reasoning and action take a backseat. The issue is not simply one of making available reading materials in Marathi; but one that touches upon the conception of the relationship between sociology and history. It requires that immediate attention be paid towards establishing a dialogue between regional social histories and theoretical perspectives in sociology. To conclude, the crisis of tiredness is underlined in sociology curricula that have little relevance socio-politically and personally, and by routinised pedagogies, the kind that are best described

as 'If it is Tuesday, it must be Social Roles' [Baker and Rau 1990].

Since the 1980s, gender-sensitive critiques of social sciences have generated critical impulses and self-reflexivity. The feminist critiques of sociology have destabilised mainstream thinking in sociology. Publications and courses on 'women' and 'gender' have multiplied, and yet very little of all this gets translated into our curriculum and pedagogical practices. Has the heart been swallowed up - making the alliance superficial by limiting it to scholarly debates? Enter, the monkey and the story moves on to the second part.

II

The Crocodile, the Monkey and the Heart on the Tree

The late 1970s had seen an expansion of the women's movement in India, both in terms of the number of action groups and the issues taken up by them. In Maharashtra, the department of sociology at the SNDT Women's University responded by initiating courses on 'women and society'. By the late 1980s, the UGC guidelines on women's studies saw social science departments (such as the sociology department at Pune University) which had been granted women's studies centres, design courses on 'sociology of women' as optional courses at the MA level. This period was marked by intense intellectual and political stimulation, and by establishment of important linkages between the theory of knowledge and the struggles and strategies of the women's movement. There was an increasing visibility to 'gender' on the agenda of the state and obviously several compulsions and benefits came to be attached to including 'women' or 'feminism' in the curriculum. Sometimes courses on 'sociology of women' and 'women and society' had been designed in anticipation of the UGC centres that were to be granted; and many of us working in women's studies centres that had been planted onto departments where such courses had already been designed and floated, found our fate sealed until the next restructuring of curriculum, which could be a good decade away. We came to realise that in the context of such 'inclusions' of women and 'pigeon-holing' of gender perspectives into optional courses, only politically engaged feminist pedagogies could have a subversive impact on the academic and institutional matrices.

As a feminist and a sociologist, one occupies one or all of the following positions: one, the position of a feminist confronting patriarchies in sociology, both at the academic and institutional levels; two, the position of a third world feminist and sociologist confronting the agendas of western feminism and sociology; three, the position of a gender-sensitive sociologist located in India, interrogating the complexities of caste, class, ethnicity and gender.

In adopting, only the first position, one may well go along the popular position of

feminist standpoint or feminist sociology. A position derived from the assumption that women's lives provide the grounds to criticise the claims of dominant knowledge and that knowledge from such a standpoint has transformative power and a potential to provide alternate visions. For many of us, who came to interrogate the patriarchies in our discipline, we did it out of both personal observation and collective experience but also through the writings of western feminists. However occupying the second position cautions us about the limitations of the transformative power of feminist standpoint sociologies, the kind developed by groups such as 'Sociologists for Women in Society'. There is by and large an insensitivity to issues of international division of labour and feminisms and sociologies other than the European and Atlantic. The third position - our location as politically engaged third world feminists sensitises us to make a realistic shift away from celebration of sisterhood to a recognition of the historical gender constitution of classes, caste, and communities and the caste, class and communal constitution of gender. This has posed major conceptual and political challenges. Yet the courses on 'sociology of women' which we are called upon to teach, remain largely within a 'victimology' or 'inclusion of women' framework. These courses begin typically with an introduction to the different perspectives in western feminist thought and then a series of 'women and..' (everything ranging from work to violence to role conflict). The notion created is that 'they' the western feminist scholars have the theory and 'we' have the 'problems' of status of women'. The usual application of theory to empirical problem is what ensues. Uberoi (1993) commenting on this issue has noted the divorce between metropolitan theory and indigenously generated data that occurs in courses on 'women and society' in India. Typically the first section is an introduction to theory and method, and the substantive section reviews the empirical literature on women in India. A review of the reading lists reveal the absence of mainstreaming into sociology, the diverse and relevant research and writings in the area of gender studies. All this points to the fact that significant questions and issues which have been raised in the examination of family, kin, household and stratification studies by gender studies have not been integrated in the sociological discourse in a cohesive manner [Patel 1993].

These optional courses in 'sociology of women' or 'women and society' are a popular choice. More than 85 percent of the students opt for these courses because they view its contents as commonsensical and as an expansion of the 'status of women' units that they had studied at the undergraduate level. We would agree with Beteille (1996) that the use of common sense is most evident in papers dealing with India. "Every student knows something about caste, class, family" [Beteille 1996:2362], and we would add

when it comes to 'status of women', they can fill pages after pages about the 'miserable condition of Indian women (especially rural women) in the family and society'. Feminist pedagogies, at the onset, have to confront at least two problems - one, the 'commonsensical understanding of the woman question in India' and 'the inherited sociological understanding of the question based on the prescribed reading materials and textbooks'. This confrontation becomes more complex - as the feminist pedagogue is continuously highlighting the importance of 'lived experience' and this may be misconceived as 'commonsensical'. In our classrooms, therefore, we often have to make a beginning by interrogating lived experience' and 'inherited understanding' simultaneously. One of the exercises that we have found useful begins with a listing of our 'sociologically inherited understanding of the woman question'. For instance,

Women enjoyed a high place in Indian society in ancient India, but with advent of Islam, women's status became lower (Class XII, prescribed textbook).

In a modern family, the woman is not the devotee but equal partner. She can divorce her husband (First year senior college, prescribed textbook)

This inheritance is then juxtaposed with students' personal experiences on the same issues; what we have therefore are the learnt and lived experiences of men and women of different castes and communities. All this is then juxtaposed with passages on the related issues from the non-brahman tradition in Maharashtra. For instance a reading of the divorce notices given in the vernacular non-brahman newspapers of the 1920s by lower and middle caste women [quoted in Omvedt 1973]; extracts of Tarabai Shinde's *Stree Purush Tulana* (1882) at once reveals the project of hindutva (homogenisation) and brahmanism (in name of objectivity) and a middle class bias that underlies our curriculum and understanding of status of women.

Juxtaposing extracts from social history with lived experiences leads to an interrogation of the social construction of the 'self' and location in historical time and space. The exercise is not only exciting and engaging but is also empowering as it allows the participants in the course to find gaps and spaces in otherwise structured courses. Importantly, it underlines the importance of retrieving the non-brahman conception of society; for such a sociology, gender is not a new 'add on' category but a structurally integral one, since to Phule, equality and destruction of caste hierarchy could not be achieved without bringing equality to the social groups most oppressed by the system; and his first practical social reform efforts were for woman and untouchables [Omvedt 1976]. It may therefore be argued that engaged pedagogics are crucial to the integration of gender perspectives in the curriculum. What happens then when those hostile to the

'subjectivity' underlining gender perspectives, or even those who see it as just another element in the canon, deal with these courses? In such cases, does then the mainstreaming of gender perspectives mean the loss of their radical potential? There is a new urgency to these questions since compulsions to include courses on women in the curriculum are many. The project of mainstreaming cannot be given up and replaced by a complete autonomy for women's studies. This would amount to an abandoning of the project of creation of more adequate knowledge. A policy decision at the UGC level is required in order to make a shift from token inclusion of 'women' and 'feminism' at orientation and refresher courses. Summer institutes and orientation courses orienting teachers to the integration of gender perspectives in the curriculum at the undergraduate and postgraduate levels are required.

Refresher courses in women studies are presently being offered at the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. However there is considerable ambiguity and confusion about the 'status' granted to these courses. College teachers complained that these courses were not considered equivalent to taking a refresher course in one's discipline, and since attendance at these courses is linked to promotions and pay-scales they were not willing to take the risk. In several universities, courses on gender have been introduced at the undergraduate level in the restructured sociology curriculum. Many of the college teachers complained that teaching these courses without any orientation workshops to provide guidelines was a difficult task. Akshara, A women's documentation and resource centre in Mumbai has been conducting orientation workshops with these college teachers. As resource persons on this project, we had been assigned the orientation on the topic 'ideology of sexuality'. In the first round of discussions, it emerged that a majority among the teachers had dealt with this topic in terms of the inherited paradigm of 'social problems'. They had highlighted the 'increasing problem' of prostitution and homosexuality. A sizeable number confessed that they had just ignored the topic since 'sexuality' was not something that could be dealt with in large, mixed, undergraduate classrooms. During the orientation workshop, ways of introducing the topic in the classrooms through passages from regional social historical materials such as magazines dedicated to the 'scientific study' of sexuality in early 20th century Maharashtra or through matrimonial advertisements were discussed. Through those materials, participants could be convinced of how the units on 'family' work, class and caste were all related to the 'ideology of sexuality'. The need for such orientation workshops, focusing on pedagogical practices that may be employed in sociology of gender classrooms is crucial and immediate; since 'mass marketable' textbooks catering to these newly intro-

duced courses on women are already multiplying.

If the alliance between sociology and gender studies is not to settle into a 'tiredness' and 'relation of convenience', pedagogies that explicitly interrogate the divisions of public and private, reason and emotion, rooted in both the everyday and history are crucial. Such pedagogies can have the kind of subversive impact on the academy which the alliance between sociology and women's studies was expected to have had on the structures and processes of the academy.

At the department of sociology, at the University of Poona, Samwaad, an action group committed to gender politics has emerged as an offshoot of such pedagogical practices. Initially, the group was an extension of classroom discussions; but soon began to actively take up issues on campus. Following series of meetings with women's groups in Pune, the group became active in larger campaigns such as the support for Bhanwari Devi campaign and the anti-beauty pageant campaigns. Classroom learning was translated into posters, songs and street-plays. Over a period of two years, a campaign seeking to reach out to students in mofussil areas emerged. This campaign entitled 'Nirbhay Bano Abhiyaan' explicitly addressed the issues of economic liberalisation, violence and religious fundamentalism. The membership of this action group may not always fully coincide with the group doing the course on 'sociology of women'. As Radhika Chopra (1996) has argued, for many students doing such courses, the engagement could be of a reflective kind. For some this engagement does not end with the course. What is significant is that there is an 'engagement' and it is not one of 'politics out there' [Chopra 1996] but one that informs everyday lives and relationships. The emergence of such action groups from the classrooms does transform considerably the texture of the everyday at university departments. Questions like 'Are we into academics or activism?', 'Is this all sociology?' are raised at heated faculty meetings. While these questions assure us that dichotomies are being interrogated and boundaries traversed, the institutional matrices of examinations, academic bodies and UGC policies often prove the contrary.

There have been endless debates on whether women's studies' person can 'technically' be allowed to teach courses on 'sociology of women'. The debates have had to be referred to academic councils. The fact that the UGC policy on women's studies calls for a periodic evaluation of the centre, somehow makes these centres seem 'illegitimate', as if the claim to the university must be proved. This often makes the alliance between sociology and women's studies an unequal one. Though on paper, interdisciplinary teaching and research have been lauded, the strength of the organised

apparatus to shield separate disciplines has not been undermined [Wallerstein 1991]. Examination papers may be set and evaluated by committees - the members of which, have not the slightest acquaintance with gender perspectives. (Question papers on these courses are often based on a commonsensical misunderstanding and misconception about the women's movement and feminism in India.) This often means that students have to pragmatically switch back to the 'inherited' commonsensical understanding of 'the status of women'.

The UGC policy on women's studies keeps fluctuating. While earlier a path of mixed development, i.e., combining autonomous women's studies centres with centres integrated with disciplines had been followed, a recent UGC guideline has made 'autonomy' a precondition for the continued existence of centres. The logic being that such centres would be truly interdisciplinary and would be able to intervene across different departments and disciplines. For many of us, pursuing a politics of integration, this has meant a premature calling off of the alliance. For the monkey there is no crocodile's back to ride on - no access to deep waters. It could mean wearing one's heart on oneself but having only a 'ghetto' to express it in. For the crocodile, the monkey moves away, leaving the radical potential of 'Integration of gender perspectives' prematurely thwarted.

III Transforming the Alliance

FROM CONVENIENCE TO RELEVANCE

This last part of the story is about the restructuring of the curriculum, examination and evaluation practices at the department of sociology at the SNDT Women's University, Mumbai. This project which stretched over a period of five years, came to be viewed as a model by many of us in western India. The restructuring of the curriculum was informed by a perspective that seeks to link knowledge systems and societal transformations. The focus thus was on training the student to interrogate power and the hierarchies in society. The course on 'gender and society' was conceived as a pivot, since it was a major site for the exploration of one's own location and engagement in power and hierarchy. Designed as a seminar course, it was meant to be training in developing a gender perspective which was to be integrated in the reading of other courses. A radical restructuring of courses and established institutional practices had required intense lobbying with the members of the board of studies, experts and committees. Sujata Patel who initiated this project in 1991 and carried it through for over five years, comments that the restructuring has been possible mainly due to an overall respect for authority at SNDT and absence of

factional politics at the higher levels in the university.

That there had always been an agenda for women at SNTU made the introduction and integration of gender perspectives - a relatively simpler task. Reading material in English, Marathi and Gujarati were collated, and courses on English reading and comprehension were designed and implemented for Gujarati and Marathi medium students. These courses were based on sociological texts and received a good response. The crucial base of the entire project of restructuring had been the reform in the examination pattern. The evaluation was to be departmental and the methods designed were more participative, fluid and student-friendly. Pedagogies were engaged, combining reading courses, seminars and discussion forms. All these changes were introduced in phases; first only at the main campus and not at the two centres located in mofussil areas. Two years later and after series of conflicts in the academic council, the backlash to the restructuring project came under the guise of a plea for uniformisation and standardisation of courses at all postgraduate centres. A viable solution to this was worked out and after considerable lobbying, the board of studies agreed that there would be a standardisation of two compulsory courses but each centre could select in keeping with its thrust areas, any six optional courses from all those listed. Just when it seemed like, standardisation had been taken care of, the 'anti-restructuring' lobby struck back, convinced the academic council that examination pattern had to be standardised and thus called for a 100 per cent external evaluation system. Such an attack on the very base of the new curriculum serves not only to get rid of its radical potential but also marks a backtracking for those involved in the process of restructuring in particular and democratisation of academics in general.

Students of the first batch of the restructured curriculum see the combination of engaged pedagogics and a democratised learning process as been crucial in 'teaching them to think sociologically'. Students doing sociology in the Gujarati and Marathi medium commented that the reading of materials from regional sources combined with their enhanced English reading and comprehension skills had transformed their very conception of their postgraduate degree in sociology. Typically the postgraduate degree in sociology is viewed as a stop-gap arrangement to marriage; but a majority from this batch saw themselves picking up jobs in NGOs and research units. In the following batches, student enrolment in sociology saw an increase. Yet those who initiated the project conclude that alter the backlash of the decision of the academic council, it appears as if the whole project was a little naive; that such a restructuration was not possible without a serious restructuring of universities as institutions.

The academic councils, the faculties, the board of studies and boards of university teaching overlap and often papers keep moving. As the bodies meet rarely the matters are kept pending for months and years. The new Maharashtra Universities Act of 1993 has nothing for this archaic management of academics - rather the number of statutory bodies and committees have increased and the act stipulates that they need not meet more than four times a year. The act makes no provisions for three issues requiring urgent attention: the separation of academics from the government of the day, administrative restructuring and taming of profit driven private colleges [Deshpande 1993]. Though right legislation cannot set right the 'triedness', nevertheless it is crucial to projects that seek to eventually transform, through the transformation of their curriculum, the universities themselves. As feminist sociologists, this means once again reclaiming the university as a site for our activism. As Wallerstein (1997) has commented, "We have spent the last 200 years trying to reunite the search for truth and the search for goodness. Social science as it came to be established in the 19th century, was precisely the heir to both searches...rather than reunifying them, it has itself been torn apart by the dissonance between the two searches" [Wallerstein 1997:7]. A sociology in quest for a just society which seeks to integrate the two cultures [Wallerstein 1997] will necessarily have to have a meaningful academic and institutional alliance with gender studies. Gender studies committed to a just society will have to grapple with the complexities of the caste, class, communal, and global constitution of gender. In such a quest; an institutional alliance with sociology shall be mutually beneficial.

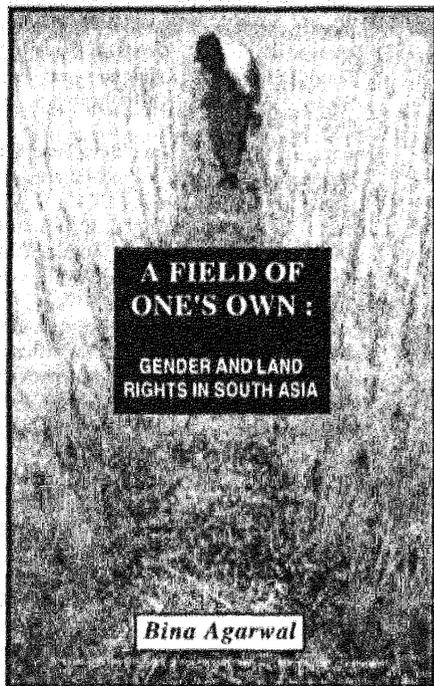
[This paper was presented at the national seminar on 'Recasting Sociology: The Changing Contours of the Discipline', CSSS, March 20-21, 1997. I sincerely thank Sujata Patel who shared with me at length her experiences as the head of the department of sociology and initiator of curriculum reform at the SNTU University, Mumbai and her analysis of the project of curricular reform, locating it within the broader framework of the 'crisis in sociology'. I also thank Shilpa Phadke who gave me at length the students' viewpoint of the experiment of curriculum reform at SNTU, Mumbai.]

References

- Baker and N Rau (1990); 'The Cultural Contradictions of Teaching Sociology' in Cans (ed), *Sociology in America*, ASA, New Delhi.
- Beteilte, A (1996): 'Sociology and Common Sense', *Economic and Political Weekly*, special number, September, pp 2361-65.
- Chopra, R (1996): 'Engaging with Passion', *Mian Journal of Gender Studies*, Vol 3, No 1, January-June.
- Das, V (1993): 'Sociological Research India: The Slate of Crisis', *Economic and*

- Political Weekly*, Vol XXVII, No 23, June 5, pp 1159-61.
- Deshpande, J (1993): Maharashtra: Universities Bill a Backward Step', *Economic and Political Weekly*, March 13, pp 436-37.
- Deshpande, S (1994): 'Crisis in Sociology: A Tired Discipline', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XXIX, No 10, March 5. pp 575-76.
- Dhanagare, D (1993): Sociology: Teaching and Research in Universities in Maharashtra and Goa', (a status report for UGC).
- Giri, A (1993): 'Creating a Community of Discourse in Sociology in India', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XXVIII, Nos 29-30, July 17-24, pp 1538-39.
- Hill-Collins, P (1991): Learning From the Outsider Within - The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought' in M Fonow and A Cook (eds), *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*, Indiana University Press.
- Lek, J (1995): Saffronisation of Shiv Sena: Political Economy of City, State and Nation', *Economic and Political Weekly*, June 24, pp 1520-28.
- Murthy, G B V (1993): 'Crisis in Sociological Research', *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol XXVIII, No 45, November 6.
- Omvedt, G (1976): Caste, Class and Women's Liberation', paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, March 30.
- (1976): *Cultural Revolt in a Colonial Society: The Non-Brahman Movement in Western India 1873-1930*, Scientific Socialist Education Trust, Mumbai.
- Palshikar, S (1996): Caste, State and Political Economy', paper presented at the seminar, 'Impact of New Economic Policy on Dalits in India', Department of Sociology, University of Pune, December 9-11.
- Pardeshi, R (1996): Phule-Ambedkaranche Brahmanikaran: Sangh- Bhajapche Davpech', Krantisinh Nana Patil Academy, Pune.
- Patel, S (1993): 'Gender and Society: Contemporary Theoretical Challenges', working paper, XX, All India Sociological Conference, Mangalore.
- Patil, S (1980): *Dasa-Shudra Slavery*, Allied Publishers, Delhi.
- Porter, M (1995): 'Call Yourself a Sociologist - And You've Never Been Arrested?', *Candian Review of Sociology And Anthropology*, vol 32, no 4, November, pp 415-37.
- Ritzer, G (1996): 'The MacDonaldisation Thesis: Is Expansion Inevitable?', *International Sociology*, vol 11, no 3, pp 291-308.
- Roseneil, S (1995): 'The Coming of Age of Feminist Sociology: Some Issues of Practice and Theory for the Next Twenty Years', *The British Journal of Sociology*, vol 46, no 2, June, pp 191-207.
- Shinde, T (1882): *Stree Purush Tulana*, Gajanan Book Depot, Mumbai.
- Uberoi, P (1993): 'Reciprocity in Social Science: Gender Issues'. *The Indian Journal of Social Science*, vol 6, no 3, pp 243-58.
- Wallerstein, I (1991): *Unthinking Social Science*, Polity Press, Oxford.
- (1997): 'Social Science and the Quest for a Just Society', keynote address, International Sociological Association, TISS, Mumbai, March 25-26.

Now in Paperback !



A FIELD OF ONE'S OWN : GENDER AND LAND RIGHTS IN SOUTH ASIA

Bina Agarwal

Winner of the

A. K. Coomaraswamy Book Prize 1996

(Association for Asian Studies, USA) and

The Edgar Graham Book Prize 1996

(SOAS, University of London)

"This book will become a classic landmark work of reference" (Judges : Edgar Graham Book Prize)

PB ISBN : 81-85618-64-X

592pp

Rs. 195/-

HB ISBN : 81-85618-63-1

592pp

Rs. 395/-



**CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS**

Available at all good bookshops or order from us :

FOUNDATION BOOKS

4764/2A, 23, Ansari Road, New Delhi - 110002 Tel. : 3285851, 3285852, Fax : 3288534
C-22, "C" Block, Brigade MM, K.R. Road, Jayanagar, Bangalore - 560082 Tel. : 6651322

NEW FROM SAGE

This geographical atlas constitutes the first systematic presentation of the spatial and

quantitative characteristics of the distribution of languages in the seven countries of South Asia. Utilizing a semiographic analysis and combining and comparing language data from various national censuses covering a forty year period, this atlas enables readers to actually see the geographical location, extension and linguistic affinities of any of the numerous languages spoken in South Asia.

1997 ■ 236 pages ■ Rs 795 (cloth)

ATLAS OF THE LANGUAGES AND ETHNIC COMMUNITIES OF SOUTH ASIA ROLAND J-L BRETON

REVISUALIZING BOUNDARIES

A Plurilingual Ethos

LACHMAN M KHUBCHANDANI

complementary orientations, the volume covers a wide arena ranging from methodological constructs, the role of minority languages and diglossia, to language modernization and planning, and the role of language elites.

Language and Development, Volume 3

1997 ■ 256 pages ■ Rs 335 (cloth)

In this collection of seminal articles, Lachman Khubchandani sets out a new agenda which probes the contours of plurality consciousness in studies of language. Focusing on the strengths of



SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
Post Box 4215, New Delhi 110 048
(Tel: 6465884, 6444958, 6453915;
Sales: 6463794, 6463820; Fax: 6472426)
AE-55, Salt Lake, Calcutta 700 064
(Tel: 3377062) ■ 27, Malony Road,
T Nagar, Madras 600 017 (Tel: 4345822)
■ 31, Lal Bahadur Stadium, Post Box 131,
Hyderabad 500 001 (Tel: 231447)