CHAPTER ONE

Squinting at Society

There are very few jokes about sociologists, as Peter Berger confesses in the opening sentence of his famous *Invitation to Sociology*. As a sociologist, I have always regretted this fact, specially since there are plenty of jokes about our exalted cousins, the economists, and even our more modest siblings in psychology and anthropology have got their share. If forms of humour are one indicator of what matters to society, sociologists and sociology clearly do not.

Though it cannot soothe our injured egos, there happens to be a good reason for the unimpressive public image of our discipline. Other disciplines have the advantage of being perceived as obviously complex subjects requiring specialized knowledge—economics is a good example. But this perception also extends to seemingly less complex subjects that are distanced from everyday life, like exotic cultures or the history of our own or other societies. Sociology is unique among the social sciences for the extent to which its subject matter appears to overlap with the content of everyday life. Everybody is involved in social relationships and institutions; everyone has first-hand experience of social values and norms. Small wonder, then, that sociology fails to inspire awe and is often equated with common sense.

There is nothing specially tragic about this fate: it is shared, more or less, by all disciplines unable to promise access to a well-paid job or to social prestige. But it is indeed ironic—in fact, doubly so—that

sociology of all disciplines should be confused with common sense.

The first irony is in the pejorative intent of this equation, which implies that common sense is something simple and self-evident. This is a big mistake, for common sense is really quite a profound and powerful phenomenon. In ordinary language, the phrase usually refers to knowledge or skills acquired 'naturally', i.e, *without being taught*. This may be true in the physical world, where there are some skills that are at least partly untaught or unteachable—like riding a bicycle, for example. But there are no untaught skills in the social world, where society teaches us everything we know, except that, sometimes, it also erases the signs of its teaching. It is precisely this kind of social knowledge—the kind that we are taught to regard as untaught—that sociologists refer to as 'common sense'. Common sense is a vitally important social institution because it supplies the cement that holds up the social structure. That is why the term has a special status in sociology, being used as an abbreviation for a whole range of shared, socially inculcated values, attitudes and habits of thought with which we make sense of our world. (To remind the reader of this special usage, I am converting the phrase into a single word.)

Commonsense is pre-judice in the strict sense—it is 'always already' in place and hard at work long before we make any conscious judgements. It pre-organizes our perceptions in such a way that a large part of the social world is taken for granted and allowed to sink like an iceberg below the surface of our consciousness, leaving only a small part for our explicit attention. Normal social life would be impossible if we and the others whom we interact with did not share a common set of assumptions about the world. That is why interacting with those who don't have commonsense—small children or mental patients, for example—is often stressful, though it can also be quite refreshing.

In their essence, these ideas about commonsense are far from new and quite respectable—'from good family', as we say in India. Three branches of the family tree are particularly relevant because they provide a sense of the different ways in which the notion of commonsense (or something like it) has been considered important in sociology.

One line of descent can be traced back to the German philosopher of phenomenology, Edmund Husserl (1859-1938), and those who brought his ideas into sociology, specially in the US: the underrated theorist, Alfred Schütz, who earned his living as an insurance company executive in New York; the Chicago philosopher, George Herbert Mead, widely influential through his lectures, though all his books were published posthumously; Mead's student, Herbert Blumer who taught sociology at Berkeley (and in his younger days played football for the Chicago Bears); and, more recently, the immensely popular academic writers, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann.

Practised under various labels—phenomenological sociology, symbolic interactionism, ethnomethodology—this perspective highlights the fact that the social world, a human construct, has infinite possible meanings which cannot be exhaustively described by the rational methods of natural science. Human actions and communication are based on a shared set of 'background understandings' which are never, and can never be, fully spelt out.[1] We interact by exchanging symbols that convey much more than their literal meaning; human communication is inevitably 'indexical' in that it necessarily depends on what remains unsaid, just like a pointing finger (the index finger, as it is called) always refers to something beyond itself. Thus, phenomenological sociology approaches commonsense with utmost respect, seeing it as an immensely powerful toolkit for encoding and decoding meaning that everyone acquires unknowingly.

Another branch of its intellectual family tree links commonsense to the Italian Marxist thinker and revolutionary, Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937), who was also perhaps the first to use the term in this particular sense. Journalist, theorist of the factory councils movement, cultural critic, general secretary of the Italian Communist Party, and Member of Parliament, Gramsci spent the last decade of his life in

Mussolini's fascist prisons where his already fragile health was irrevocably destroyed; he died at the age of forty-six in a Rome clinic, six days after his jail term expired. Much of Gramsci's intellectual legacy is contained in the thirty-three 'Prison Notebooks' smuggled out of his room during the funeral arrangements and sent to Moscow by diplomatic bag. Gramsci is a key figure in Marxist thought because he makes the difficult transition from the world of the founders of Marxism—whose faith in the imminent collapse of capitalism seemed justified by the trend of historical events (like the European revolutions of 1848, the Russian Revolution of 1917, or the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s)—to the world we inhabit, where such faith can no longer be sustained.

The effects of this transition can be seen in Gramsci's notion of commonsense, which he describes as the 'philosophy of the non-philosophers', the uncritically adopted conception of the world that ordinary people inherit from their socio-cultural environment. Embodied in popular language, religion and folklore, commonsense is a chaotic collection of contradictory beliefs and attitudes; but the prevailing power structure imposes a partial coherence on it by highlighting some elements and marginalizing others. Thus modified, it serves to bind the moral conduct of individuals to the norms of the social groups they belong to, and bends these norms themselves towards the dominant ideology. In this way, it helps to legitimize the power structure by securing the passive (and occasionally the active) consent of the broad mass of people. But because of its contradictory contents, the coherence imposed upon commonsense is always vulnerable to subversive reformulation. Gramsci's notion of commonsense rescues the Marxist theory of ideology from its earlier reliance on a crude mixture of coercion and 'false consciousness'. Since contemporary capitalism cannot be overthrown by swift armed insurrections, ideology becomes the decisive battleground on which a protracted 'war of position' must be fought to recast commonsense and give it a new, radical coherence.

A third branch of the family tree connects commonsense to the

contemporary French anthropologist and sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (born 1930, died 23 January 2002). Influenced by both phenomenology and Marxism, Bourdieu's early ethnographic work in the Kabylia region of Algeria in the 1950s and 1960s was intended to be 'fieldwork in philosophy', part of an attempt to construct a 'theory of practice'. Bourdieu's version of commonsense is his notion of the 'doxa', or that portion of our world that seems so self-evident that it is silently accepted—because it 'goes without saying', and because we are not aware that things could possibly be otherwise. The doxa is the sphere of socially invisible unanimity that precludes both ortho-doxy and hetero-doxy: unlike them, it refuses to recognize the presence of other opinions and hence the possibility of dispute.

The concept of doxa is part of Bourdieu's attempt to solve the age-old agency-structure riddle in social theory—how to explain the co-presence of both free will and institutional constraint in the actions of ordinary people? He suggests that the doxa helps reconcile structure and agency by prompting people to freely choose what they are in fact forced to choose; the self-evident sense of 'proper limits' that it instils allows the individual to 'mis-recognize' objective structural constraints as active subjective choices. While doxic commonsense helps maintain order in pre-capitalist, 'traditional' societies with 'enchanted' social relations and a 'good faith' economy, its grip weakens during the crisis-ridden transition to the disenchanted world of modern capitalism and the 'callous cash' economy.

These three views of commonsense—from phenomenology (how is it that we know so much more than we can ever explain?); Marxist social theory (how do people consent to a social order that treats them unjustly?); and ethnography (how do people's subjective choices come to mesh so well with their objective constraints?)—expose the power and scope of this vastly underrated social institution. Indeed, it is an institution so central to social theory that sociology could well be described as the critique of commonsense. My favourite among the many possible definitions of the discipline, this description also

highlights the second irony inherent in the popular perception of sociology as commonsense on stilts.

For to think thus is to confuse a science with the object of its inquiry, which is a bit like mistaking a geologist for a rock. But such analogies are misleading because they conceal the complexity of the relationship between commonsense and sociology. Geologists need not worry about rocks shaping their minds, whereas sociologists must constantly worry about commonsense doing precisely that. And there is no simple or permanent solution for this anxiety.

It is easy to forget, given its connotations in everyday language, that commonsense is not simply a fancy term for the simple-minded naïvetes of other people. No one is immune: indeed, one could say that to live in society is to live in commonsense. It is said that Archimedes offered to lift the earth if given a big enough lever and a place to stand. But there is no Archimedian vantage point—no 'place to stand'—outside the world of commonsense from where we can practise a pure and scientific sociology. As social scientists now recognize, the previous search for 'value neutrality' is a mirage, because the social sciences are themselves a product of the society they wish to analyse, and they cannot but be influenced by the environment they inhabit. So, rather than think in terms of an unattainable ideal—value neutrality—it is better to accept the potential for bias and try to describe its possible sources as carefully and completely as possible. Unlike the traditional approach where the social scientist retreats behind a professional mask of faceless anonymity, this approach requires the foregrounding of all the aspects of research that used to be considered 'backstage' features: the researcher's personal identity and background, the conditions in which the research was carried out, and so on. At the same time, attempts to ensure a bias-free methodology are also intensified—but they are now contextualized by the realization that our efforts to transcend commonsense are always partial and provisional.

The main advantage that commonsense offers to sociologists is that it is not a single seamless monolith that engulfs all of society in

the same way at the same time. Every epoch, social group or specific context produces its own sense of what is self-evidently right or wrong, what goes without saying. This all-important fact—that commonsense is not the same in all times and places, or for all people—provides a wedge with which we can prise open its closed circuits of meaning. We can study the effects of commonsense by switching perspectives: by looking at the world from the viewpoint of differently placed persons or groups, or even by imagining a world different from the one we inhabit, much as writers and artists do. It is thus possible to analyse one kind of commonsense by consciously locating oneself within another kind, using the contrast to trace the outlines of what would otherwise be very difficult to see. But this is not easy and it certainly does not come naturally—it demands constant, disciplined effort, something like the *riyaaz* required of classical musicians. 'Sociology' is the name, among other things, of precisely this kind of *discipline*.

There is a second foothold that commonsense provides for those wishing to scale its otherwise smooth and slippery walls. This is the fact that it is always implicated in power relations. The most effective and durable forms of domination in society are ultimately based on commonsense; conversely, a significant portion of popular commonsense leans in the direction of power. It is important to recognize, however, that the mutually supportive relations between power and commonsense are neither inevitable nor permanent—they are context-driven. More importantly, commonsense also contains much that is hostile to the dominant order and provides the potential for resistance and rebellion. Nevertheless, we can take advantage of the power-commonsense correlation by using the former to unveil the latter. Just as Anil Kapoor's character in the 1980s hit film *Mr India* is normally invisible but shows up in red light, commonsense can be made visible in the light of power relations.

Positioning sociology as a critique of commonsense exposes us to the risk that we will begin to think of commonsense as something that is necessarily wrong or false, something always in need of correction. This is a temptation to be resisted. The point about commonsense is

that it represents our *unexamined* and often *unconscious* beliefs and opinions. What is objectionable here is not necessarily the content of beliefs and opinions, but that they are arrived at unthinkingly, through habit, ignorance or oversight. The goal of critique is to convert 'prejudice' into 'post-judice', so to speak. *After* we subject commonsense to rational scrutiny, we may find that it contains values and norms we cherish and wish to defend; or we may find that it harbours deceptions that distort our perspective on the world; or we may find both to be true simultaneously, or even that it is difficult to decipher what is going on. Sociology may or may not be helpful in this 'after' state, but its main mandate is to help us break out of the 'before' state of unawareness. The Greek philosophers believed that an unexamined life was an uncivilized one; sociology helps us to identify and interrogate the unexamined aspects of our lives.

If 'commonsense' is an abbreviation for the transparent pane of unexamined prejudices through which we normally view the world, 'sociology' is an abbreviation for the abnormal gaze that tries to focus on both this pane as well as the world beyond it. Figuratively speaking, therefore, sociologists need to cultivate a sort of double vision, a squint. To split a phrase that describes a squint-eyed person in colloquial 'Bihari'—among the richest of the many hybrid languages invented in contemporary India—good sociologists must always strive not only to 'look London' but also to 'see Paris'.

This book invites you to practise 'squinting' at Indian society. It surveys the careers of ideas and institutions like modernity, the nation, caste, class and globalization in the half-century since Independence. At the same time, it tries to make visible and subject to scrutiny the commonsense that surrounds not only these ideas and institutions but also past and present efforts to study them. It invokes 'the sociological imagination' to illuminate the sites where personal biographies intersect with a larger social history. It hopes, above all, to instil a sense of wary respect for all that seems self-evident, and to whet the appetite for self-questioning. In short, this book explains why it is cool to be cross-eyed, and shows you how to 'see double'.

The peculiar predicament of Indian sociology

Thus far we have spoken of sociology only in its global, or more accurately, its universal-Western avatar. But as with all the cultural sciences, this universalism is never quite complete, and the discipline has a somewhat different look in non-Western and specially ex-colonial contexts like India. It is important to address these differences for they influence the stance of the discipline and impart a particular flavour to its commonsense.

The dictionary defines a predicament as a 'difficult, perplexing or trying situation', and there are three special aspects to the one that afflicts Indian sociology. They are closely related and together shape the distinctive profile of the discipline: first, the ambivalent image that sociology inherits from the colonial era; second, the disciplinary consequences of the twinning of sociology and social anthropology that is peculiar to India; and third, the persistent anxiety about the Indian-ness (or lack thereof) of Indian sociology.

In the course of its re-establishment as a discipline in independent India, sociology seems to have fallen between economics and history. Both these latter disciplines were gifted enormous energy and momentum by the nationalist movement. Economics—commensurate with its global status as the dominant social science of the capitalist era—was seen as the discipline providing the cutting edge to the case against imperialism. In keeping with the requirements of modern nationalism, history was given the responsibility of (re)constructing the past of the emergent nation. Most important, both disciplines could easily carry over their agendas into the post-independence era. Economics, of course, became the mainstay of Nehruvian socialism and the premier language in which the modern nation was articulated. History took up the task of writing a retroactive biography of the nation, rescuing various regions, classes and movements from the condescensions of colonialist historiography.

In sharp contrast, sociology seems to have inherited a profoundly ambiguous and disabling self-identity. This was a direct consequence

of the fact that it lacked a distinct presence in colonial India, being largely subsumed under social anthropology and Indology. These two met with divergent responses from educated Indians, and this split carried over into the post-independence reputation of sociology. On the one hand, the nationalist elite approved of orientalist Indology in so far as it documented classical Indian/Hindu achievements in literature, philosophy and the arts, and enthusiastically celebrated them. Indeed, Indian-Hindu religio-spiritual traditions and culture were the crucial fulcrum on which nationalist ideology leveraged itself. Asserting India's cultural-spiritual superiority enabled the acceptance of undeniable Western economic-material superiority and the forging of a nationalist agenda for fusing the best of both worlds.[2] Social anthropology, on the other hand, met with hostility and resentment because it was perceived as deliberately highlighting the 'barbarity' of Indian culture and traditions.

This antipathy is vividly evoked by M.N. Srinivas, the most famous of Indian sociologists. Recalling the days of his youth when 'anthropology, unlike economics, political science or history, was unpopular with educated natives in colonial countries', Srinivas mentions that in India this was partly due to the notoriety of Katherine Mayo's book *Mother India*. (First published in 1927, this sensational account of sexual depravities, child marriage, infanticide, untouchability and other horrors was bitterly attacked by nationalists for presenting a distorted view of Indian society catering to Western stereotypes; Gandhi described it as 'a drain inspector's report'.) Srinivas describes how, in August 1943, he was chased out of a middle-class club in Vijaywada

> by a fat walking-stick-wielding lawyer who thought I was planning to do a Katherine Mayo on the august culture of the Telugus. I was asking questions about caste, kinship, festivals, fasts and fairs when the angry lawyer lunged at me and said, 'get out, we have no customs'. (Srinivas 1992:133.)

The contrast in the public response to social anthropologists and economists is instructive. Although the latter documented the wretched living conditions of the Indian masses, they and their discipline could nevertheless be framed as patriotic and anti-imperialist, for India's poverty could be attributed to British rule and turned into an argument for independence. Our 'customs and manners', however, could not be so easily disowned. Often cited by colonialists as proof that India did not deserve independence, they were an embarrassment for nationalists trying to speak the modernist language of their opponents.

Unlike the transformation of the economy or polity, where the past could be left behind without much soul-searching because it was thought to be neither integral to national identity nor worth salvaging for its own sake, 'the passing of traditional society' and culture was apt to be viewed with mixed feelings.[3] Tradition was an area of considerable ambivalence because, on the one hand, it contained the ideological wellsprings of social solidarity, cultural distinctiveness and hence nationalism; but, on the other hand, it was also the source of atavistic 'social evils' and other signs of backwardness that a modernist, forward-looking nation could not afford to dwell upon. In sum, social anthropology found it difficult to join the chorus of other disciplines singing songs of redemption in newly independent India; burdened with an equivocal past, the discipline needed radical rethinking.

The all-important context for such a rethinking was that of a new nation embarking on a massive state-led programme of 'nation building' with economic development as its dominant motif. Understandably, the concrete forms taken by the nation-building project had an enormous impact on the academic-intellectual field. Disciplinary identities and agendas were recast in response to direct or indirect state sponsorship and the prevailing ideological climate. Although the science and technology-related disciplines were the main beneficiaries, the social sciences also profited from the huge expansion of the research and higher education establishment in India during the 1950s and '60s . In the planned and unplanned gerrymandering of disciplinary boundaries that this process inevitably involved, Indian sociology found itself at a disadvantage.

Some part of this disadvantage was perhaps due to its union with social anthropology. Indian social anthropologists have generally refused to abide by the conventional distinction between anthropology as the study of 'primitive' or traditional societies and sociology as the study of 'complex' or modern societies. There is a lot to be said in favour of this refusal: the archaic separation is no longer practised; the two disciplines are closely related and overlap significantly; and, finally, both types of society that each allegedly specializes in coexist in a country like India. Although a merger of two disciplines implies that the product can claim the names of either or both of its parents, in India the label of sociology has been preferred over social anthropology. This preference may have been motivated mainly by the desire to downplay the embarrassing association with colonialist anthropology, and perhaps also the need to distance the discipline from physical anthropology (including palaeontology and anthropometry) which had a strong presence in India.

Whatever the motivation, it cannot be denied that the composite discipline of Indian 'sociology' is heavily tilted towards anthropology, and would be known by that name elsewhere. When they go abroad, Indian sociologists are treated as anthropologists and invariably visit departments of anthropology rather than sociology. The overwhelming majority of the scholars influential in the profession, both Indians and specially Westerners, have been trained as anthropologists. The most intensively-studied areas have been caste, kinship, religion, village and tribe, rather than the class structure, cities, markets, industrial relations, or the media. In terms of methods, too, anthropological specialities such as participant observation and informant-based field work have been very prominent, while survey research and quantitative analysis have rarely been influential.[4]

The trajectory of Indian sociology may not have been very different even if its internal composition had been otherwise. The new national priorities which prompted the post-independence restructuring of academia did, after all, re-order the hierarchy of disciplines. At the global level too, the reasons which made the latter half of the twentieth

century 'the age of economics' could not be wished away. By the same token, other disciplines could not simply erase their pasts and reinvent themselves. My point, therefore, is *not* about disciplinary 'luck'—I am not asking why sociology isn't more like economics. Granting that sociology would receive only a small share of the academic space given to the social sciences, my point is that its anthropological bent may have prevented the discipline from fully occupying even this small space.[5] In the (sociological) areas which could claim a prominent place in the nation-building project, the composite discipline was relatively weak and therefore suffered encroachment from its more assertive neighbours. On the other hand, the (anthropological) subjects where its authority was undisputed often ran counter to the ideological inclinations or the perceived practical needs of the new nation.

Consider, for instance, the vast terrain claimed by that capacious cliché, 'socio-economic'. Because it has a narrow methodological base and is ill at ease with 'macro' analyses, Indian sociology has ceded more ground to economics here than it need have. Indeed, recent demands for a fuller analysis of the socio-cultural aspects of economic institutions have come more from economics than sociology. While it is easy to understand why predominantly economic themes like poverty (for example) have spawned an immense academic and para-academic literature, it is puzzling that sociology has remained so aloof from this mainstream.[6] It has been left to economists and political scientists (and to organizations like the UNDP or the World Bank) to underline the importance of social capital, gender inequalities, caste- or community-based networks, and other such social phenomena in understanding poverty or responses to it. The 'bad luck' of the discipline cannot be the only reason why sociologists have not been centrally involved in any major national initiative during the four decades that separate the Community Development Programme of the 1950s from the Mandal controversy of the 1990s.

The third peculiarity that marks the predicament of Indian sociology also stems from its merger with anthropology, though in a different way. This is the recurring anxiety about the *Indian-ness* of

Indian anthropology-alias-sociology: is it Indian enough? Can it—
should it—be made more Indian?

Anxiety may seem an oddly extravagant word, but I wish to
highlight precisely the extra concern that the social sciences provoke
in non-Western settings. The natural sciences have always believed
that they are unaffected by their historical-cultural location, although
some doubts may have crept in recently. The social sciences are on the
whole less confident on this score, but there are significant differences
among them. Economics and history, for example, seem to carry the
burden of cultural/historical specificity lightly, though for very
different reasons. Given its past, it is not surprising that these concerns
should weigh most heavily on anthropology. Here, issues like cultural
specificity, colonial power and racial domination were not merely part
of an external context, they were integral to the theoretical warp and
methodological weft of the discipline. Acknowledging the distorting
effect of Western-colonial contexts did not require Indian academics
to dump disciplines like history or political economy. Practitioners
could see that it was possible to keep the baby and get rid of the bathwater
by practising nationalist historiography or development economics.
Things were different with anthropology: to state the contrast crudely,
it was much more difficult to decide what brown people should do
with a discipline that was basically designed by White people to study
non-White people.

The spectrum of possible responses was bounded at one end by a
position that denied any link between colonialism and anthropology,
and saw no problem in continuing with business as usual in the post-
colonial era. At the other end was the belief that a fundamentally
orientalist discipline like anthropology had no post-colonial future—
to borrow the old feminist epigram, it would be as useful to independent
India as a bicycle to a fish. The variety of actual responses that
eventually unfolded cannot be described in simple terms; they
certainly did not take the shape of a golden mean. However, common
to most of them was an undercurrent of anxiety about the Indian-ness
of the discipline, an anxiety born of the fact that the very idea of an

Indian anthropology runs against the historical grain of the discipline.

A famous founding precept of the discipline says that the
anthropologist studies cultures *other than* her/his own native culture.
But we also know that, despite the abstract neutrality of this principle,
the practice of anthropology has been profoundly asymmetrical,
consisting almost entirely of Western researchers studying non-
Western subjects. Consequently, both the Western-ness of the
anthropologist and the 'non-Western-ness' of the 'other' cultures he/
she studied were well entrenched in the commonsense of the discipline
as self-evident norms. Against this background, the non-Western
anthropologist stood out as an oddity—all the more so when studying
her own culture, because the 'study-only-strangers' rule was also
violated. And for reasons that seem obvious but need more careful
scrutiny, non-Western anthropologists (unlike their Western
counterparts) have almost always ended up studying their own
societies. It has rarely been possible for them to study the West, or even
non-Western cultures other than their own; and the few existing efforts
of this sort have not had any significant impact on the mainstream of
the discipline, although some distant rumblings have been heard
recently.

Thus, the anxiety about Indian-ness may have begun as a largely
unselfconscious and often muddled response to this messy history.
Seen as oddities but wanting to be taken seriously, the early Indian
anthropologists may have been somewhat uneasy about the tacit
tension between their national-cultural and their professional
identities. But if this was true when the post-colonial era began around
1950, it is no longer so today, when disciplinary norms and practices
appear to have changed considerably. Any lingering self-doubt in
Indian sociology-anthropology today is not fuelled by unease about
studying one's own society. If anything, the shoe is on the other foot.
Heightened awareness of the discipline's past has raised doubts about
the intended or unintended effects of Western scholarship on India.
Apart from colonial contamination, there has also been a more
generalized fear that alien theories or theorists might not be able to

produce a sufficiently accurate or authentic account of Indian culture and society. It is these vaguely defined but strongly felt misgivings that have prompted repeated calls for a truly indigenous sociology.

There are several interesting paradoxes and peculiarities associated with this phenomenon. For instance, foreign scholars have been among the most insistent advocates of an indigenized sociology based on native concepts. There is also the historical irony that much of the intellectual ammunition used by nationalists of every variety—including specially the historical and Indological work on the past glories of Indian civilization and culture—has been provided by Western scholarship. Finally, the all-important fact is that despite its emotive-intuitive appeal, it has proved very difficult to even define, leave alone create, an indigenous science of society.

It is easy to demonstrate that most indigenist positions usually boil down to an understandable but intellectually incoherent nostalgia. But there are other, quite coherent, reasons for focusing attention on the national-regional domicile of disciplines. When we simply refer (as we often do) to 'sociology', 'anthropology' and so on, we are assuming that these proper nouns denote universal entities that belong equally to all humans without regard to nationality, race, class, gender or any of the myriad other particularities which divide humankind. This is true in an important albeit rather abstract sense, and it is imperative that we keep renewing our faith in this assumption. However, at a more concrete and experiential level, we also know that this abstract universality is more fiction than fact. Although they often claim a grandiose vagrancy—that they belong to no place and all places simultaneously—the modern academic disciplines do have a fixed address. They do not relate to all places or to all kinds of people in the same way, and the reverse is equally true.

This is not just a question of differences but of *inequalities*. Like the rest of the world, the academy, too, is full of glaring disparities in access and influence. The dominance of the West over the rest in the field of knowledge production has been one of the taken-for-granted aspects of academics in our time. Western libraries are better stocked

with materials on non-Western countries than libraries in these countries themselves; scholars based in the West have access to more material and non-material resources, are more 'visible' and have a greater impact on global disciplines than their counterparts located in non-Western countries, and so on. India has been a partial exception in some disciplines and contexts, and it is also true that things have been changing rapidly. Nevertheless, it needs to be reiterated that globalization has not diminished these disparities—it has only displaced and complicated them. At the same time, we also need to remind ourselves that these complex inequalities are not only international—they are just as integral to intranational institutions, relationships and processes.

The net result is that we can no longer afford to be naïve about the universalist claims of academic disciplines, least of all in cases like anthropology or sociology. It is now not enough to speak of 'sociology', or even 'Indian sociology,' without qualification. Further questions are inevitable today even though they may not have easy answers: is Indian sociology simply the sociology *of* India? Who or what is it *for*? Does it matter who it is practised *by*, and where its theories and methods come *from*? Though they may not be equally relevant in all contexts, these are not trivial questions nor are they due merely to misplaced national chauvinism. They are a product of the fact that the self-understanding of the social sciences has been transformed by recent work uncovering the systematic synergy between structures of power and institutions of knowledge.

The realization that 'Indian sociology' is a disparate field marked by inequalities and asymmetries along several criss-crossing axes demands from us a double vigilance. We have to be alert to the possibility that the persuasive power of a theorist, the content of a theory, or the career of a concept may be affected by where they are located on the global grid of unequal power relations that regulates knowledge production. But we also have to be on guard against reductive formulae that insist on a fixed relationship between location and content. Every location has inherent possibilities and constraints,

but they do not take effect automatically: they must be scrupulously investigated in each case. In the final analysis, the effects of location must be demonstrated, not assumed.

'You are here': A route map for this book

The concluding section of this introduction provides a sketch map of the route through Indian society and sociology that is taken up in the following chapters. But first, in keeping with the emphasis on self-reflexivity in this book, I must provide its readers with some indication of where its author is coming from.

Like others of its kind, this book too has been shaped by a variety of factors: the author's areas of interest, competence, and ignorance; disciplinary trends that encourage or discourage particular fields; publishers' assessments of the commercial viability of different themes or formats; the inevitable mix of accidents for which no one can be credited or blamed, and so on. Other things being equal, authors generally tend to overstate the part played by their own intentions and plans in this process. At the end of a long and arduous journey, we are inclined to claim that the destination reached is precisely the one aimed for in the beginning. This is usually only partially true, but there is an understandable and perhaps also necessary tendency to underplay its partialness. After all, the author's job is not merely to impose coherence on chaos but also to provoke and—ideally—to persuade.

My main aim has been to write a book that would advertise the attractions of sociology—its distinctive stance towards the world, and the special insights it offers. My intended audience, therefore, has been a non-specialist one, including the general reader wanting to think beyond commonsense, academics from neighbouring disciplines, and students across the social sciences and humanities. But after the book was done, I found that I had all along been addressing myself as well. Perhaps it is a sign of the times that, even more than

others, it is we sociologists who need to rediscover the attractions of our discipline.

The overall theme, specific subjects and mode of presentation in this book are, as far as I can determine, products of three sets of causal factors. The first is my 'naturalized' rather than native citizenship in Indian sociology; the second is my formative experience as a teacher; and the third involves the contingent historical events of the last decade or so.

My repeated insistence on a singular disciplinary perspective may seem odd, specially in view of the fact that I have never had any formal training in the specific subject area of this book, namely the sociology of India. I did my bachelor's and master's degrees in economics, and was halfway through a doctoral programme at an Indian research institute when I wandered off to an American university and into the discipline of sociology, in which I earned a second master's and a doctoral degree. Due to institutional encouragement and force of circumstance, most foreign (and specially 'Third World') social science students in Western universities end up writing theses on their native countries. Out of a perverse resistance to such prodding, I insisted on a 'local' topic and wrote a dissertation on the centrality of an 'extra-economic' phenomenon like racism to California's clearly capitalist agriculture. Although I hardly realized it at the time, this also meant that I did not study any Indian sociology. Why, then, do I harp on the specificity of the discipline? Such disciplinary monogamy appears particularly incongruous today when inter-, multi-, trans-, and even anti-disciplinary perspectives are much in vogue. And surely it is carrying things too far to insist on differentiating sociology even from social anthropology?

In keeping the focus firmly on sociology, my motive is not to deify disciplines or to re-erect barricades between them. In fact, the following chapters will often trespass, quite casually and without fuss, on to territory claimed by economics, anthropology, political science or history. My point is different: the inclusive enthusiasm of labels like 'inter-disciplinary' makes us forget that systematic scholarship

also requires ruthless exclusion. This is a necessity, not a failing; we are able to study some subjects or master some methods only by refusing to deal with others. Descriptions like interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary may give us a vague sense of the something 'extra' that is being included, but they remain silent on the exclusions that must inevitably accompany the inclusions. As a result, we are no longer aware of what we don't know, and risk ignoring lopsided patterns of disciplinary development. Indian sociology is an excellent example: the claim that it is both social anthropology as well as sociology has served to divert attention from the uneven growth of its two components. Because the discipline has been less than ambidextrous, I dwell on the distinctive identity of sociology only to favour the weaker hand.

This book is about certain subjects and perspectives that I think have been underemphasized, and 'sociology' happens to be the most convenient label under which they can be grouped, particularly since it also helps to focus attention on the processes responsible for this relative neglect. But beyond this, the name does not really matter; what matters is the awareness of what is being excluded or included, and why. The best known authors and the most influential books associated with 'Indian sociology' have generally focused on the important subjects of caste, kinship, religion, village society or tribal cultures, and they have done so, by and large, from an anthropological perspective. Of these themes, all except caste are absent from this book. Even among the more sociology-oriented themes, this book does not cover key areas like agrarian and industrial relations, demographic trends or the media. These omissions do not imply—and I cannot emphasize this enough—that these subjects are in any way less important or deserving of study. They are the price paid for focusing, from a 'macro' or society-wide perspective, on five ideas, institutions and processes—modernity, nationhood, inequality, caste, and globalization. The emphasis throughout is on examining that which has seemed (or still seems) self-evident, not because everything self-evident is necessarily false, but because unexamined beliefs need to be

converted into self-conscious ones.

This selection of topics and perspective is directly due to my lack of formal training in Indian sociology, and specially to my being forced to teach what I had never been taught. I had been a teacher of economics before, but that was a subject I had been taught; I had also taught sociology in American universities at the doctoral and undergraduate levels, but that did not involve India. Teaching sociology in India, I felt the difference acutely. I felt not just like an outsider—a feeling that the discipline believes to be useful and in fact fosters—but like an impostor. I felt the full weight of a hundred years of sociology on my sagging shoulders every time I walked into the classroom and struggled to 'discipline' my students.

The struggle was initially conducted in the theory courses of the MA programme. Given the logic of the curriculum in Indian universities, this usually means Western sociological theory unencumbered by any social context. On this terrain, I had the advantage for I had specialized in 'theory' and had taught it for some years. On the other hand, my students were put on the defensive by the difficulty of the material and the aura of a foreign degree; perhaps my apparent sincerity also prompted them to be indulgent and they hid their bafflement and exasperation. Emboldened by what I fondly believed to be my success in teaching theory, I ventured to teach 'applied' courses on contemporary society, hoping to impress my students with the usefulness of what they had been taught.

I soon realized, however, that on this terrain my students had the upper hand. My lack of formal training in Indian sociology meant that I did not possess the commonsense of the discipline, and had not internalized its mental reflexes. Nor did I possess the pragmatic ability to choose my battles wisely. In this state, I was very vulnerable to the visceral accounts of lived experience that my students threw at me. Once they persuaded me to look at sociology and at the world through their eyes, I could neither deny nor explain away the serious mismatch between the two. It was like a jigsaw puzzle where the pieces of the right shape have the wrong part of the picture on them. Bewildering

and painful, it was also a profoundly provocative experience, and I will always be grateful to my students and my lack of training for this unconventional initiation into Indian sociology.

I believed, quite plausibly, that my initial difficulties were simply the product of ignorance and lack of experience. If only I read more books and read them more intensively, if only I examined my students' examples and arguments more carefully, I would be able to fill the gaps between theory and social experience or at least explain why they need not or could not be filled. This was true to a large extent, and rapid progress was made as my reading broadened and deepened, and as I learnt to sift through individual experiences to separate 'personal troubles' from 'social problems'. But many problems persisted even after several years of teaching and could no longer be explained by individual ignorance alone (which in any case is a permanent state, varying only in degree and direction).

For example, caste was a live and volatile issue on the campus with frequent clashes between Dalit and upper-caste students. But despite the vast literature on this subject in sociology, I could find very little that directly addressed their experience. It was almost as if the caste that sociologists studied and the caste that was part of everyday social experience in the university were two different things. I could analyse caste only by anaesthetizing it in the classroom, 'like a patient etherized upon a table'. Whenever I encountered it in its live and active avatar in events on the campus, I was at a loss. In the same way, marriage was an important and sometimes even a traumatic subject for students, specially the women, many of whose families saw the MA course as a stopgap arrangement while searching for a suitable match. But the sociological literature on kinship, marriage and the family seemed light years away from the kind of strategizing and the pressures and counter-pressures faced by these young women and their families. 'Endogamy' in the real world was a hugely complex, constantly evolving institution that easily outflanked the available academic analyses.

It was not only such issues of immediate experience that sociology

did not seem to address adequately, but also larger ones. The bitter anti-Mandal agitations had only just died down when I began teaching, the demolition of the Babri Masjid followed soon after, and communal riots were already an integral part of life in the city. Although I was deeply affected by both events, the former was specially painful professionally. It was hard to accept that a discipline that had studied caste intensively for decades had nothing more to say about Mandal than countless columnists and self-appointed pundits.

No academic discipline should be expected to provide a ready-made manual for living or a guide to current affairs. But why has Indian sociology been unable, by and large, to respond to the unprecedented opportunities it has been presented with in recent times? The last two decades should have belonged to sociologists. They should have belonged to us because, for the first time in the history of independent India, the nation faced a number of 'big' problems that looked and were more social rather than economic. Secessionist movements in Punjab and Kashmir based on ethnic-religious identity; the Mandal controversy and the intrusion of caste into a supposedly caste-less urban middle-class milieu; the advent of Hindutva and its elevation of the communal divide on to centre stage in the national polity; and the widespread concern about the cultural impact of globalization—all these developments (to name only four) were ideally suited for major interventions by sociology and other non-economics social sciences. But our response has not been equal to the challenge, or at least that is how it seems. I am not sure why or how this has happened, and this book is part of an attempt to think through this predicament.

It would be foolish to believe that Indian sociology can obtain something like the magical 'solution to all problems' promised by the sex-clinic ads scrawled on the walls of Delhi. But I do hope that this book will contribute more to the solutions than to the problems, and that students and teachers of sociology and neighbouring disciplines will find it useful. Most of all, since I was one myself not so long ago, I hope that the 'general reader' will want to know more about the

subtle but disconcerting art of 'squinting' at the world. She or he may also find it interesting to explore the commonsense of everyday life—and of the discipline that critiques commonsense. For if we understand how commonsense is formed, we may be able to think of ways in which it might be re-formed.

CHAPTER TWO

Mapping a Distinctive Modernity

Modernity—together with its contrasting twin, tradition—is among the most ubiquitous themes in the commonsense of contemporary India. An intense and contentious aspect of the process of nation formation, the desire to be modern has become so deeply ingrained in our national psyche that its signs and symptoms are visible all around us.

Consider, for instance, the frequency with which the word 'modern' has been used as a name: for a well known journal (the *Modern Review*) published from Calcutta in the early 1900s; for a popular brand of bread made by a public-sector company 'privatized' recently; for an elite school in Delhi; and most significantly, for countless shops and small businesses—tailors, 'hair cutting saloons', dry cleaners, 'variety stores' and so on—in cities and small towns all over the country. (In fact, if there were a contest for guessing the most popular (non-proper noun, English) names for small businesses in India, my money would be on 'modern', 'national' and 'liberty', probably in that order.)

I came across a slogan that could well have been the epigraph for this chapter in another peculiarly Indian place of public culture—the graffiti hand-painted on vehicles, in this case a Delhi bus. 'Unhe bhi to pata chale ki ham bhi *modern* hain', it said—they should realize that we too are modern. The slogan used to be the punchline of a 1980s

television ad. More recently, the beauty queens that we are now producing with monotonous regularity have repeatedly informed the world that the essence of Indian womanhood is the blending of tradition with modernity. No Indian needs to be told that this theme has been among the perennial obsessions of our popular cinema across all genres and regions. In the realm of 'high' culture as well, the question—what qualifies as 'modern' and what should be our attitude to it?—has generated intense literary debates in every major Indian language, and in every discipline in the arts, specially painting and dance.

Why does the idea of modernity have such a massive presence in Indian social life? What makes it such a big deal?

Everyone above the age of fifteen will have worked out some version of the commonsense answer to this question. Modernity becomes a big deal because we are desperate to be, and to be acknowledged as, modern; but at the same time, we don't want to be 'too modern', or 'only modern'—we wish to be modern on our own terms, and we are often unsure what these terms are or ought to be.

This isn't a bad answer, and you need read no further if you are satisfied with it. But this book is for people who are not content with commonsense; if you are one of them, and have sometimes wondered *why* the modernity-tradition theme has become the mother of most clichés, do read on.

'Modern': A short social history

The English language inherits the word 'modern' from the ancient Latin, where it has been in use since at least the sixth century of the Christian Era. For the first twelve hundred years or so of its history, the word was used in a generic sense to characterize the *distinctiveness of any contemporary era* in order to distinguish it from past eras. Around the eighteenth century, the word acquired a new and more specific sense that referred to the *unique social system that emerged in Western Europe* between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, and the

values and institutions associated with this system.[1]

In pre-nineteenth century English usage, 'modern' appears to have been a pejorative term with strong negative connotations, and we are told that 'Shakespeare invariably used the term in this sense' (Black 1966:5). However, as Raymond Williams points out, 'through the nineteenth century and very markedly in the twentieth century there was a strong movement the other way, until *modern* became virtually equivalent to improved or satisfactory or efficient' (Williams 1983:208-9).[2] Although 'modern' still retains its comparative-temporal sense of something close to or part of the present, it is interesting to note that, in the last decades of the twentieth century, this sense has been yielding ground to words like 'contemporary' or to neologisms prefixed by 'post'. Moreover, the word is no longer unequivocally positive in its connotations.

These recent developments in the career of the word point to a complicated and unequal relationship between its two meanings: the generic one has generally been subordinated, whether surreptitiously or openly, to the specific meaning. The consequences of the dominance of the sense connoting Western European modernity can be seen quite clearly when we shift from the relatively static noun—modern—to the more dynamic and processual verb, *modernization*. Modernization entered the English lexicon during the eighteenth century, mainly in references to changes or improvements made to buildings and spelling, at a time when the reversal of the pejorative connotations of the noun-form had already begun. By the twentieth century the word had become increasingly common and was 'normally used to indicate something unquestionably favourable or desirable' (Williams 1983:208-9). This general connotation of a process of *positive change or improvement* (particularly with reference to machinery or technology) was inflected—specially when speaking generally about social institutions or entire societies—by the suggestion of a more pre-determined movement towards the *European Enlightenment model of modernity*.

Unlike other attempts to distinguish a modern present from its pasts, modernity is not content with establishing a merely relativistic

difference but claims fundamental superiority. As Arjun Appadurai has put it, European modernity

> both declares and desires universal applicability for itself. What is new about modernity (or about the idea that its newness is a new kind of newness) follows from this duality. Whatever else the project of the Enlightenment may have created, it aspired to create persons who would, after the fact, have wished to have become modern. (Appadurai 1997:1.)

Once claimed, such normative privileges pre-position modernity in a profoundly asymmetrical relationship to all other epochs and cultures.

These claims have, of course, been much more than abstract assertions, having had the status of self-evident truths for most of mainstream social science. Whether in terms of a contrast with the world of *tradition* (another critical keyword of modern times), or in terms of the coherence of its own multifaceted achievements, there is a formidable array of evidence proclaiming the uniqueness of post-Enlightenment Western-European modernity. Some of this evidence is eloquently recounted by Lloyd and Susanne Rudolph:

> '[M]odernity' assumes that local ties and parochial perspectives give way to universal commitments and cosmopolitan attitudes; that the truths of utility, calculation, and science take precedence over those of the emotions, the sacred, and the non-rational; that the individual rather than the group be the primary unit of society and politics; that the associations in which men live and work be based on choice not birth; that mastery rather than fatalism orient their attitude toward the material and human environment; that identity be chosen and achieved, not ascribed and affirmed; that work be separated from family, residence, and community in bureaucratic organizations ... (Rudolph and Rudolph 1967.)

To this long list of the attributes of modernity we must also add the revolutionizing of modes of governance with the emergence of democracy, the modern nation-state and its institutional apparatus;

the advent of new and intensified notions of time; and, at a somewhat different level, the supplanting of God and Nature by Man and Reason as foundational categories, and the consequent penchant for 'metanarratives' (or grand story-lines) of various kinds, most notably those of Progress.

It hardly needs emphasizing that the ideas and institutions of modernity have wielded enormous material and moral power. Like all other social systems, modernity too has been historically and culturally specific; but it is the only social system in human history that has had the technological capability, the social organization and the systemic will-to-power to comprehensively reshape the whole world in its own image. Colonization is only the starkest form of this reshaping, which begins with pre-modern Europe itself, and passes through the de-population and re-settlement of the New World, to the direct or indirect subjugation of the rest of the globe. The mental-moral forms of colonization have been even more profound in their effects: whatever be our attitude towards it, modernity has shaped to an extraordinary degree the ideological frameworks we inhabit, the intellectual tools we use and the values that we hold dear.

This overgeneral sketch needs to be qualified and complicated in a number of (sometimes contradictory) ways. Despite the remarkably convergent forces and processes it has unleashed across the globe, modernity has hardly been a single unified entity. Indeed, it is only at the highest level of abstraction that one can speak of something simply called 'modernity'. Not only have disparate, even incompatible perspectives been produced within its ambit, but modernity has itself spawned oppositional philosophies of various kinds (such as the romanticism of a Rousseau or the nihilism of a Nietzsche). And though it is true that modernity's attempts to colonize the world have been largely successful, this has usually meant that other cultures or social systems are not simply erased, but are subjected to intense and sustained pressure. Moreover, by the twenty-first century, modernity has legitimized itself in most parts of the world and is more a freely chosen goal than an alien imposition.

Modernity Outside the West

An important aspect of modernity is the fact that it is also the source of the conceptual tools that have been used to understand it. In this sense, therefore, modernity defines our intellectual horizon rather like commonsense—there is no place to stand outside of it. The social sciences as we have known them are themselves products of and responses to modernity, having emerged in the post-Enlightenment era in Western Europe (Hawthorn 1987). The discipline of sociology, in particular, was invented as part of a larger attempt to make sense of this new and historically unprecedented social system. The classical theorists acknowledged as the founders of the discipline—including August Comte, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Herbert Spencer, and Ferdinand Toennies—were all concerned with theorizing the Western European experience of *modernization,* the process of becoming or being made modern.

It should not surprise us that it is only in the 1950s—more than half a century after the institutionalization of disciplines like sociology—that academic interest in modernization extended beyond the West. Until then, non-Western societies were considered to be non-modern by definition, and were studied either by anthropologists interested in 'primitive' cultures or by orientalist scholars investigating the past of once-great civilizations.

But the world changed very rapidly after the end of World War II. The process of decolonization, which coincided with the beginning of the Cold War, gave birth to a 'Third World' consisting of a host of new African and Asian nations who had gained independence between the late 1940s and the 1960s. On the one hand, decolonization released fresh hopes and energies in the new nations across the globe, at a time when boundless faith was being invested in the idea of unlimited material progress based on rational-scientific technologies. But, on the other hand, there was no fundamental change in the socio-political, and specially the economic, inequalities undergirding the world order. The new nations thus became both the repositories of millenarian

agendas of change and progress fuelled by domestic aspirations, as well as potential client states where the old and new world powers competed to establish spheres of influence. Added momentum was provided by the almost total hegemony of the US over the Western world.

'Modernization studies' were launched in the early 1950s as part of a vast, largely US-sponsored multidisciplinary academic project with the overall objective of winning the Cold War—both negatively (by preventing the 'slide into communism' of poor Asian, African and Latin American nations), and positively (by providing socially, economically and politically viable routes to stable non-communist growth and development). As part of this enterprise, various US federal government institutions (including the military), leading universities, and private philanthropic foundations (notably the Ford and Rockefeller foundations) financed a historically unprecedented volume of social scientific research on the new nations of the Third World (Myrdal 1970:12-16, Gendzier 1985, sp. Ch.2). Moreover, nationalism and independence also awakened in the middle-class elites of the Third World an intense interest in the development and modernization of their own societies, often translated into state support for research, or at least into willing cooperation with externally sponsored research efforts.[3] Seen against this background, the emergence and popularity of theories of growth, development or modernization seem almost inevitable (Myrdal 1970:8).

Ironically, despite its three-fold division, the world was also being *unified* in a way it had never been before. Although centuries of plunder, trade, warfare, religion, conquest and colonialism had fostered global intercourse of various sorts, the developments of the twentieth century were without precedent. Campaigns to eradicate disease in the early decades of the century created the notion of a global human population collectively at risk, while the Great Depression of the twenties and thirties dramatically illustrated the interdependence of national economies. By the time the fifties came along, the mind-boggling scale of new weapons of mass destruction and the spectacular successes of space exploration had altered human consciousness forever, imbuing

it with a powerful sense of a single shared planet.

It was in this historical context—in an intellectual climate where deep divisions coexisted with ideas of commonality, change and convergence—that Western social science first addressed the non-Western world through modernization studies. How, it asked, would—should, could—these clearly non-modern societies become modern?

Although it soon came to be dominated by development economics and allied fields, the thirty year boom (1950s-1970s) in modernization studies affected several disciplines including sociology (specially rural sociology), area studies, political science and social psychology. Sociology played a particularly prominent role both because it provided the most commonly invoked theoretical framework—namely, the highly abstract (hence apparently context-free and cross-culturally portable) taxonomic syntheses of Talcott Parsons—and because of the inevitable importance of rural sociology in studying predominantly rural Third World societies. The major themes taken up by modernization studies included development, the transition from traditional to modern social forms, the aids and obstacles to the emergence of modern political institutions, and the inculcation of (or resistance to) modern values and norms in the individual personality.

Even if we know now that they led to an intellectual dead end, modernization studies did mark a significant moment in the global history of the social sciences. At the very least, their naïve confidence *in modernization as a theory of 'the true, the good, and the inevitable'*—as Arjun Appadurai (1997:11) has put it—triggered our scepticism and forced us to rethink the vexed relationship between modernity and non-Western societies.

THE SPECIFICITY OF INDIA

While it is, of course, strongly affected by this global background, the history of modernization studies in India is also rather distinctive. Unlike in most other Third World countries, American modernization

theory did not dominate the study of social change in India, although it was a prominent and influential presence in the realm of state policy. This difference is due to the combined effect of three factors: the prior involvement with India of other Western scholarly traditions; the presence of a small but relatively well-developed indigenous research establishment; and the hegemonic influence exerted by a long-standing nationalist movement.

As an ancient civilization with a living Great Tradition (rather than a 'decapitated' one, to use Robert Redfield's starkly evocative term[4]), India was no *tabula rasa* for Western scholars. The production of systematic knowledge on Indian society of a recognizably modern kind developed very rapidly from 1760 onward, based on the pioneering work of Orientalist Indologists, colonial administrators and missionaries, as Bernard Cohn has shown (1987:141-171). By the early decades of the twentieth century these varied traditions had already produced a considerable body of works on the arts, sciences and cultural-religious practices of classical Hinduism; the cultural coherence of Indian/Hindu or aboriginal communities; and regional inventories of castes and tribes detailing their 'customs and manners'. To this must be added the later work of Western and Indian scholars trained mainly in the British tradition of social anthropology, as well as some American anthropologists, consisting largely of ethnographic monographs on village, caste or tribal communities.[5]

However, this diverse body of largely anthropological work on India did not show any deep or sustained interest in social *change*, except in the form of inquiries into the decay or degeneration of traditional practices, institutions and communities. With independence, of course, the search for social change became an important item on the agenda of social anthropology in India—so much so, in fact, that some scholars worried that it would eclipse other issues.[6] But even when it did get taken up, this search was conducted largely independently of American modernization theory as such, in keeping, perhaps, with the relative indifference towards this theme in anthropology.[7]

The second and third reasons for the Indian difference have to be

viewed together: the social dominance of nationalism in the 1950s, and the existence of institutions that could give intellectual expression to this dominance. In India, as in most of the non-Western world, the themes of modernization, development, growth and progress were part of the much wider canvas of the colonial encounter, particularly since the latter half of the nineteenth century. They were woven into colonialist narratives of the white man's burden and the *mission civilisatrice*—and also into emergent nationalist narratives of the desire for development thwarted by colonial oppression and economic drain. In the heady aftermath of Indian independence, the idea of modernization took on the dimensions of a national mission; it became an integral part of the Nehruvian 'tryst with destiny' that the nation had pledged to keep. While Indian nationalism in itself was hardly an aberration (though older than most others in the Third World), India's colonial inheritance of a viable nucleus of Western-style academic institutions was unusual, possibly even unique. Like other social institutions of the time, Indian universities and research institutes were also eager to participate in the agendas of the nationalist state, and provided another site for the emergence of modernization studies in India, albeit one marked by an ambivalent attitude towards Western scholars and institutions.[8]

Anxiety And Ambivalence

'We may have become weary of the concept of modernization,' writes T.N. Madan (1995:5), 'but the important question is, have we carefully formulated the reasons for this weariness?' Indian sociology does seem to be weary of this theme—not only bored or disenchanted, but also exhausted by it.[9] Why has the conceptual pursuit of modernization been so debilitating?

A DISCREPANT DUALISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS

Some of this weariness may have been caused by the frame of analysis

commonly used to understand modernization, namely dualism. The dominant view among students of modern India held that neither tradition nor modernity would be strong enough (at least in the foreseeable future) to completely erase the other. This meant that the search for an adequate summary-description of Indian society was converted into the problem of defining dualism—or characterizing the nature of the relationship between tradition and modernity.

There is nothing exceptional in this, for dualism is the presiding deity in the conceptual pantheon of modernization not just in India but everywhere in the 'non-West' (Banuri 1990:40-3). Consider, for example, one of the most famous vignettes in modernization studies— the story of 'The Grocer and the Chief'—with which David Lerner begins his classic work on *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Lerner 1958:21-28; subsequent quotations in this paragraph are from these pages). Presented as 'the parable of modern Turkey', this story contrasts two main characters who stand for modernity and tradition. The chief (of the village of Balgat, 8 km south of Ankara) is a 'virtuoso of the traditional style'. A prosperous farmer and an imposing personality, he has no unfulfilled ambitions, loves to expound on the values of 'obedience, courage, loyalty', and responds to persistent inquiries about where else he would like to live with a firm 'nowhere'. Balgat's only grocer is described by his interviewer (a Turkish student identified only by the abbreviated name Tosun B.) as an 'unimpressive type' giving 'the impression of a fat shadow', whom the villagers consider to be 'even less than the least farmer'. But the grocer visits Ankara frequently, is fascinated by Hollywood movies, would like to own 'a *real* grocery store' with floor-to-ceiling shelves, and is eager to live in America because it offers 'possibilities to be rich even for the simplest persons'. As if to underline the centrality of this dichotomous model for modernization theory, Alex Inkeles and David Smith present an identical contrast between Ahmadullah, a 'traditional' illiterate farmer from Comilla, and Nuril, a 'modern' metal worker in a Dhaka factory, who enact Lerner's Turkish parable all over again—sixteen years later, in Bangladesh. (Inkeles and Smith 1974:73-83.)

The point of recalling these emblematic figures is not to claim

that they are absent in India—how could they be?—but to highlight the fact that the *dominant* descriptions of dualism in the Indian literature are different. Simply put, Indian descriptions of dualism seem discrepant because they are relatively more sophisticated than those elsewhere, at least in the early period of modernization studies. The precociously complex analyses of influential scholars like M.N. Srinivas minimize the impact of the cruder models of dualism, even though they are as common in India as elsewhere in the Third World. On the other hand, this means that the dead end of dualism is reached sooner in India and more time is wasted in the futile effort to grasp Indian social reality in terms of the tradition-modernity dichotomy.

The most obvious differences in Indian accounts of dualism have to do with the social units in which tradition and modernity are located and their mutual articulation. Thus, tradition and modernity are not only segregated into two separate personalities as in the Bangladeshi or Turkish tale, but are also apt to occur, in comparable Indian accounts, as integral parts of *the same personality*. For example, M.N. Srinivas mentions meeting the 'driver of a government bulldozer' on his field village of Rampura in 1952, barely two years after Tosun B. met with the Turkish grocer and chief on Daniel Lerner's behalf. The bulldozer driver, a Tamil-speaker from Bangalore, was skilled enough to operate his machine and also to 'do minor repairs; but he was not only traditional in his religious beliefs, he had even picked up some black magic, a knowledge usually confined to small groups'. Srinivas reports that 'he saw no inconsistency between driving a bulldozer for his livelihood and indulging in displays of black magic for his pleasure', the 'two sectors being kept completely "discrete."' (Srinivas 1971a:54 5.)

But if such descriptions are more believable and complex than the caricatures of crude dualism, they also place the Indian personality under permanent suspicion of schizophrenia. Here is Srinivas again, speaking this time of the first generation of his own community, South Indian Brahmins, who

took to English education in considerable numbers and

entered the professions and government service at all levels. In the first phase of their Westernization, their professional life was lived in the Western world while their home life continued to be largely traditional. (The term 'cultural schizophrenia' comes to mind, but a caution must be uttered against viewing it as pathological.) (1971a:57)[10]

The theme of the coexistence of 'discrete' sectors in a single person, family or other social group is a common one in the literature on modernization in India, and, indeed, in the conversational anecdotes of everyday life.[11] The dualistic-but-unified personality may be described in a wide range of registers—from pathos through pathology to pride. But whatever the tenor of the description, and regardless of the attitude of the person being described, the describer—specially the professional social scientist—is unable to shake off a sense of incongruity which invariably inflects the description.

Nevertheless, in the Indian literature, the choice between tradition and modernity is rarely presented as a mutually exclusive 'either-or', though it is often seen as a morally charged one. In Lerner's description, tradition has no value whatsoever for the grocer, who wishes only to escape from its parochial constraints; and the chief, though forced to acknowledge the impact of modernity, remains thoroughly immune to it morally. In this parable, 'modern Turkey' is the only transcendent entity capable of subsuming these contrary world views, while in the Indian literature the burden of subsumption is felt by social units all along the scale from the national to the individual.[12]

However, there is another difference that does seem important: the prominence of *Indian* scholars in the social anthropology of India. In India, the Western anthropologist encountered not only natives and 'local counterparts' (brahmin pundits, gyanis or maulavis), but also his/her own '*double*', the native anthropologist with comparable Western training (Burghart 1990; see also Das 1995:34-41). Such an early and sizeable presence of local scholars is quite unusual among

Third World countries, and may well be unique.[13] Whatever the reasons responsible, the crucial question is whether the presence of Indian researchers made any difference to the *descriptions produced*.

Returning to the comparisons between modernization in Lerner's Turkey and Srinivas' India, a striking difference is now visible. Tosun B., the Turkish graduate student whose field notes caught Lerner's attention and helped produce the parable, is himself outside the frame of reference, or, at best, at its edges. By contrast, Srinivas, the anthropologist with an Oxford degree, is never allowed to forget his Indianness, and is constantly being pulled into the frame of the picture he is painting.[14] Perhaps it is this sustained incitement to self-reflexivity that makes Indian accounts of dualism precociously complex. Indian anthropologists are acutely aware that modernization is happening not just 'elsewhere' but in the 'here and now' that they themselves inhabit.

Whatever the truth of their claim to greater sophistication, Indian accounts of dualism cannot escape the limitations of this mode of theorizing. Modernization—even in its minimalist version of an ongoing interaction of some sort between tradition and modernity—proves to be a conceptual dead end because there is, literally, no exit. A modernizing society is always only a modernizing society: it can no longer call itself traditional, and its modernity is never quite the real thing. In a strange twist on the 'allochronism' (Fabian 1983) that anthropology is accused of, the modernization paradigm evacuates the present of such societies, robbing it of its immediacy and constricting its relations with the past and the future into narratives of loss or inadequacy. It is truly remarkable how this motif of a society, a culture, a history, a politics or even a personality permanently in a state of in-between-ness—a double-edged failure—recurs across disciplinary contexts.

For example, in anthropology, the 'developing societies' become (in the words of T.N. Madan) 'deceived societies as they have had their present transformed into a permanent transition', 'an endless pause' (1995:165, 22). In Marxist political economy, (as Mihir Shah

puts it in his requiem for the mode of production debate), 'Indian agrarian relations are perhaps destined forever to remaining semi-capitalist' (1985:PE-66). And Ranajit Guha inaugurates the 'Subaltern Studies' initiative with the announcement that the 'central problematic' of historiography is the 'failure of the nation to come into its own' (Guha 1982:7). All the various avatars of this theme—whether in the garb of a search for modernity, democracy, capitalism, or development—are marked by the anxiety of striving for a norm that is unattainable from the very beginning.

THE INTERNAL BIASES OF INDIAN SOCIOLOGY

The internal composition of Indian social anthropology may also have contributed to the impasse in modernization studies. In Indian social anthropology the distinction between sociology and anthropology has been refused at least since Srinivas (that is, since the mid-fifties or so). This is an unexceptionable refusal in so far as the convention of the former studying 'complex' and the latter 'simple' societies could not really be followed in India and is no longer the rule elsewhere either. However, the well-established Indian practice of referring interchangeably to sociology and anthropology hides the fact that the latter is much better developed here than the former. Because the social anthropology of India was heavily oriented towards 'tradition'—that is, towards institutions like caste, tribe, kinship and religion, and towards rural rather than urban society—modernization studies here were also biased in this direction. Had urban sociology, economic sociology, social history or political sociology been better developed, the content of modernization studies may have been more balanced, with the new and emergent studies getting as much attention as the old and traditional. As it happened, most studies of modernization in India located themselves in the world of tradition and looked out upon modernity from that vantage point, with its attendant strengths and weaknesses. Indian social anthropology failed to cultivate intensively those methods (such as survey research or quantitative techniques) and research areas (like industry, the media or the class

structure) of sociology proper which fell outside its usual zone of intersection with anthropology. This, in turn, affected the manner in which the discipline dealt with the question of modernization, particularly since this question privileges a macro perspective, something which anthropology is neither theoretically inclined towards nor methodologically equipped for.

THE CATHOLICITY OF THE CONCEPT

Part of the difficulty that Indian sociology has had with the theme of modernization may be due to the vastness of the term itself. It is pertinent to recall here that modernization was introduced into social theory as a very broad, catch-all concept that was considered 'useful despite its vagueness because it tends to evoke similar associations in contemporary readers' (Bendix 1967:292). As Dean Tipps has written in an important critique:

> The popularity of the notion of modernization must be sought not in its clarity and precision as a vehicle of scholarly communication, but rather in its ability to evoke vague and generalized images which serve to summarize all the various transformations of social life attendant upon the rise of industrialization and the nation-state in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These images have proved so powerful, indeed, that the existence of some phenomenon usefully termed 'modernization' has gone virtually unchallenged. (Tipps 1973:199.)

This may sound somewhat exaggerated in the Indian context—the momentous and swift transformations taking place here were clearly very real and significant. But the question of whether 'modernization' was a useful conceptual basket into which all these varied changes could be thrown did bother Indian scholars sensitive to the 'messiness' of the process.

The fact that in modernization theory, this process is 'defined in terms of the goals towards which it is moving' (Tipps 1973:204) is

particularly problematic not only because the direction of change is difficult to determine, but also because this goal itself involves conflicting ethical-moral values and claims. The sensitive scholar's instinctive distrust of such treacherous terrain is seen in Srinivas' doubts and queries: is all social change to be called modernization? Is modernization the same as Westernization?[15] Similar instances can be found in the work of most scholars, and the very existence of many different viewpoints shows that these doubts are not easily settled.

Problems And Prospects

As already noted, modernization has been an omnibus concept, a sort of summary description of epochal dimensions based on an underlying dichotomy between tradition and modernity. If there ever was a time when such an abstract, generalized dichotomy was conceptually useful, it is surely gone now. All the common uses to which it was put—to indicate a division of global society into different spheres, to refer to a similar division within a given society, or to distinguish between past and present—are no longer viable because, today, there are as many similarities as differences across the divide.

'Most societies today possess the means for the local production of modernity,' as Appadurai and Breckenridge point out, 'thus making even the paradigmatic modernity of the United States and Western Europe (itself not an unproblematic assumption) no more pristine.' (1996:1.) To continue to refer to non-Western or Third World societies as simply 'traditional' is therefore seriously misleading. Similarly, if one were to believe, with Robert Redfield, that '[t]he word "tradition" connotes the act of handing down and what is handed down from one generation to another' and that it therefore 'means both process and product' (quoted in Singer 1975:x), then it is clear that no sharp division can be made between tradition and modernity in the long term. On the one hand, what is modern for one generation will perforce become part of tradition for the next; on the other hand, the product that is passed on cannot possibly exclude the modern. Analytically, it

seems futile to think of 'tradition' and 'modernity' as though they were the names of distinct pre-existing objects or fields of some kind; it is more fruitful to think of them as value-laden labels which people wish to attach to particular portions of what they inherit or bequeath. Descriptively, no purpose is served by this contrast after the thorough diffusion and domestication of modernity across every conceivable area of tradition.

However, it would seem that this very ubiquity of modernity has created a new use for 'tradition'—not as a descriptive term, but rather as a 'space-clearing' or 'distinction-creating gesture' (Dhareshwar 1995b:PE108). Tradition of this sort—that is, invoked as a sort of claim-to-difference—is itself a product of modernity, and forms part of the reservoir of resources with which modern adversaries fight each other. Thus, in a very general sense, everything and everyone is modern today, the Taliban as much as Microsoft, velcro and vibhuti as much as dowry and debentures. This does not mean, of course, that everyone and everything is *the same*—just that the traditional-modern axis is unable to tell us anything useful about the very important differences that distinguish contexts, institutions, processes or relationships.

Another angle on the non-viability of the high level of abstraction at which terms like tradition, modernity and modernization have been pitched is offered by recent attempts to re-examine the self-evident unitary status of most objects to which these terms used to be applied. The nation-state is an obvious example: 'fragmentary' perspectives may have their own problems, but it cannot be denied that the taken-for-granted status of entities like 'India' or 'the nation' has suffered serious damage (Pandey 1991, Chatterjee 1994). This break down of its objects of reference also serves to evict the concept of modernization from its high perch.

Contemporary Responses

If 'modernization' has lost its analytical-heuristic value as a summary-

description of epochal sweep, this is as much due to the internal collapse of the tradition-modernity dichotomy as to the external attacks by dependency theory and world systems theory. But there are as yet no obvious successors, though terms like 'post-colonial', 'post-modern', and lately, 'globalization' have been hovering in the wings. However, the most noticeable change in Indian social theory today is the marked increase in confidence vis-à-vis the West. (In this, theory seems to have followed social life rather than the other way around, but that is another story.) While such self-assurance was not exactly unknown before, it is probably more widespread and sophisticated, and certainly more ambitious now. Indian scholarship has developed an 'attitude' by the 1990s and is no longer overawed by Western disciplinary dominance. In the wake of such confidence, contemporary responses *to the demise of the modernization paradigm* seem to take four broad routes.

DOWNSIZING AND AVOIDANCE

The most common response has been to avoid the term—modernization is no longer invoked in the grand theory mode. If it is used at all, the scope of the term has been scaled down, and it seems to be returning to the specific technical sense in which it first entered the English language (e.g., for buildings, machinery and spelling). Since it is only at very high levels of abstraction and generalization that the term has proved a failure, it may still be serviceable in restricted contexts with clear referents, as for example, in the modernization of libraries or irrigation systems. However, this amounts to banishing the term from social theory.

RECLAIMING THE PRESENT

The previous response simply rejects one of the main functions of modernization as a summary-description—a name—for an epoch in which societies previously described as 'traditional' begin to experience

rapid change. What gets obscured, however, is that this epoch is a contemporary one, that it constitutes the present of the societies undergoing modernization: the teleological orientation is so strong that descriptions of the journey are overwritten by descriptions of the destination. If modernization studies in general tend to 'evacuate' the present, those within social anthropology are doubly affected because of the discipline's old habit of constructing an 'ethnographic present' in which other cultures are 'distanced in special, almost always past and passing, times' (Clifford 1986:9). It is not surprising, therefore, that some recent initiatives in this discipline (and elsewhere in the human sciences) have concentrated precisely on the recovery and reconceptualization of contemporaneity. Thus, for example, Veena Das undertakes an anthropology of 'critical events' explicitly in order 'to reflect on the nature of contemporaneity and its implications for the writing of ethnography' (Das 1995:4); Geeta Kapur confronts the problem of identifying the 'founding equation between history and subject' that might help define the contemporary moment in cultural practice (Kapur 1991:2805); Madhav Prasad seeks to go 'back to the present' to signal not 'the nation's arrival at some pre-determined telos, but *arrival as such*, arrival in the present as the place from which to find our way forward' (Prasad 1998b:123, emphasis original); and Vivek Dhareshwar asks what it means to be modern if 'our time' is one where the conditions of intelligibility of 'the key words of our cultural and political self-understanding' no longer hold (Dhareshwar 1995:318; 1996). More generally, these and other such attempts are part of an effort to pay rigorous attention to the historicity of the present without allowing this historicity to be hijacked by the teleology of notions like modernization. As D.P. Mukerji (1955:15) reminds us, it is more important to understand 'the thing changing' rather than 'change per se'.

EXPLORING EMERGENT LOCATIONS

As outlined in the previous section, Indian social anthropology has

until recently been concerned mainly with tradition and how it copes with modernity. This has meant that modernity has been viewed through the frameworks of tradition and has been looked for in its 'traditional' sites, so to speak. These, of course, are not the only or necessarily the most important ones where it is to be found—indeed, it is one of the hallmarks of the contemporary era that eruptions (or claims) of modernity may take place in the most unexpected locations. For example, the slogan painted on a bus that I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter—'They should realise that we too are modern'—is also the punchline of a mid-1980s television ad for sanitary napkins. It is spoken by a mother as she hands a package of napkins to her daughter (who is returning to her in-laws), the connotation being that the napkins will prove to the 'boy's side' that the girl comes from a 'modern' family. That a television advertisement would deliberately foreground menstruation in this manner can hardly be anticipated by conventional notions of the 'inner/outer' and 'private/public' domains. Examples of scholarly attempts to explore systematically such unconventional sites where the peculiarities of Indian modernity find expression include recent studies on social aspects of the film-form in India,[16] and new work on the domain of sexuality and its linkages to such varied institutions as the state, the media, the law, and academic disciplines such as demography or anthropology.[17]

COMPARISONS ACROSS THIRD WORLD CONTEXTS

For both obvious and less obvious reasons, the lateral contacts among sociologists of non-Western countries have been few and largely under the auspices of Western institutions. Unfortunately, what Srinivas and Panini said a quarter century ago still remains true, including specially their concluding observation:

> Paradoxical as it may seem, the very need to understand Indian society requires from Indian sociologists a commitment to a

comparative approach in which the problems, processes and institutions of their society are systematically compared with those of neighbouring countries in the first instance, and later with other developing countries. So far such a comparative approach has been conspicuous by its absence. (Srinivas and Panini 1973:48.)

Though some Indian sociologists have indeed worked on other Third World countries (Ramakrishna Mukherjee on Uganda; Satish Saberwal on Kenya and J.P.S. Uberoi on Afghanistan, for example), the impact on the discipline at large has been negligible. Third World countries have always only provided the non-Western empirical grist for Western theoretical mills. As the Brazilian sociologist, Mariza Peirano, points out:

> the moment we leave behind the frontiers of the country, what here was a theoretical discussion, almost immediately becomes merely regional ethnography (1991:326).

It is only through this kind of cross-cultural comparative work in Third World contexts that we can move beyond tiresome lamentations of Western intellectual hegemony to a situation where the specificities of Indian, Turkish, Indonesian or Brazilian society can finally refuse to be merely 'local colour' and aspire to be part of 'global theory'.[18]

Beyond Commonsense

The stakes in modernity were raised enormously in non-Western contexts, where the idea of modernization arrived dressed up as a 'secular theory of salvation'.[19] The defining condition of non-Western engagements with modernity was that its ideas and institutions were 'always-already' marked as Western. Given that even the most benign forms of colonization involved an adversarial relationship with the West, this immediately created a tension, a predicament. Modernity was the object of intense desire, at the very least because it promised

resources with which the marks of colonial subjugation could be erased and equality claimed with the erstwhile masters. It was also the source of extreme anxiety because it seemed to threaten any distinctive (non-Western) identity—which was the only proof of true equality with (rather than mere mimicry of) the West. Hence the desperate desire not just for modernity, but a distinctive modernity.

We seem to have liberated ourselves from the frustrations of this history to a large extent: now, we not only believe that there are many ways to be modern, but also claim that *our* way involves 'blending modernity with tradition' to get 'the best of both worlds'. But the seemingly self-evident clichés of today can be as misleading as the grand assertions that we have recently outgrown. Sociology suggests two rules of thumb to negotiate these terms.

First, words like 'modern' and 'traditional' must be treated as invitations, not as descriptions; they do not tell us about the character or content of the things they are attached to—they suggest the attitude we should adopt towards these things. Before we accept or decline such invitations, it is wise to look at who is issuing them and what their motives might be. Moreover, we must always remember that, even if and after we agree to label something as 'modern' or 'traditional', all the work of description and analysis still remains to be done.

Second, we must keep in mind that, given their intertwined ideological origins, the two terms almost always work in tandem, although this may not be readily visible. So, if we see one of them at work, we must search carefully for the (usually compensating) moves made by the other. For example, in order that men can be 'modern', it may be necessary for women to be 'traditional'; or if women are shown to be modern in some sphere, they may need to be shown as traditional in some other sphere. These labels may be chosen or imposed, enabling or constraining, uneventful or controversial; they may also present complex mixtures of contradictory aspects. Examining these patterns—which particular groups or spheres of society bear the costs or enjoy the benefits of such labels—provides valuable insights into the social structure.

Notes

1. Squinting at Society

1. To establish this point, ethnomethodologist Harold Garfinkel conducted a controversial set of 'breaching experiments' in which his graduate students at the University of California in Los Angeles deliberately breached the implicit social contract by refusing to use their commonsense and requiring their unsuspecting interlocutors to explain themselves 'fully'. These experiments had to be quickly abandoned because they turned mundane conversations into traumatic events and brought even close relationships to the brink of breakdown.

2. This in essence is the model of nationalism attributed to Bankim Chattopadhyaya in Partha Chatterjee's well-known work (1986). Variations on this basic theme can be found strewn all over the history of Indian nationalism even to this day.

3. The phrase in quotes is the title of a famous book by Daniel Lerner.

4. It is interesting to note that M.N. Srinivas began his career in India in the 1950s with the opposite view—that is, by advocating the cause of participant observation as a much neglected method contrary to the popularity of survey research (Srinivas 1994:14-18). At the end of the century, the shoe would certainly seem to be on the other foot. It would not be easy to cite even five survey-based or quantitatively-oriented studies that have had a major impact on Indian sociology during the last fifty years.

5. I do not mean to imply that anthropology has no contribution to

make in development, or that involvement in state initiatives is always
a good thing. We are now much wiser on both counts. I am only
trying to understand why—according to the *then prevailing notions* of
what disciplines were about and what development entailed and so
on—the outcomes that would have been predicted by the social
logic of institutions failed to materialize.

6. Satish Saberwal, himself a maverick figure among sociologists, has a
very perceptive essay on this theme (Saberwal 1999). To the best of
my knowledge, this is the only extended treatment of the subject by
any major scholar.

2. Mapping a Distinctive Modernity

1. Historian Cyril Black has written that in ancient Latin, modern was
'a term denoting the quality of a contemporary era' (Black 1966:5).
Raymond Williams also notes that the earliest English meanings of
the word 'were nearer our *contemporary*, in the sense of something
existing now, just now' (Williams 1983:208-9, original emphasis).

2. Original emphasis, abbreviations expanded; see also Williams
1989:31-2.

3. These two factors also contributed to the emergence of the multi-
lateral institutional complex built around the United Nations, which
also undertook research on modernization and allied issues in the
Third World.

4. Personal communication from Redfield to Singer, May 1956, quoted
in Singer (1972:8).

5. Apart from Cohn's essay cited above, overviews of early work on
Indian society and culture are to be found in Kopf 1969, Mandelbaum
1970, Madan 1995 (Ch.5: 'Images of India in American
Anthropology'), Srinivas and Panini 1973, and Saberwal 1986.

6. For example, Louis Dumont felt that the strong desire for change
and the state-sponsored drive towards it may force researchers to be
less vigilant about the *continuities* (or lack of change) in society

(Dumont 1964:10). Similar sentiments were echoed by Ramakrishna
Mukherjee in his complaint that the 'modernizers' among Indian
sociologists neglected the 'null hypothesis' of 'no change' (Mukherjee
1979:52). An interesting early discussion of the links among, and the
implications of, the community and village studies research, the state-
sponsored tendency towards social engineering, and the heavy
involvement of Western, particularly American, researchers and
institutions is to be found in Saran (1958:1026-32).

7. As Dean Tipps has pointed out, anthropologists—the very people
who knew the most about the Third World societies that
modernization theory was setting out to study—were typically the
least enthusiastic about it. (Tipps 1973:207, see also footnote 4.) This
could also be due to the fundamental orientation of classical
anthropology towards pre-modern societies, such that modernization
seems anthithetical to the very *raison d'etre* of the discipline.

8. George Rosen speaks of the Indian government alternating between
'great sensitivity' and 'undue respect' for foreign scholars and provides
useful details (Rosen 1985:52-54). For example: Douglas Ensminger
(the American rural sociologist and Ford Foundation consultant in
India in the 1950s and 1960s, closely associated with the Community
Development Programme) had the kind of direct access to Prime
Minister Nehru and the Planning Commission that would have been
envied by Indian sociologists, though some economists enjoyed
similar status. And A.K. Saran points out that after independence,
local scholars may, on the one hand, be enabled to ask uncomfortable
questions about the desirability of foreign collaboration; but, on the
other hand, they may also become much more hospitable to foreign
influences once freed of the moral burden of subject status (Saran
1958:1028-9, 1031-2).

9. One reason, perhaps, why Indian sociology has sometimes looked
like a tired discipline (Deshpande 1994).

10. In a brief later article Srinivas returns to this theme while discussing
'the oft-heard comment that Indians do not have a sense of
contradiction, or that it does not have the same emotional and other

implications for them as it has for Westerners' (1971b:155; page references in this paragraph are to this work). After giving further examples of the Indian talent for tolerating the contradiction between modern and traditional world views (including Nehru—publicly contemptuous of astrology, yet pressing his daughter to get a proper horoscope made for his new-born grandson, pp.155-6), Srinivas distinguishes sources of contradiction found in all cultures (such as role conflict)) from those likely to be peculiar to developing societies (such as the compulsion to appear modernized and the very rapid pace of change). He wonders if 'the urge to consistency may become stronger' with further social change, thus accentuating the feeling of contradiction, which, in turn, 'may be accompanied by increased mental illness' (p. 158).

11. An interesting example is provided by K.N. Raj, a leading Indian economist closely involved with development planning, who recalls that Gulzarilal Nanda, the minister in charge of planning, twice postponed the signing of the First Five Year Plan, insisting on a numerologically auspicious day (Raj 1997:108).

12. But too much must not be made of such differences. After all, they hold only for the early stage of modernization studies up to the 1960s; there is every reason to presume that anthropological accounts of Third World modernization grew in sophistication over time. Moreover, comparisons of this sort need to consider carefully further questions of detail: are the Lerner or Inkeles-Smith type of multi-country survey-based studies really comparable with Srinivas' solo ethnography? and so on.

13. A similar situation may conceivably have existed in the South and Central American nations, which were formally independent long before the decolonization of Asia and Africa. A different but well-known instance is that of the Carribbean colonies which, between the 1920s and the 1960s, had already produced a glittering galaxy of writers and intellectuals, including Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Edouard Glissant, Walter Rodney, Eric Williams, C.L.R. James, and W. Arthur Lewis. But the presence of a sizeable 'Westernized' local

academic establishment (even if colonial in origin and design) is in all probability peculiar to India. My ignorance of other Third World histories prevents a more informed statement.

14. The last chapter of *Social Change in Modern India*, 'Some thoughts on the study of one's own society', is on this very subject: 'One of the things that strikes me as I look back on the reception accorded my work outside my country is the repeated reference to my being an Indian sociologist engaged in the study of my own society.' (1971a:147.) Srinivas goes on to note that while opinion was divided on whether this was an asset or a liability, his Indianness was invariably remarked upon. For a recent reformulation of his views on this subject, see Srinivas 1996.

15. Srinivas himself seems to prefer Westernization to modernization. But the reasons he provides are curious: he believes that modernization implies a value-judgement regarding ultimate goals, which social scientists are unable to endorse or reject, whereas Westernization is a more neutral term (Srinivas 1971a:50-52).

16. For example, Rajadhyaksha 1993, and Prasad 1998a.

17. See, for example, the collections edited by Uberoi 1996, and John and Nair 1998.

18. Such a comparative perspective must also, as Mariza Peirano points out, prevent our interest in other Third World countries being restricted to the desire to counter Western theories or models, such that, for example, Brazil exists for Indian sociology only in so far as it is the source of dependency theory (Peirano 1991).

19. A phrase attributed to Ashis Nandy by Banuri (1990:95).

3. *The Nation as an Imagined Economy*

1 . For example, Emile Durkheim insisted that social institutions were *emergent* phenomena, always greater than the sum of their parts, not only founded on shared beliefs, norms and values, but also themselves 'collective representations' to a greater or lesser degree. From a