Beyond Eurocentrism: Decentring Global Sociology Through the Lens of India

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***Abstract*—Sociology, as a discipline, was born in the heart of modern Europe. Over time, it spread across the world and became a global academic field. But here's the problem — even though sociology claims to speak universally about human society, the knowledge it produces is still largely shaped by Western ways of thinking. Western experiences are treated as the default, the norm, the standard against which everything else is measured. That's a serious limitation, and it's one we need to talk about.**

This paper takes a close look at why global sociology needs to step back from that Eurocentric center — and why India, in particular, deserves a far more prominent place in shaping sociological thought. India isn't just a case study for Western theories. It's a rich source of its own theoretical, methodological, and philosophical insights. Drawing on postcolonial sociology, Southern theory, subaltern studies, and indigenous knowledge traditions, this paper makes the case that the flow of knowledge can no longer be a one-way street running from the Global North to the Global South. That has to change. Why India? Because India brings something genuinely unique to the table. Its extraordinarily diverse social formations, ancient civilizational traditions, linguistic plurality, caste dynamics, religious heterogeneity, and deep history of philosophical thought make it an invaluable intellectual resource for rethinking sociology from the ground up. A significant part of this paper digs into how sociology's colonial roots have left a lasting mark on the discipline. Concepts like modernity, secularization, individualism, and development — all borrowed from Western intellectual traditions — often fall flat when applied to Indian society. They don't quite fit. They miss the texture, the complexity, the lived reality of life in India. The paper explores how Indian thinkers and sociologists — B. R. Ambedkar, G. S. Ghurye, M. N. Srinivas, A. R. Desai, D. P. Mukerji, and contemporary decolonial scholars — have offered far more nuanced and grounded ways of understanding Indian social life. It also highlights the power of indigenous concepts like *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (the world as one family), *Dharma*, *Sarvodaya*, and *Lokavidya* as genuine alternative frameworks for thinking about social relationships and collective existence.

The argument the paper here is straightforward but important: decolonizing sociology isn't just about adding more non-Western examples to the textbooks rather It's about fundamentally rethinking the conceptual foundations of the discipline itself. When sociology genuinely opens itself up to epistemologies from non-western countries which includes India and other non-Western societies, it becomes more reflective, more pluralistic, and more relevant to the world as it actually is — not just as the West has imagined it to be. Ultimately, this kind of intellectual transformation is about epistemic justice. It's about building a sociology that truly belongs to everyone.

***Index Terms*—Global Sociology, Decolonization, Southern Theory, India, Eurocentrism, Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam, Indigenous Knowledge Systems**

I. INTRODUCTION

Sociology likes to present itself as a discipline for everyone a universal lens through which we can understand human society in all its complexity. But if you look closely at where sociology actually came from, a different picture emerges. The intellectual foundations of the discipline were built in a very specific time and place: nineteenth-century Europe. The upheavals of industrialization, urbanization, capitalism, and the rise of the modern nation-state were what kept thinkers like Karl Marx, Max Weber, and Émile Durkheim up at night. Their ideas were brilliant — and many remain deeply relevant today. But somewhere along the way, theories rooted in European experience quietly got promoted to the status of universal truth. And that's where the trouble begins.

Over the past two decades, scholars have been pushing back on this. Debates around decolonization, Southern

theory, and epistemic justice have laid bare just how unequal the world of sociological knowledge production really is. Connell (2007) put it plainly — sociology has long operated on a kind of intellectual division of labour, where theories get generated in Western academic hubs while places like Asia, Africa, and Latin America are treated mainly as sources of raw data. Bhambra (2014) makes a related point: the discipline has largely ignored how deeply colonialism shaped both European modernity and the very emergence of sociology as a field. The result? Concepts born out of very specific historical circumstances have been packaged and sold as universally applicable — while rich intellectual traditions from other parts of the world have been pushed to the margins.

But this isn't just about wanting more geographical diversity on a reading list. It cuts much deeper than that. The real question is: *who gets to produce sociological knowledge?* Too often, countries like India appear in sociological literature as subjects to be explained — data points, case studies, empirical illustrations for theories developed elsewhere. They are rarely seen as places from which genuinely new theoretical thinking might emerge. This has cost the discipline enormously, leaving it ill-equipped to engage meaningfully with indigenous, subaltern, and non-Western ways of understanding the social world.

India, in this context, offers something remarkable. It's hard to think of another society that holds together such an extraordinary range of social, cultural, linguistic, and religious diversity. Caste, class, tribe, religion, region, and language don't exist in neat separate boxes in India — they overlap, intersect, and produce forms of social life that standard sociological categories simply struggle to capture. And alongside this social complexity, India carries a long and sophisticated intellectual history. From ancient philosophical schools and Buddhist thought to anti-caste movements, Gandhian philosophy, Dalit scholarship, feminist interventions, and contemporary critiques of development and globalization — India has never been short of thinkers grappling seriously with questions of social order, ethics, inequality, and collective life.

Indian sociology, too, has produced work of real depth. Scholars like G. S. Ghurye, D. P. Mukerji, M. N. Srinivas, A. R. Desai, André Béteille, and Yogendra Singh didn't just apply Western frameworks to Indian realities — they engaged with those realities on their own terms. More recently, thinkers like Gopal Guru, Sundar Sarukkai, Sharmila Rege, and Satish Deshpande have brought sharp attention to the connections between knowledge, power, caste, and representation. And standing above all of these, in many ways, is B. R. Ambedkar. His analysis of caste remains one of the most powerful sociological critiques of inequality produced anywhere in the twentieth century — a powerful reminder that transformative theoretical thinking can and does emerge from experiences that have historically been excluded from the centres of global knowledge production.

That said, foregrounding India in global sociology comes with its own responsibilities. India is not one thing. It is not a single, unified cultural tradition waiting to be offered up as an alternative to Western theory. Its intellectual landscape is full of contestation, internal hierarchies, and competing visions of what society is and should be. So any serious effort to decenter sociology through India must also reckon honestly with the voices that have been marginalized *within* India — Dalit, Adivasi, feminist, minority, and regional perspectives that have too often been spoken over or ignored. Genuine democratization of knowledge means listening to all of these, not just the most visible or celebrated strands of Indian thought.

What this paper ultimately calls for is a shift in how we think about India's place in global sociology — not as an interesting case study, but as a genuine site of theoretical production. Drawing on postcolonial sociology, Southern theory, and indigenous knowledge traditions, it explores how India's intellectual resources can help build a sociology that is more plural, more reflexive, and more honest about its own assumptions. The goal isn't to swap one intellectual centre for another. It's to imagine a global sociology built on real dialogue — across diverse histories, experiences, and ways of knowing.

II. EUROCENTRISM, COLONIALITY, AND THE MAKING OF SOCIOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE

Sociology didn't emerge in a vacuum. Its rise as an academic discipline was deeply tied to some of the most turbulent forces of its time — European colonial expansion, the spread of capitalism, and the formation

of modern nation-states. We tend to tell the story of sociology's origins through the brilliant minds of Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, and rightly so. But a growing body of scholarship has been making an uncomfortable point: the discipline was also shaped, profoundly, by colonial encounters and imperial formations that stretched far beyond European borders (Go, 2013; Bhambra, 2014; Steinmetz, 2017). The social transformations that those classical thinkers were trying to make sense of weren't purely European phenomena — they were entangled with colonial extraction, global trade, slavery, and the control of colonized peoples. Yet somehow, these colonial dimensions were quietly left out of sociology's own story. Bhambra (2014) captures this well when she talks about a "foundational forgetting" of empire within sociological thought.

For most of its history, sociology operated on a particular assumption: that Europe's path of development was essentially the path — the universal trajectory that all societies were either following or would eventually follow. Concepts like modernity, secularization, rationalization, industrialization, citizenship, and development were products of very specific Western European experiences. But they were packaged and exported as universal frameworks for interpreting societies everywhere (Amin, 1989; Chakrabarty, 2000). Under this logic, non-Western societies got labelled as traditional, backward, pre-modern, or simply incomplete — earlier drafts of Europe, still waiting to catch up. This wasn't just a matter of academic categorization. It established a whole hierarchy of societies, with Europe at the top as the model of historical progress and everyone else measured by how closely they resembled it.

Scholars have come to call this the *coloniality of knowledge*. Quijano (2000) argues that even though formal colonialism has largely ended, its forms of power live on — particularly in knowledge systems that continue to privilege certain ways of knowing while quietly pushing others aside. Mignolo (2011) goes further, suggesting that modernity and coloniality were never really separate things; the West's universal knowledge claims were built on the suppression of alternative epistemologies and intellectual traditions. Seen in this light, sociology wasn't simply a neutral science of society — it was part of a broader intellectual order that reflected deeply unequal global power relations.

The effects of this are visible in how sociological knowledge gets produced and circulated today. Theoretical innovation is still largely associated with institutions and scholars in Europe and North America. Intellectual contributions from Asia, Africa, and Latin America continue to sit at the margins of mainstream sociological canons (Connell, 2007). Societies in the Global South too often appear as convenient empirical laboratories — places where Western theories get tested — rather than as sources of original thinking. Santos (2014) has a striking term for what happens to the knowledge that gets left out of this system: *epistemicide* — the systematic erasure, sidelining, and devaluation of knowledge systems developed outside the West.

Epistemicide is a striking idea because it names something that might otherwise go unnoticed. Indigenous knowledge systems, oral traditions, community-based learning, and non-Western philosophical thought have routinely been dismissed as mere cultural belief rather than recognized as legitimate intellectual traditions. Colonial educational institutions played a big role in this — actively promoting European knowledge while undermining local ways of knowing. The damage wasn't only political. It created deep and lasting epistemic inequalities that continue to shape academic disciplines right up to the present.

In recent years, the push to decolonize sociology has grown louder and more urgent across the world. But this movement is asking for more than just a more geographically diverse reading list. It's raising a much more fundamental challenge: interrogating the very epistemological assumptions that decide what counts as legitimate sociological knowledge and who gets to produce it (Bhambra, Gebrial, & Nişancıoğlu, 2018). Decolonization means questioning the universal authority claimed by Western categories and making genuine space for other intellectual traditions to enter the theoretical conversation. As Alatas and Sinha (2017) put it, a truly global sociology has to recognize multiple sociological traditions — not just keep deferring to one civilizational perspective.

In this broader project, India stands out as a particularly significant presence. The Indian experience does something important — it exposes the limits of Eurocentric social theory while simultaneously pointing toward what else is possible.

The persistence of caste, the coexistence of multiple religious and linguistic communities, the long shadow of colonial rule, and the presence of rich, centuries-old philosophical traditions — all of this strains and often breaks the frameworks that mainstream sociology has to offer. And crucially, Indian thinkers — anti-colonial intellectuals, Dalit scholars, feminist and subaltern theorists — have generated ideas and critiques that go well beyond explaining India alone. They speak to some of the deepest sociological questions of our time: inequality, power, democracy, identity, and social justice. Engaging seriously with these traditions isn't just a gesture of inclusion. It's a necessary step toward building a sociology that is genuinely more plural, more self-aware, and more equal to the complexities of the world we actually live in.

III. SOUTHERN THEORY AND THE QUEST FOR EPISTEMIC JUSTICE

The growing dissatisfaction with Eurocentric social theory has given rise to a range of intellectual interventions that seek to rethink the geography of knowledge production. Among these, Southern Theory has emerged as one of the most influential critiques of the unequal structures that continue to shape contemporary sociology. In her seminal work, Connell (2007) argues that sociological knowledge is produced within a global system characterized by profound asymmetries of power. Theories developed in Europe and North America are frequently treated as universal frameworks, while intellectual traditions from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and other parts of the Global South remain peripheral to mainstream sociological discourse. As a consequence, knowledge generated in the South is often viewed as locally specific or descriptive, whereas knowledge produced in the North is granted the status of theory.

Southern Theory challenges this hierarchy by questioning the assumption that sociological innovation originates exclusively in metropolitan centres. It draws attention to the intellectual contributions emerging from societies shaped by colonialism, dispossession, dependency, and resistance, arguing that these experiences generate distinctive insights into power, inequality, modernity, and social transformation. Rather than viewing the Global South merely as a source of empirical data, Southern theorists insist that it should be recognized as a site of conceptual and theoretical production. The aim is not to reverse the hierarchy by replacing Northern theories with Southern ones, but to create a more democratic and plural intellectual landscape in which multiple traditions of knowledge can coexist and engage in dialogue.

A similar concern informs Bhambra's (2014) notion of "connected sociologies." Bhambra argues that conventional sociological narratives often treat societies as self-contained units that evolve independently of one another. Such an approach obscures the historical entanglements produced through colonialism, empire, migration, and global capitalism. By foregrounding these interconnected histories, connected sociologies challenge methodological nationalism and reveal how European modernity itself was constituted through interactions with the colonized world. This perspective encourages sociologists to move beyond narrowly bounded accounts of social change and to recognize the global processes that have shaped contemporary societies.

The debates surrounding Southern Theory and connected sociologies are ultimately concerned with the question of epistemic justice. At stake is not merely the inclusion of a wider range of scholars within existing sociological frameworks but a more fundamental rethinking of whose experiences are considered worthy of theory and whose knowledge is recognized as legitimate. Epistemic justice requires acknowledging that sociological understanding can emerge from multiple historical locations and social experiences rather than from a single intellectual tradition.

Within these debates, India occupies a particularly important position. The country's long history of colonial rule, anti-colonial struggles, caste-based inequalities, religious pluralism, linguistic diversity, and democratic experimentation has generated a rich body of sociological and intellectual work. From anti-caste thought and subaltern scholarship to feminist interventions and indigenous knowledge traditions, India offers perspectives that challenge dominant sociological assumptions and expand the conceptual horizons of the discipline. Engaging seriously with these traditions is therefore essential to the broader project of building a sociology that is not merely international in scope but genuinely global in its epistemological foundations.

India as a Site of Theory Production: Rethinking Sociology from the Global South

A persistent limitation of mainstream sociology has been its tendency to treat non-Western societies as objects of inquiry rather than sources of theoretical knowledge. Within this unequal intellectual division of labour, theories are often assumed to originate in Europe and North America, while societies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America serve primarily as sites for empirical application. Such a view obscures the rich intellectual traditions that have emerged from the Global South. India, in particular, demonstrates how sociological concepts can arise from local social realities while contributing to broader theoretical debates.

The development of sociology in India was shaped by the encounter between colonial knowledge systems, nationalist aspirations, and indigenous social realities. Unlike Europe, where sociology emerged in response to industrialization and class formation, Indian sociology confronted questions of caste, religious diversity, kinship, village society, colonial domination, and postcolonial nation-building. These realities required analytical frameworks that often exceeded the explanatory limits of conventional Western categories.

Several Indian sociologists made important contributions in this regard. G. S. Ghurye's studies of caste, tribe, and culture laid the foundation for understanding social stratification and cultural diversity in India. D. P. Mukherji emphasized the need to study Indian society through its own historical experiences rather than merely reproducing European concepts. M. N. Srinivas's influential concepts of *Sanskritization*, *Westernization*, and the *Dominant Caste* demonstrated how caste adapted to changing social and political contexts, challenging linear theories of modernization. Similarly, A. R. Desai's Marxist analyses connected social change in India to colonialism, capitalism, and class relations, while André Béteille's work on caste, class, and power highlighted the persistence of inequality within democratic institutions.

Among these contributions, B. R. Ambedkar's analysis of caste remains particularly significant. Ambedkar conceptualized caste not simply as a cultural system but as a structure of graded inequality sustained through social, economic, and epistemic forms of domination. His work anticipated contemporary debates on social exclusion, structural inequality, recognition, and intersectionality. As scholars such as Guru (2002), Rege (2006), and Paik (2014) have shown, Ambedkar's ideas continue to offer valuable insights for understanding questions of dignity, citizenship, and epistemic justice far beyond the Indian context.

Theoretical contributions from India also extend beyond canonical sociology. Dalit studies, feminist scholarship, subaltern studies, and Adivasi intellectual traditions have challenged dominant forms of knowledge by foregrounding the experiences of historically marginalized communities. These interventions have drawn attention to the relationship between knowledge and power, demonstrating how social location shapes both lived experience and knowledge production (Guru & Sarukkai, 2012). In doing so, they have contributed to broader debates on decolonization and epistemic justice.

Taken together, these intellectual traditions demonstrate that India is not merely a field for testing existing theories but a site from which new sociological insights emerge. Questions of caste, exclusion, democratic inequality, religious plurality, and subaltern agency speak not only to Indian realities but also to wider global concerns. Recognizing India as a site of theory production is therefore essential to the project of decentering sociology and building a more plural and genuinely global discipline.

The Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Alternative Sociological Imaginations

Decentering sociology requires more than critiquing Eurocentrism; it also demands engagement with alternative ways of knowing and understanding social life. While sociology has largely developed through concepts rooted in European experiences of modernity, capitalism, and state formation, decolonial scholars argue that valuable sociological insights can also emerge from indigenous and non-Western knowledge traditions (Santos, 2014; Smith, 2021). Recognizing these traditions as sources of theory rather than merely objects of study is an important step toward a more inclusive sociology.

India offers a rich repository of intellectual traditions that can contribute to contemporary sociological debates. One such concept is *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (“the world is one family”), which advances a relational understanding of social life

based on interdependence, reciprocity, and collective responsibility. In contrast to the emphasis on autonomous individuals found in many strands of Western social thought, it foregrounds social connectedness and shared human responsibility. As such, it offers useful insights for thinking about global citizenship, migration, environmental responsibility, and social solidarity in an interconnected world.

Similarly, Gandhian ideas of *Sarvodaya* (welfare of all) and *Swaraj* (self-rule) challenge dominant development paradigms centred on economic growth and consumption. Gandhi emphasized ethical responsibility, community self-governance, social justice, and ecological balance—concerns that remain relevant in contemporary discussions of sustainable development and alternative modernities (Kothari et al., 2019).

Beyond philosophical traditions, Adivasi knowledge systems provide important perspectives on community life, collective resource management, and human-nature relationships. Studies have shown that many Adivasi communities practice forms of environmental stewardship and participatory decision-making that differ from market-oriented models of development (Xaxa, 2008). These perspectives contribute to ongoing debates on sustainability, ecological citizenship, and environmental justice.

At the same time, engaging with indigenous knowledge requires critical reflection rather than uncritical celebration. Knowledge traditions are shaped by their own histories of power and exclusion. Feminist, Dalit, and Adivasi scholars have shown that indigenous and classical traditions may also reproduce hierarchies based on caste, gender, and social status (Rege, 2006; Guru & Sarukkai, 2012). The objective, therefore, is not to replace Western sociology with indigenous knowledge but to foster dialogue among diverse intellectual traditions. Such an approach broadens the sociological imagination and creates space for multiple ways of understanding society and social change.

IV. DECOLONIZING AND INDIANIZING SOCIOLOGY EDUCATION AND THE POLITICS OF CURRICULUM

The persistence of Eurocentrism is perhaps most visible in the teaching of sociology itself. Across universities and schools in many parts of the world, sociology curricula continue to privilege a relatively narrow canon centred on European and North American thinkers. While Marx, Weber, and Durkheim remain indispensable to sociological education, their dominance often leaves limited space for intellectual traditions emerging from Asia, Africa, Latin America, and indigenous societies. This imbalance is not merely a matter of representation. Curricula play a central role in shaping what students understand as legitimate knowledge. As Apple (2004) reminds us, educational institutions are deeply implicated in the production of "official knowledge," determining whose voices are included, whose histories are remembered, and whose experiences become visible. The absence of non-Western intellectual traditions from sociology curricula therefore reflects broader inequalities in global knowledge production.

In the Indian context, the challenge is particularly significant. Although sociology departments frequently engage with themes such as caste, tribe, religion, and social change, the theoretical foundations of teaching often remain anchored in Western frameworks. Decolonizing sociology education requires moving beyond the token inclusion of a few Indian thinkers and toward a more substantive restructuring of the curriculum. Students should encounter Ambedkar, Phule, Periyar, Gandhi, Tagore, Pandita Ramabai, Savitribai Phule, Dalit intellectual traditions, Adivasi epistemologies, feminist scholarship, and contemporary Global South theorists not as supplementary readings but as central contributors to sociological thought.

Such curricular transformation would encourage students to critically examine the historical conditions under which knowledge is produced and circulated. It would also enable them to appreciate the plurality of sociological traditions and develop a more reflexive understanding of the relationship between knowledge, power, and society. A decolonized curriculum is therefore not about replacing one canon with another; rather, it is about fostering intellectual dialogue across diverse traditions of thought.

For a Plural and Dialogical Global Sociology:

The call to decenter sociology should not be interpreted as a rejection of Western social theory. The objective is not to substitute one intellectual centre for another, nor to establish competing civilizational

claims to sociological authority. Rather, the aim is to cultivate a more plural and dialogical sociology capable of engaging with diverse histories, experiences, and epistemological traditions.

Chakrabarty's (2000) notion of "provincializing Europe" remains instructive in this regard. Provincializing Europe does not mean dismissing European thought; it means situating it within a broader landscape of global intellectual traditions rather than treating it as the universal horizon of social knowledge. Such an approach opens space for a sociology in which theoretical insights emerge from multiple locations and circulate through dialogue rather than hierarchy.

A plural sociology recognizes that no single civilization, nation, or intellectual tradition possesses a monopoly over understanding society. The social challenges confronting the contemporary world—rising inequality, climate change, forced migration, religious conflict, digital surveillance, and democratic crises—cannot be adequately understood through a single epistemological lens. Addressing these issues requires intellectual collaboration across diverse traditions of knowledge.

The future of global sociology therefore lies not in universalism rooted in one historical experience but in what may be termed epistemological pluralism. Such a sociology acknowledges the coexistence of multiple ways of knowing while remaining open to critique, dialogue, and mutual learning. India, with its long history of intellectual diversity and social complexity, offers one important site from which such conversations can emerge. By bringing indigenous knowledge systems, anti-caste thought, feminist perspectives, subaltern scholarship, and contemporary sociological debates into conversation with global traditions, sociology can move closer to becoming a genuinely inclusive and globally relevant discipline.

V. CONCLUSION

The current paper attempt to understand decentering the field of sociology from the lens of India. and it has become a big debate in the field of sociology where the debates surrounding decolonization, Southern theory, and epistemic justice have drawn attention to a longstanding limitation within sociology: the tendency to universalize concepts derived from European historical experiences while marginalizing alternative intellectual traditions. Therefore, one of the challenges facing by contemporary sociology, is not merely one of expanding geographical representation but of rethinking the epistemological foundations upon which sociological knowledge is built.

This paper has argued that India as an epistemological point provides an important vantage point for such a rethinking. The unique characteristically experiences of caste, tribe, religious plurality, colonialism, scientific progression, democratic transformation, and social inequality have generated distinctive sociological insights that cannot be fully captured through conventional Western frameworks which are seen as lens to study India. The contributions of thinkers or scholars from India such as Ambedkar, Mukherji, Srinivas, Desai, and numerous Dalit, feminist, Adivasi, and subaltern scholars demonstrate that theoretical innovation is not confined to the traditional centres of knowledge production.

The paper has also highlighted the value of engaging with indigenous knowledge systems and alternative sociological imaginations. Concepts such as *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, *Sarvodaya*, and *Swaraj*, together with community-based and indigenous forms of knowledge, offer conceptual resources for rethinking questions of social relations, development, ethics, and collective well-being. At the same time, these traditions must be approached critically, acknowledging the internal inequalities and exclusions that shape all knowledge systems.

Decentering sociology does not require replacing one canon with another. Rather, it calls for a more dialogical and plural understanding of knowledge in which diverse intellectual traditions are brought into conversation. Such an approach recognizes that sociological insights emerge from multiple historical experiences and social locations, not from a single civilizational centre.

Ultimately, the future of global sociology depends on its ability to move beyond inherited epistemic hierarchies and engage seriously with knowledge traditions from the Global South. The question is no longer whether sociology can study societies such as India, but whether sociology can become genuinely global without learning from them.

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