CHAPTER 1

Beyond Sociology: An Introduction and An Invitation

Ananta Kumar Giri

Exploring new frontiers of sociology does not mean extending existing theories and methods but interrogating some of its uncritically accepted modernist assumptions, such as the equating of society and nation-state, the dualism of individual and society and that of ontology and epistemology. *Beyond Sociology* explores pathways in which we go beyond sociology in terms of exploring the contours of a transformational sociology; this seeks to transform the assumptions of conventional sociological theorizing and practice as well as modes of sociological imagination. Despite all the waters that have flowed around the world for the last 150 years, contemporary sociology, even so-called global sociology, suffers from what Ulrich Beck called the NATO-like fire power of Western sociology. In this context, sociology has to open itself to transcivilizational dialogues and planetary conversations about the very themes of thinking about self, culture and society. So far, globalization of sociology has meant globalization of themes and methods of modernist sociology, which makes an easy equation between sociology and modernity. For sociologists such as Anthony Giddens, Ulrich Beck and André Béteille, sociology is a modern discipline and is post-traditional (Beck et al. 1994; Béteille 2002). But if sociology

A.K. Giri (✉)
Madras Institute of Development Studies, Chennai, India

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blindly follows the post-traditional teleology of modernity how can it study varieties of forms of life—traditional, modern, postmodern and transmodern (cf. Dussel 2017)?[1] These varieties of forms of life exist not only in the so called traditional societies such as India or Lapland but in all contemporary societies—whether India, Indonesia, Sweden, France, Britain, Germany, Singapore, China or the USA. *Beyond Sociology* thus initially challenges us to go beyond an a priori teleological privileging of the post-traditional telos of modernist sociology. It invites us for a foundational interrogation of modernist sociology as a prelude to making sociology part of a planetary conversation about the very themes such as society and individual that it seeks to understand.

It is only with such a foundational interrogation that sociology can open itself to transcivilizational dialogues and planetary conversations. In planetary conversations, we converse and learn together by moving across our initial locations and given borders. For example, in Western sociology power is considered an important part of the constitution of self, culture and society. But in Indian spiritual traditions, it is not only power but also *sraddha*—love and reverence for life. For example, in Srimad Bhagavad Gita, one of the texts of life in Indian traditions, it is written: *Sraddha Mayo Ayam Purusha, Jo Jat Sradha So Eba Sa*. This means the *Purusha*—the human person (including men, women and children, and not just man)—is characterized by *sraddha*. One is what one loves. These lines also offer some pre-suppositions about self, culture and society like the presupposition about power offered by Max Weber and Michel Foucault, and the justification offered by Jürgen Habermas (Habermas 2001). On the other hand, some of the most enchanting formulations about self, culture and society in Indian spiritual traditions fail to address and transform the sociological condition of power in the direction of radical democracy. Thus what is called for is not a one-sided valorization of certain aspects of one's culture, such as spirituality from India and power from the West, but a mutual confrontation of one's pre-suppositions and a broadening of our universe of discourse (cf. Giri 2012, 2013a, b).

The above were some of the questions that inspired me and John Clammer to convene the session "Beyond Sociology" at the thirty-seventh World Congress of Sociology at Stockholm in July 2005. The present book builds upon some of the papers presented in that session as well as other contributions.

The essays in this book in their own ways help us to understand the limitations of established conventions of sociology and nurture the

pathways that allow us to go beyond the sociology we know. The opening chapter by the inspiring thinker and philosopher Daya Krishna tells us that social does not have the same pre-eminence in all traditions as it does in modern Western sociology. Daya Krishna's discussion of the two predicaments of *socio-centrism* and *atman-centrism* helps us in outlining a new sociology beyond the socio-centric sociology of modernity. But these two predicaments today can also be nurtured with the vision and practice of *Anatta* or no-self, which interrogates the logic of both socio-centrism and atman-centrism, and helps to cultivate emptiness in both self and society and move from ego to egolessness in both self, other and the world. In Buddhist paths of thinking, being and becoming, *anatta* is part of *pattipacchasamudaya*, dependent co-origination, which is also part of manifold webs of interdependence. This interdependence is nurtured not only by what Thich Nhat Hanh calls Interbeing but also Transbeing, where we are animated by not only immanence but also transcendence. Daya Krishna's chapter is followed by Ananta Kumar Giri's "Beyond Sociology: Cultivating an Ontological Epistemology of Participation," in which Giri explores pathways that go beyond conventional sociology by exploring the work and meditation of ontological sociality in self, culture and society, which involves both ontological and epistemic engagement. For Giri, going beyond sociology urges us to reconstitute both society and subjectivity: society is a field of ontological epistemology of participation, and subjectivity consists simultaneously of unconscious, sociological role occupant and transcendental self (see Giri 2006, 2017a, b, c). In his subsequent chapter, "Deep Sociology," John Clammer follows some of these concerns further by inviting us to explore pathways of a deep sociology going beyond continued "epistemological Eurocentrism" and taking part in cross-cultural dialogues and conversations, for example between Japan and the West (see Clammer 1995). Clammer also urges us to take the philosophical dimensions of sociology and social life, especially current processes of globalization, seriously. This means rethinking our fundamental assumptions in sociology about society and individuals, such as an oversocialized view of the individual as predominantly a product of society. For Clammer, "an oversocialized and overculturalized notion of self cannot provide the foundation for an adequate sociology of the real world, as the sociology of the body demonstrates." He urges us to transform the "existential shallowness, culturalism and anthropocentrism of conventional sociology with the possibility of a rich and transforming engagement with the issues and approaches to life that artists, spiritual seekers,

poets and deep ecologists have long pioneered and the absence of which is both the source of so much of aridity of sociology and the crises that global society and environment now confront."

Clammer raises some fundamental questions about our conceptions of society and sociology. The following chapter by Piet Strydom, "Inferential Dialectics: On Dialectical Reasoning in Critical Social Science and the Sociocultural World," carries this spirit of deep inquiry and reconstitution further. Strydom, true to his deep engagement in critique and reconstitution, challenges us to rethink our conventional methodologies such as dialectics and introduces a very creative path of inference in it. As he tells us, he introduces the "inferential stance which allows the clarification of the operation of different yet closely related modes of inference in both social science and the sociocultural world—the latter being particularly important since inference is usually associated with scientific practice rather than with social action, interaction, discourse and so forth."

Strydom, in his engagement, makes a dialogue with Jürgen Habermas and in his subsequent chapter, "Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action: From Discourse Ethics to Spiritual Transformations," Ananta Kumar Giri takes this dialogue further. Giri challenges us to rethink and reconstitute the themes of moral consciousness, discourse ethics and communicative action that Habermas uses by realizing their need for further conceptual, practical and spiritual transformations. Giri here engages with Jürgen Habermas and Sri Aurobindo, exploring pathways of mutual transformation by simultaneously cultivating discourse ethics suggested by Habermas and practical and integral spirituality striven towards by Sri Aurobindo. With a spiritual engagement, discourse ethics goes beyond argumentation towards deeper meditation, mutual listening and care, while with the practice of radical democracy inherent in discourse ethics, spirituality becomes less authoritarian and more dialogical.

Giri's spiritual opening of the social and sociological interrogation of the spiritual is accompanied by Philip Wexler's chapter on mysticism and society, in which Wexler challenges us to understand the mystical engagement with sociology in the works of pioneers such as Max Weber, George Simmel and William James, as well as the mystical dimension in society. Interactions which constitute social relations and society are not only social but also mystic and cosmic. For Wexler, mysticism has to be understood not in terms of dualism between other-worldly and this-worldly realms, as Weber suggests, but as a dynamic creative force moving in

between and across different realms such as this world and the other world which is manifest in the lives of both individual and society. Mysticism calls for a wider definition of the meaning of the social and urges us to go beyond "an oversocialized" view of man, as critiqued by Dennis Wrong and referred to in Clammer's chapter in this volume. Wexler here draws our attention to Kabbalah, the mystical tradition in Judaism, as well as to Tantra, from Indian traditions. For Wexler, "Against Weber's view of mysticism as divided between other-worldly and inner-worldly, in the Kabbalah […] mysticism is neither. It is between worlds, dynamic, relational and empowering." Wexler further argues:

> To put it simply and boldly, both individualism and culturalism, as explanations, are historically inappropriate to an emergent world in which the meaning of society itself is changing. Against the "end of the social views," which argues the triumph, albeit dissentingly, of informationalization, or the supercessation of persons by the objectivization of social relations, the view presented here is that the social is being transformed in cosmicization. Within such a wider, transformed social field, mysticism comes to the fore as a societally central social relation. The character of mysticism, as described in classical Kabbalah and Tantra—their interactive dynamics of emanations and divine corporealizations, embodied entextualizations of classical mystical beliefs and practices—reveals itself to be—now, more evidently, because of the expansion of the meaning of the social horizon—a fully social relation.

Wexler's chapter is followed by Wei-Hsu Lu, who presents us with an alternative sociology based upon Confucian vision and practice of self-transformation. If Wexler argues that conventional models of social interactions lack a mystical dimension and cosmic interaction, Lu argues how it lacks a performative dimension especially with regard to the differential profundity of the participants of social life. To elaborate his argument, Lu presents us the game of Go from Chinese civilization and society and the perspective of Mencius with regard to the vision and practice of self-transformation. He discusses the phenomenological sociology of Alfred Schultz and sociology of symbolic interaction of Herbert Blumer, and argues how their approaches lack not only attention to differential profundity of participants in interaction but also the need for compassion and self-transformation in interactions as well as in social life. As Lu argues, "The philosophy of free will or subjectivity in interpretativism conceals the phenomena of "differential profundity (差異境界)." For Lu,

> In Schütz's and Blumer's programs, how persons conduct themselves in social activities is converted into how subjects move their physical bodies to communicate with one another. This conversion from lived persons into philosophical subjects plus their physical bodies is the root of the blind spot in both Schütz's phenomenological sociology and Blumer's symbolic interactionism … Mencius's teachings about self-transformation have the potential to equip us with a distinct approach to the study of lived persons' performance with differential profundity because his teachings are not based on any philosophical tradition of subject and object. Rather, his teachings about self-transformation and about lived persons' appropriate performance in their surroundings come from the philosophical anthropology of qi (氣). For Mencius, a lived person is not an isolated subject who contemplates the world and studies other human beings' conduct as the motion of things without thoughts. Moreover, there is no problem of intersubjective communication in Mencius's view. There is no such philosophical theory in which separate subjects are linked by their shared ability to constitute their intersubjective reality or to objectify their common world with the assistance of ideal types or language. Unlike Schütz or Blumer (together with Mead), Mencius did not assert that successful interactions in an in-group or successful joint actions must rely on the conditions that actors successfully express their minds or mental consciousness through their bodies, and that they successfully interpret others' bodily expressions as the indications of minds or mental consciousness. In his view, a lived person's performance toward other persons and things issues from this person's being affected by (感) and replying to (應), the surroundings through qi. Furthermore, one's ability to be suitably affected by and to suitably reply to one's settings can be cultivated, as long as one continually refines the quality of qi flowing through oneself.

Lu's chapter is followed by Gudrun Dahl's "Beyond Sociology: Structure, Agency and the Ethics of Writing," in which the author raises some foundational questions about the valorization of agency in contemporary discourses and scholarship where "agency is wielded on behalf of others, often in collective terms." As a critical anthropologist Dahl urges us to realize that when we, for example feminists and other advocates, attribute agency to others, it presents a "pre-theoretical moral commitment" which may do violence to the reality that we seek to understand. In this trope, "Agency becomes an unmarked category validated as good per se disregarding whether it contributes to a positive change in condition, maintains status quo or incurs damage or suffering to others."

Dahl's critique of agency also points to the limits of standpoint of agents in their social life as well as in ideological articulation. The

concluding chapter, by Giri, "With and Beyond Plurality of Standpoints: Sociology and the *Sadhana* of Multi-Valued Logic and Living," takes this issue further by rethinking and transforming sociological reasoning from the point of view of the issue of plurality of standpoints and the way they become part of a process of communicative and meditative pluralization. Building upon Karl Mannheim and André Béteille, Giri argues how each of the standpoints from where we begin and which we strive to move to or assert are partial in nature. But, for Giri,

> realizing the partial nature of one's standpoint and realizing that one's standpoint is interpenetrated or needs to be interpenetrated by others' standpoints calls for further work on self-transformation—transformation of one's one-dimensional epistemology and politics—mutual communication and institutional nurturance where institutions of society facilitate such realization of one's partiality and communication among partial standpoints through institutionally facilitated spaces and processes. This calls for understanding the way plurality of standpoints become part of multi-dimensional processes of pluralization. This is a further challenge for sociology. Here it is not enough only to confine sociology to the empirical study of society and not to accept the normative challenge of how sociological research can contribute to creating a field of knowledge, reflections, social relations and institutional space where plurality of standpoints go beyond their initial closures—self-justification and absolutist claim—and communicate with each other.

The key challenge for us is to realize the limits of our given standpoints and pluralize them. For Giri, it calls for a *sadhana* of multi-valued logic and living in place of the dominant either of logic of self vs. the other, the right or wrong. As he argues:

> How do we pluralize our plural standpoints which at the level of self, ideology and even sociological method present themselves in a singular, absolutist and exclusionary way? Pluralizing plural standpoints calls for generosity and expansion of points of view into circles of views on the part of both participants and observers which is not necessarily articulated and embodied in the sociological method as it is prevalent today. This calls for *sadhana* (striving) of multi-valued logic and living as well as spiritual transformation of our consciousness, method, self and society which are prone to cling to the absolutism of a singular standpoint. *Sadhana* or striving makes our knowledge, including locational knowledge of standpoint, not just received and taken for granted but evolving, interpenetrative and emergent.

In such a striving, sociology is not confined only to the so-called empirical level and isolated from the normative challenge of realizing the challenge of going beyond one's initial closure and absolutism. Sociology goes beyond the dualism of the empirical and the normative by striving to understand what T.N. Madan (2011) calls the "transempirical" dimension of our empirical reality, and by cultivating a new normative which emerges out of struggles and aspirations of people's lives for beauty, dignity and dialogues in the midst of ugliness, disrespect, violation and violence of many kinds.

The chapters in this volume in their many different ways help us go beyond contemporary dominant ways of thinking about and doing sociology, helping us to cultivate a transdisciplinary and deep sociology. Marcus Bussey in his Afterword explores the larger implication of this journey. He suggests how with this book we can explore "various intuitive, embodied, creative, aesthetic and spiritual modalities to delve beyond the conventional givens," and rethink, reconstitute and transform our taken-for-granted discourse and practices of sociology and the human condition.

Notes

1. In conventional classification of our world we are used to categories of traditional, modern and postmodern, but Enrique Dussel (2017) here challenges us to realize the significance of an emergent transmodern condition where we are not slaves of either tradition or modernity nor ahistorical children of a postmodern world but live creatively in our present-day world, building upon critical and transformative resources from all sources through creative memory work. To this memory work I add the dynamics of memory meditation. I share my following poem as a way of reimagining our condition as cross-fertilization of roots and routes through memory work and memory meditation:

   Roots and Routes: Memory Work, Meditation and Planetary Realizations

   1

   Roots and Routes
   Routes within Roots
   Roots with Routes
   Multiple Roots and Multiple Routes
   Crisscrossing With Love
   Care, *Chung* and *Karuna*
   Crisscrossing and Cross-firing

2

Root work and Route Work
Footwork and Memory Work
Weaving threads
Amidst threats
Dancing in front of terror
Dancing with terrorists
Meditating with threats
Meditating with threads
Meditating with Roots and Routes
Root Meditation
Route Meditation
Memory Work as Meditating with Earth
Dancing with Soul, Cultures and Cosmos

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