

Editorial article

Methods to Living Sociology

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“All mysteries which lead theory to mysticism find their rational solution
in human practice and in the comprehension of this practice.” Karl
Marx, the Eighth Thesis on Feuerbach

Abstract: *A sociologist as an academic practitioner and an individual are not two separate entities; they are interconnected, united in one. A sociologist, as an individual (or subject, self or agency) operating in the social field and as a social scientist (a teacher), applies the same method of participation, critical engagement, cognition and application (of information and knowledge). Self-objectification and deconstruction are the methods applied in both domains as the individual-sociologist engages critically with everything that he/she comes across and goes through a relentless process of selection, rejection, modification, and deconstruction-reconstruction of the cognitive elements, while making them an integral part of the relative subject that he/she is in a given time and space. The cognitive elements thus construed are then put to practice in actions and non-actions. This deciphers the magic of praxis in social and academic life. The subject or the agency is active with all practical reasoning in encountering and interpreting the bits and pieces of information and given discourses in the process of “subjectivation”. The idea here is to obliterate the conventional distinctions between “subjective” and “objective” fields of knowledge and praxis.*

Keywords: Subject, subjectivation, objectivity, self-objectification, being and becoming, discourses, praxis, doing sociology.

Introduction

The two major inherited problems of the social sciences of today are (1) localism and fragmentation, and (2) conscious absence of the social scientist, the subject, in the overwhelming celebration of “doing sociology” (a phrase

that turned popular following the publication of the volume titled *Doing Sociology in India* (2026). The absence of the sociologist with all her/his passion, critical engagement in knowledge production and social praxis is amply demonstrated in the articles (barring a few) in the three volumes of *Indian Sociology* (Yogendra Singh ed. 2014) or in T. N. Madan's account of *Sociology at the University of Lucknow* (2013). The signs of dispassionate, objective sociological writings are overwhelming in all these texts. The gradual specialisation and fragmentation of the discipline into micro fields (or areas) in the name of "technocratic efficiency" or mythical "objective knowledge" have killed the possibility of developing grand social science discourses or grand perspectives. The objectification of the discipline, following the positivist tradition set by the likes of Comte, Durkheim and Weber and most Indian sociologists (notwithstanding C Wright Mills' warning), has swamped the social sciences into "abstracted empiricism" (Mills' phraseology)¹, which could very well be rephrased as "absurd empiricism". The pressure of empiricism on scholars has made Indian scholars, the younger ones in particular, afraid to think and write originally while challenging conventional wisdom; the ideas produced in the name of research are therefore "repetitive" and absurd, failing to add anything new to the existing body of knowledge. The Durkheimian and Weberian teachings of methodological strategies, to which young scholars in India are oriented, result in an unwelcoming divorce between the subject social scientist and the objects of research. The empathetic connect with the objects of research (the society or the people) is conspicuous by its absence. We, Indian sociologists, end up producing a vast body of literature through institutional knowledge-production systems that lacks meaning and relevance in understanding the realities of people's lives or the modes of their praxis. The social science "knowledge" that we produce, in India, for example, remains largely uninteresting for the students, scholars, teachers, and even the planners, and is emotionally dry for the common citizens. Where is the passion in what we do in the name of social science?

It is, therefore, high time that we replace "doing sociology" with a new phrase, "living sociology"; one can again revise it to "living social sciences". This requires a change in our approach to social sciences. First, we need to acknowledge that it is time to go beyond the conventional distinction between "subjective" and "objective knowledge" since it is difficult to imagine a human being who is devoid of reasoning, critical insights, agency, interests and moral standards; everybody is capable of applying the methods of objectification (or deconstruction) of all objects (including the Cartesian "I" or the Foucauldian ever-evolving "subject"); even those who apparently

surrender to beliefs in certain spheres (superstitions, stereotypes, caste or religion) are capable of self-reflection and could be logical or rational on certain other matters; every individual thus could be an unity of the opposites”; there could also be a transition from belief to rationality in one individual over time. Second, we must acknowledge that the subject (better to say, the relative subject in a given time and space), with all her/his agency (affectivity, imagination, criticality, creativity and freedom), is at the centre of knowledge (consciousness) production and praxis, and the “subject social scientist” in social life and the researcher-academician “social scientist” are the same unfragmentable entity. Third, the subject in essence is an analytical-critical entity who consciously or unconsciously applies a dialogical-dialectical method of cognition while questioning and applying her reasoning motivated by the “will to change for the better”; he/she is capable of uniting cognition and action, reflection and change. The purpose of the present paper is to examine the possibility of this new approach to what I call “living sociology” and see how it might work at two levels: (1) at the level of the common people and (2) at the level of social scientists.

The method

Every individual is on a journey from birth to death. The journey begins even before birth (the parents’ love, cohabitation, DNA lineage, parents’ economic condition, health, nutritional status, and so on) and continues after death (as she/he is remembered for her/his love, care, and contributions by friends and family members). Moving through the semiotic formative years, the individual becomes a subject or self, relentlessly engaging, dialogically and dialectically, with the information that flows from multiple directions. She/he consciously selects elements of realisations and truth for internalisation into her/his own character to formulate subjective discourses, which, in turn, are applied in life in the course of the journey. Cognition and praxis are thus inseparable. In this process, the individual encounters the forces of domination (the cultural tradition, the history, the dictates of the parents, the community-members, the economic condition, the power relations of the time, and so on), banking on her/his agency and freedom (the quantum and efficacy of which would vary largely on the social conditions, the subjective manoeuvres and the will to exercise), evolves as a subject with time and experience, and modifies the “self” that she/he is in course of the journey in the light of new experiences and realisations. This method is equally true for a common man as well as for a sociologist or a social scientist. For a sociologist, sociology is just another domain of

information or knowledge with which she/he engages dialogically and dialectically with all possible cognitive passion while applying all the techniques of discourse formation and action through a relentless process of selection of the knowledge-elements. A sociologist, following this obvious method, therefore, cannot “do” sociology dispassionately without engaging with the object of research while conforming to the demands of “scientific” or “objective” knowledge formation since she/he is at the centre of the process with all her human sensitivities. The discourses thus formed need not necessarily be in the zone of “subjective, unscientific, moral beliefs”; rather, they could be logical and objective, provided the sociologist activates the techniques of “self-objectification and reflection” while consciously applying the Cartesian method of critical examination, or the Derridean technique of deconstruction². My conviction is that an individual, sociologist or not, is perpetually caught in “logical-nonlogical”, “ideological-scientific”, conscious-unconscious dilemmas while examining the body of information, experiences and ideas she/he is privy to; it is almost impossible to be either this or that. It is, therefore, impossible to be exclusively subjective or objective, as the individual cannot help but logically and critically examine everything that she/she comes across; intersubjective variations are always a possibility depending on the context. Following Levi-Strauss, one can argue that the primitive or the modern mind, academic or otherwise, is naturally programmed with reasoning and curiosity to disentangle the “unconscious” or the “unknown”³.

The essence of being

The physical features, natural sensory organs and the analytical, reflective and creative brain that every single individual is empowered with distinguish her/him as the superior among all creatures. Following Aristotle’s dictum, we human beings come into the world not as a result of a pre-given will, but in accordance with the laws of nature, not just to live a life but to live a good life⁴. The knowledge of biological sciences tells us that we are genetically endowed with coded information, stored in mitochondria and chromosomes, that lays the foundation of our nature. The knowledge of social sciences tells us that the social conditions, the economic conditions, the ecology, the historical social traditions, the culture, the political conditions, the people we come in touch with and interact with, and the social institutions offer us the life worlds where we grow up as social beings and live an interconnected (entangled) life. The self is built through active engagement with the given factors and the subject’s own will and initiatives for self-

elevation to a point. The social sciences also tell us that the individual-self forms and evolves through a complex process of dialogical and dialectical intercourse between the self of a given time and the flow of information and discourses from all the external sources to which an individual has access. G. H. Mead would tell us how an individual lives through the play stage to elevate herself to take social responsibilities to be a part of the “generalised other”⁵; Jürgen Habermas would tell us how an individual actively participates in the public sphere to develop a critical self⁶; Jean Paul Sartre would argue how all individuals enjoy some free space and strive to preserve that combatting the constraining social forces⁷; Foucault would argue that the individual always take an active-critical role in engaging with the historically and socially given and pushes for change in the process of subjectivation⁸.

Could there be a purpose in an otherwise “absurd life”? While Albert Camus would answer in the negative⁹, Aristotle would never rule out human beings’ relentless striving for a meaningful life or “good life”. As I understand it, the search for a meaningful life, against all adversaries, is universal in all normal, sensible human beings. Only the subject, located at a time and in a condition, has the prerogative to decide about the purpose of life and to modify it depending on changing conditions and perceptions. The will to live and live a “good life” is indomitable in all human beings, who pulls all here/his resources and reason to actualise it. She would fail at times yet would stand up and make a fresh approach while making compromises, adjustments, manoeuvres and innovations. The management of micro time, reshuffling of the communities and interconnectedness, special and social movements, readjusting the moral, ethical and aesthetic standards, withdrawal in silence are all well-reasoned strategies that the subjects deploy to live a meaningful life, an authentic life, a dignified life. He/she negotiates with power, confronts the dominant forces to survive in conditions of slavery and precarity, takes the necessary sufferings to stand by truth (Feodor Dostoyevsky¹⁰), aesthetics and freedom. He/she would drive on his/her romantic passion to leave a mark in the field of knowledge, literature and art for setting new artistic/creative standards, contribute to social transformation and, would thus live after life. She/he would also live in comforting myths and illusions (Franz Kafka)¹¹. Life can thus take different courses depending on subjective preferences and efforts, and the changing existential conditions; purposeless life, on the other hand, is an exception rather than a rule.

The subject, information, knowledge and praxis

Following Karl Marx, I am fully convinced that the process of critically engaging with the known traditions and discourses, social participation, cognition, action and reflection are the primary sources of our ever-forming consciousness, which, in turn, impacts our being and course of action in the social field. The processes – discursive engagements, lived experiences, cognition and action – are tied in an active, spontaneous, inseparable entanglement. This is precisely what is known as the Marxist thesis on praxis (for an elaboration, we can refer to Marx’s theses on Feuerbach and Louis Althusser’s *For Marx*, 1969).¹² This differentiates Marxist epistemology from the Durkheimian or Weberian search for objective knowledge, where we are told that the objects of knowledge (the society or the people) are external to us and we must look for a dispassionate account of others’ lives and problems as unconcerned observers following the methods of non-normative science¹³. Contrary to their “ideal-typical” methodological prescription, which constitutes the central point of the methodology courses and classes followed in social sciences in India, and endorsed by the mainstream Indian sociologists and researchers, the crux of the Marxist method is outlined in his famous dictum, “the philosophers have only interpreted history; the point, however, is to change it”. The theoretical knowledge, according to Marx, is meant to be tested in the light of its applicability for social transformation. We, as ordinary subjects or as social scientists, cannot help but engage with fellow individuals and their problems with Rousseau’s “empathy”¹⁴ and are always driven by a “will to change things”. We apply this method, consciously or unconsciously, when we reflect inward (which we all do), identify our crises and take conscious measures to address them. This happens because we, following Descartes, are driven by an inbuilt curiosity to objectify everything around us, including ourselves, and to engage with it to varying degrees. The Weberian “distancing”, like phenomenological “bracketing”, is an “ideal-typical” prescription for objectification which, in reality, cannot be practised without subjective (at times, passionate) engagements with the objects of research. Here lies the fundamental difference between science and social sciences. We may not all participate in our historical task of one-dimensional social transformation through class revolutions, but as conscious and concerned subjects, we are all “rebels” (in Albert Camus’ or maybe Hegelian metaphysical sense)¹⁵, and we indeed participate in causing positive changes in our micro social fields; the will to change for a better life is thus universal. In the following section, I will illustrate how it works for the common people and for the sociologists (or social scientists).

(1) Non-specialist Information, knowledge and praxis

Intuition and reflection are almost impossible to apply to reconstructing precisely what happens in the semiotic phase of our lives, since we hardly recall what our early childhood had been like. However, we were surely there with all our sensory and perceptive prowess, ability to feel, observe and react to all objects of stimulation or sensation; we were also capable of communicating our physical needs, comforts and discomforts through our limited modes of semiotic expressions. The psychologists, Freudian or not, would tell us how significant the feelings and impressions, the unconscious or fuzzy mental images of our childhood, are reflected upon and reconstructed to form our subjectivity later. All psychologists agree that the conscious-critical-creative-self, which we might call individual agency, starts forming right in our childhood and matures as we age, with growing command over information from all external sources and experience, interacting with more and more individuals and confronting new situations. The individual agency matures as we grow up with greater access to information and independent analytical prowess, subjective morality and aesthetic tastes. Let us decode this process in greater detail.

In our early childhood days, we fail to separate beliefs and reasoned-out knowledge, and we tend to take everything that is passed on to us by parents and other older people around us as true, as we do not have alternative or conflicting bodies of knowledge or information in the light of which we could have examined what we were told. Banking on our power of imagination and driven by self-interests, we still sometimes contradict others and express our dissent, as an unhappy child expresses her/his disapproval of authoritarian impositions against her/his will by saying “no”, or by crying when she/he feels powerless. However, as we grow up, we interact more, confront new situations and odds, learn from others, read more and, thus, gather more information and experience; we sharpen our analytical prowess by relentlessly, consciously or unconsciously, reflecting upon every bit and piece of information and experience before we accept or reject them. This is how even the common people, who are not privy to the specialist theoretical knowledge, apply the phenomenological act of reflection as a method of cognition while dealing with tradition and experience. The common people, even the illiterate and the members of the subaltern classes, are driven by sensitivity, reason, self-interest, morality and justice; they, at times, appear more humane than the middle- and upper-class people empowered with formal education since their realisations are founded on raw experiences and sufferings.

Let us illustrate this point further. In our childhood, we were introduced to the traditional beliefs and ideas of ghosts, gods, religion, castes, solar or lunar eclipses (Rahu, Ketu, and so on), injected with a sense of hierarchy and differences among the members of the neighbourhood communities and were taught the practice of social distancing along caste, religious and class lines; we took them as real and followed them in our actions and interactions. We were injected with a traditional moral code and were taught to follow it as sacred, and were instructed to practice a set of rituals, which we followed without much logico-critical examination. We were introduced to the characters of the Ramayana and Mahabharata as if they were real, and we chose our heroes (like Rama, Krishna or Arjuna) with a great deal of affectivity while looking at the villains (like Ravana, Karna or Duryodhana) with a great deal of abhorrence. We hardly had any alternative informative or analytical models of our own to check all these beliefs and traditions critically. As we grew in maturity, we gradually learnt to question the veracity of the information, ideas, sayings and truth as we had access to alternative ideas and information; we developed our own reasoning and moral standards to examine everything critically; we learnt the art of rejection, acceptance, and modification of everything sourced from secondary sources before imbibing them as a part of our character. For example, in schools and colleges we were introduced to Madhusudan's *Meghnad Badh Kavya* and Tagore's *Karna-Kunti Sambad* and learnt to deconstruct the *Ramayana*'s depiction of Meghnad (Ravana's son who fought heroically against Rama) or the *Mahabharata* version of Karna (the illegitimate eldest son of Pandava's mother Kunti who sided with the Kauravas in the grand war of the epic *Mahabharata*) and look at them with a great deal of empathy. Similarly, it became possible to partly or wholly repudiate the ideas of ghosts, gods, religion, caste, the rituals or everything else that we learnt in early stages of our lives or to retain some elements of them in modified forms in our cognitive storage. A believer in caste or religion can thus learn to reject them as unjust and unethical instruments of segregation, exploitation and domination of fellow neighbours and friends or the unanimous people (the labouring Dalits, workers and cultivators) on whose labour we survive and are entangled with. Likewise, a boy who grew up imbibing the elements of patriarchy can learn, through social participation and experience, the inhuman nature of these practices and be gender sensitive; or one can also move from a believer to become an atheist as she/he learns to see everything with logic.

Subjective morality, a logical and compassionate understanding of traditions, discourses and human relations, can place a reflective individual on the

path of self-transformation. Experiences, constant dialogue with individuals and ideas we encounter, sensitivity to the suffering of others, and a sense of responsibility can turn an insensitive human being into someone sensitive, empathetic, and connected to fellow human beings, animals, nature, and the environment. The will to knowledge, search for a higher moral order based on humanism and empathy for the suffering lot, could bring about such subjective transformations. This is what Jacques Rousseau and later Claude Levi-Strauss have suggested while explaining the rules of how human beings connect to fellow human beings, with nature and animals (Levi-Strauss, 1968). The common people connect with fellow human beings, animals and nature without knowing Rousseau's or Levi-Strauss's revelation of the unconscious structural rules.

An idea or a piece of information can turn into knowledge if it passes the rigour of subjective examination and is corroborated by experience, albeit relative. Internalised in subjectivity, these relative truths then come alive in application in real life. An individual who does not believe in caste will stop practising it, and an atheist will look at everything religious with a great deal of disdain and disparagement. We must have seen a lot of cases of such subjective evolution and transformation. Unfortunately, we in "empirical research" collect field data without realising the authenticity of the subjective and shared "folk" or "community" knowledge which is already drawn phenomenologically, applying the techniques of critical reflections on the subjective experiences and intersubjectively shared at the community level. Regrettably, the researcher often distorts the phenomenological techniques and manufactures data to suit his/her research scheme. This is precisely what C Wright Mills termed "abstracted empiricism" (I term it "absurd empiricism"), which a large majority of PhDs in Indian universities are infested with.

(2) When academic knowledge comes alive

From Socrates to Descartes to Derrida is a long methodological journey. Socrates teaches us to question relentlessly to look for an ever-eluding truth; Descartes teaches us to doubt everything in an inexorable search for truth, and these methods find greater articulation in the now widely known Derridean method of deconstruction. The persistent search for truth by the subject is therefore the only truth, and all "deemed truths" are logical-nonlogical temporal fiction (mental constructs) which, interestingly, come alive in our cognition and action. The mind never stops imagining and engaging in critical thinking until we are gone, and the will to search and

change never dies. Thus, cognitive and social actions are signs of all living human beings.

Questions have been raised about the centrality of Descartes' pre-given "I" in his famous maxim "cogito, ergo sum", in his *Discourse on Method* (1637) as a first step to demonstrating the attainability of certain knowledge. This is indubitable, as Descartes argues in the second of his six *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641) that even if an all-powerful demon were to try to deceive him into *thinking* that he exists when he does not, he would have to exist for the demon to deceive him. Therefore, whenever he thinks, he exists. Furthermore, as he argued in his replies to critics in the second edition (1642) of the *Meditations*, the statement "I am" (*sum*) expresses an immediate *intuition*, not the conclusion of a piece of reasoning (regarding the steps of which he could be deceived), and is thus indubitable. (<https://www.britannica.com/topic/cogito-ergo-sum>). A key contribution of *Discourse on the Method* is its emphasis on scepticism as a tool for acquiring knowledge. Descartes doubted the reliability of physical senses, trusting only his mental reality. Descartes, thus, laid the foundation for his dualist philosophy, or separation of mind and body, ontology and epistemology. The Cartesian "I" is never fully formed. The pre-Socratic philosopher Heraclitus sensed this when he said: "I see only being, no becoming". An individual never becomes one, but she/he is always in flux, actively participating with all her/his agency in momentary, relative self-formation.

But who can deny the centrality of "I" in her/his being, however unformed or unarticulated (as Julia Kristeva deconstructs "self" identity) that be? After all, it is I, with all its cognitive abilities and moral-ethical standards, participating in the process of cognition and social action; it is I who takes the responsibility for what it does or does not and takes the consequences of her actions.

This tradition of deconstructive methods teaches us to have courage to question the social science discourses and strive beyond; to acknowledge that there is no such thing as the final truth, therefore, do not take anything for granted, subject everything to critical scrutiny and search for something truer that confirms to your experiences and realisations; do not accept anything unverified while being true to your logical frame, observations and moral standard and once you accept something as true, however relative and fragile it might be, stick to it, albeit it demands sacrifices and brings pain; this is what Tolstoy(1983) and Dostoyevsky (see Evdokimova and Goldstein, 2016) would have taught us. In other words, be authentic as a

human being and be true to yourself because your ultimate accountability lies with yourself.

Engaging ourselves with the philosophical tradition of Spinoza, Nietzsche, Einstein and Marx, Russell and all the modern astronomers, we learn to be atheists; we learn that there is no reason to mystify the creation of the universe, matter, life, and even consciousness. There is no reason to credit God for all this. An atheist reading of the *Upanishads* and the *Gita* is possible if we learn to read the texts as metaphors while appreciating the spirit of the underlying philosophy. If we read the *Vedas*, alongside the authentic ancient history of India (the writings of Romila Thapar, 2002, for example), carefully, we learn that the Aryan texts, notwithstanding their transcendental philosophical values, were instrumental in legitimising the early colonisation mission of the migrant Aryans over the indigenous Adivasis (the Dasas) of the Indian subcontinent. We can thus decode the politics of the Varna system to negate the institution of caste, which has long been taken as a sacred creation of the supreme lord Brahma and is reproduced in our everyday lives and politics. The rigid occupational demarcation, the hierarchy, the principle of purity and pollution embedded in the Varna and to a large extent in the caste system, unfold the embedded conspiracy of the propertied and upper caste combine to establish a monopoly control over the resources and labour and the women (as is evident in the credence laid to the practice of hypergamy in the *Manusmriti*) of the already disenfranchised labouring classes, the Sudras, the Achhuts. A critical engagement with social science knowledge about the Varna and the Caste systems pushes us to see the inherent political game of “divide and rule”, hence illogical, unjust and inhuman. Once we arrive at such a realisation, would any reasonable sociologist continue to hold on to the caste system and follow its prescription in their social lives? Or, should she research and teach caste as a distant, dispassionate sociologist? The insights drawn out of critical engagement with the social science discourses come alive in deciding our relations and actions in a caste-ridden society; the segregation between discursive consciousness and practical consciousness thus withers.

Reading the history and politics of capitalism from its classical Avtaar to its neoliberal incarnation through the critical lenses left behind by Marx, Gramsci, Althusser, and the members of the German critical school, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and many others, how could a sensitive sociologist (or social scientist) remain naïve to its architecture of self-reproduction while turning the natural resources, the technocrats, managers, social institutions, the labouring classes of all categories, the women and even the

consumers of all classes into mere means to the production of surplus value. How could one fail to see the validity of the Marxist thesis that the superstructure - the State, the power relations, the culture, education or religion - is structurally designed to accord stability to the infrastructure, the mode of production? From Gramsci (1999), Althusser (2014) and the members of the German critical school, we learn how culture, media, family, education, language, and the psychic makeup of individuals become an important part of liberal and neoliberal governmentality; from C. Wright Mills (2000) we learn how the corporate-military- and political elite constitute an impregnable force that manipulates all democratic institutions and processes to further its interests; from Michel Foucault we learn how knowledge, surveillance, sexuality, population, welfare, control and punishment have been turned into the weapons of capitalist governmentality. Social scientists like Ulrich Beck (1992), Judith Butler (2004), and Akhil Gupta (2012) teach us how careful infliction of poverty, hunger, unemployment, insecurity – the sources of precarity in public life – could be the means of management and control of peoples' lives; or how the surveillance and punishment (state's monopoly over peoples' lives) have been used by the modern states, democratic or otherwise, to suppress the critical voices. Overall, social science knowledge helps develop critical-practical discourses about the economic-political-social architecture of which we are an integral part. From Habermas, we learn how the corporate-controlled modern media side with the State in spreading a reign of "distorted communication" to subvert the public sphere and critical citizenship. How could we then act as sociologists and as citizens as members of civil society while keeping these two as separate fields of wisdom? How could we as social scientists be unconcerned observers about the forces and processes that impact our existence, rights, morality and wellbeing; how could we remain silent to see the immense sufferings and injustices inflicted on the common people? Leaving the remedial actions to the politicians, as Max Weber (1949) would have suggested, and protecting sociology from being a normative (moral) discipline, as André Béteille (1996) would have suggested, is neither desirable nor attainable. How could we act only as "distanced social scientists" when in our everyday existence we confront issues of injustice, violence, caste, religion, inequality, corruption, state atrocities, and disenfranchisement? Can we keep aside our sociological insights while acting as a conscious and sensitive member of society?

The analytical insights we draw out of our critical engagement with the social science theories help having a clearer understanding of the things happening around us. Studying the Adivasi tea garden workers in North

Bengal over the last two decades, I realised that they are trapped in a structural conspiracy like their Dalit counterparts all over India. The tea gardens and the agricultural fields, which provide the Adivasis with a livelihood, tie them at a subsistence level and keep them having no control over material or human resources (education and skill), nullifying the avenues for their upward mobility. This trap forces the Adivasis and Dalits to work as physical labour, while producing surplus value for the owning classes. When tea gardens or shrinking agriculture cannot sustain them, they gradually shift to the sprawling urban informal economy for a living. The surplus labour, not accommodated in the plantation system, moves out to serve the private houses, the construction industry or the larger informal sector, which too is highly exploitative, and which too, directly or indirectly, help reproduce the neoliberal economic order. A section of the girls is trapped in flesh trade. Thus, the neoliberal order reproduces itself on the value produced by their cheap labour, and the labour laws, the state policies, even some of the welfare doles directed to facilitating mere survival of these labouring classes are a part of this reproductive technology. This precisely explains why the Dalits and the Adivasis are perpetually stuck in underdevelopment, in poverty, hunger, and precarity, while hardly tasting the opportunities of upward mobility. The neoliberal order conspires to bind them in slavery and semi-slavery, disenfranchise them, just to make sure that there is an unhindered supply of cheap labour.

Engaging with the knowledge in the field of environmental sociology, we come to realise how capitalist greed has, in the course of human evolution, turned ecocentrism into an anthropocentric approach to nature. We come to learn how the globally practised neoliberal development discourses lead to ruthless exploitation of natural resources - land, forest, minerals, water – while bringing about ecological disasters.

Engaging with feminist literature, we come to learn about the rules of patriarchy, gender inequality and atrocities and gradually learn to accept the ideal of gender equality while treating the members of the other gender, the members of the LGBTQ, with greater sensitivity and humanness.

Doing sociology or social sciences, thus we gradually learn that we have internalised information and ideas and discourses in our characters and apply them in our social life as we simultaneously act as social scientists and responsible members of society. “Doing sociology” as a distanced researcher gradually transcends into “living sociology” as we learn that cognition and social practices are inseparable, united in our being and practices.

Conclusion

The central questions addressed in this paper are (1) whether subjective-objective boundaries are still maintainable in social sciences, (2) whether it is feasible or desirable to be distant-dispassionate observer of the social processes of which the social scientist is an integral part, (3) whether the Weberian prescription of knowledge production without praxis is maintainable, and (4) whether the individual-self and sociological self of one person operate in segregated zones. The paper has answered all these questions in the negative and argued with ample illustrations (a) that the subject sociologist (or social scientist) is at the same time a sensible-responsible member of society and she/he engages dialogically and critically with agency all the information and discourses that she/he confronts, examines them before selecting the cognitive elements to be internalised in her/his character; (b) that she/he does not segregate or hierarchise the information and knowledge drawn from social fields (and reflected upon) and from the field of social sciences, (c) that once internalised the body of consciousness or knowledge, which is always relative and in the process of formation, ceases to be abstract ideas, rather, they are put into practice in real life, and (d) that the process of engagement with information and ideas, the process of cognition and praxis are same for the non-academic and academic people with the single exception that the latter are privy to both practical and theoretical/philosophical understanding while the former deals with the traditional ideas and beliefs, which they confront in course of growing up, using their practical consciousness, which they draw reflexively from social participation; both deploy the same critical-cognitive prowess and agency in the process of being and doing. The autonomous and ever-evolving subject that a human being is always empowered with critical-cognitive and ethical-aesthetic standards and is driven by self- and collective interests to dialogically and dialectically engage with all information and discourses that she/he comes across to deconstruct and reconstruct the cognitive elements that construe her/him, which, in turn, guide her/him to action.

Thus, we not only deal with the ideas but live them. This prepares the ground for a shift from “doing sociology” to “living sociology” as we sit at the centre of social or sociological understanding and put it in practice in social life. The hierarchy of commonsense and higher philosophy as maintained by Gramsci and the mainstream sociologists can no longer be maintained on two grounds: first, that the method to cognition and praxis is the same in both cases; second, “the higher philosophy of the organic intellectuals” is unidirectional and hegemonic and does not necessarily

guarantee freedom from inequality, exploitation and injustice. Praxis of ideas, interests, love, aesthetics, ethics and rebellion, individual or collective, are common to all human beings and, in essence, are multidimensional and never unidirectional.

Since all individuals, sociologist or not, encounter multiple social constraints, fear of power and precarity, and all individuals are variously driven by self-interest or even greed, it is often the case that the course of individual action does not follow the internalised consciousness or truth; rather, the individuals make moral-ethical-aesthetic compromises in their acts of self-deception. In the acts of self-deception and self-alienation, albeit unethical, which the actors do under constraints or as conscious-calculative choice, the actors demonstrate their agency or subjectivity while being socially condemned. In the acts of self-deception, the opportunist middle-class intellectuals, the social scientists, are more proficient than the ordinary people, as the latter make compromises mostly for a living while the former compromise their critical consciousness and intellectual honesty for fragile material gains or greed for power and position.

Notes

1. In Chapter 4 “Abstracted Empiricism” in *The Sociological Imagination* (2000), C. Wright Mills dismissed the crude empiricism without theorisation in the name of sociological “scientific research”. Unfortunately, this is the problem with most of the Indian sociologists who neither do serious ethnography nor attempt any theorisation.
2. According to Derrida, deconstruction is relentless questioning and negation in search of an ever-eluding truth. The genealogy of this method could be traced back to Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher of the pre-Socratic period, who said, “everything is in flux”, to the Socratic method of endless questioning, to Descartes, to Nietzsche, and to the present-day post-structuralist writers (Julia Kristeva, in particular).
3. See Levi-Strauss “The Science of the Concrete” in his book *The Savage Mind* (1968): 1-34.
4. According to Aristotle, the ultimate purpose of human life is to achieve *eudaimonia*—a term often translated as “happiness,” “flourishing,” or “living well.” He argued that this state is reached by using our capacity for reason to live a life of virtue and contemplation. (<https://www.heartoftheart.org/?p=1219>).

5. George Herbert Mead, in his book *Mind, Self and Society* (1937), argues that, through socialisation and imitation during the play stage, the individual turns into a mature self to act as a responsible member of society.
6. Jürgen Habermas, in his *Theory of Communicative Action, Vol. I* (1984), argues that the self as an **intersubjective subject** is formed through **communicative action**, language, and social interaction rather than isolated individual introspection; while the State and the media join hands to shape the individual character, the subject still manages to preserve criticality.
7. Jean-Paul Sartre, in his *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (1956) argues that humans are “condemned to be free.” He views that there is no God or inherent human nature; therefore, we must construct our own purpose through our choices; this means we bear the total responsibility for everything we do and become.
8. Michel Foucault argues that the subject is constituted by history, genealogical discourses and social forces, yet she/he plays an active part in self-formation, a process he calls “subjectivation”. “Subjectivation”, according to Foucault, carries a double meaning: how a person is constructed as a “disciplined subject” of the system and how she/he is tied to her/his own self-conscious identity. For details, see Foucault (1983).
9. For details, see Avi Sagi’s book *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd* (2002).
10. The Russian writer Feodor Dostoyevsky explored profound existential, moral, and religious ideas through novels and novellas like [*Notes from Underground*](#), [*Crime and Punishment*](#), and [*The Brothers Karamazov*](#), where he suggested that one should stand by truth, albeit it might mean a lot of suffering. For a detailed note, see <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fyodor-Dostoyevsky>
11. On the human condition, Franz Kafka observed: “*Reality is too heavy for people, so they rent illusions and call it happiness*”, which is also translated as “*so they borrow illusions, soft dreams, sweet lies, and call it happiness*”.
12. Elaborating Marx’s theory of praxis Althusser argues that Marx completed “a long March” from under the early influence of Hegelian dialectics of ideas or abstract philosophy to crude materialism of Feuerbach to mature scientific Marx, who proposed that although understanding begins at a theoretical level the theories are tested in the light of the reality of modes of production, class relations, conflicts and struggle for social

transformation; a theory thus tested in practice stands the test of time; understanding without application in social transformation is abstract philosophy. For details, see Louis Althusser (1969).

13. For Durkheimian positivism, see his book *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1982); for an account of Weberian methodology, see his *The Methodology of the Social Sciences* (1949).
14. Jean-Jacques Rousseau viewed empathy or **pitié** (pity or compassion)—as a natural human instinct that ignites our natural repugnance at seeing others suffer and works against our drive for self-preservation (or self-love). Through empathy, human beings connect to fellow human beings, animals, and nature. For details, see Rousseau, 1979 [1763].
15. Albert Camus makes a distinction between rebellion and revolution, arguing that class revolution does not necessarily end exploitation, injustice or subjugation, but what is necessary is relentless rebellion since every social system or social relation is ingrained with the elements of inequality and injustice (see Camus, 1954). Hegel (2018), on the other hand, stood by the dialectics of ideas in his book, which Marx rejected as bereft of praxis (See Marx, 1857, 1969 and Althusser, 1969a).

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