Feminisms and sociologies: Locations and intersections in a global context

Maitrayee Chaudhuri

This article explores the many ways that sociologies and feminisms have intersected with an equal emphasis on the actual content of these intersections as well as on the context. First, the article shows how disciplinary histories and feminist rethinking across 'nations' and 'regions' do bear similarities, but also differ in many significant ways. Second, linked to the matter of contexts and travels is the matter of hierarchies within international academia that acquires new forms in the global context. Third, the national location of the academia continues to matter, evident, for instance, in the rich feminist scholarship on kinship and family studies, which prised open central sociological categories in India, precisely when the field was declared waning in the West and in the feminist engagement with sociology of education which reflects a persistent engagement with India's classrooms and pedagogy. Finally, if these visible new areas of feminist recasting are missed out when counting sociology's tryst with feminism, then we need to ask what is misplaced in the yardsticks of measurements.

I
Introduction

For any body of knowledge to move forward and understand changing contexts, it is necessary to pause, look back and examine the limits and possibilities of what has been done so far. This is the task I have set out for myself as I seek to map the intersections of sociologies and feminisms

Maitrayee Chaudhuri is at the Centre for the Study of Social Systems/School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi.
Email: maitrayeec@gmail.com

in this article with a specific focus on India but in a comparative frame.[1] The process of doing so has not been easy as, first, the body of work that emerged at the intersection of sociology and feminism is diverse and disparate and, second, there is no agreed-upon criterion from which one can assess the impact of feminism on sociology. I would like to elaborate upon both points for they impinge upon this article.

Causes for diversity and disparity of scholarship in the area are many, of which institutional and intellectual locations call for special mention. It is, therefore, simply not possible to make any sweeping claims across nations about the trajectory of feminisms and sociologies. This article rests on the assumption that disciplines themselves have had very distinct national trajectories. British social anthropology was, for example, distinct from American cultural anthropology. American sociology was a story apart. In India, sociology and social anthropology was often subsumed together, a fact addressed, though from different perspectives, by many Indian sociologists (e.g. Beteille 1974; Oommen 2013; Patel 2011; Srinivas 1962). In some departments of sociology in India, the influence of British social anthropology and its variant of structural functionalism were marked. In others, American sociology, particularly Talcott Parson, was more prominent in shaping the contours of the discipline. It fitted well with the broader ideological model of modernisation in a post-World War II, that is, Cold War, context (see Deshpande 2003; Patel 2011). Each of these responded differently to feminist recasting. A contention often made in the West is that anthropology[2] has been seen to be epistemologically more receptive to feminism than sociology. This may not hold true in India simply because the disciplinary trajectory of sociology and social anthropology is so intertwined here. The rich body of feminist scholarship on marriage, family and kinship in India reflect at once both the worm's-eye perspective of anthropology and the bird's-eye view of sociology.

Further, we have to take into account the uneven nature of scholarship not just across nations but also within a nation. For instance, attempts to map feminist recasting of sociology in the West have often been organised into different phases of feminist scholarship transforming traditional sociology, usually in the following steps: first, to understand the absence

[1] The rather long list of citations is to showcase the scholarship at the intersection of sociology and feminism in India, which the article argues has, in some ways, been lost in the curious world of academic circulation and visibility.

[2] Atkinson (1982) offers a good example.

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of women in the cognitive structure of the discipline; second, to focus on sex roles and gender inequalities in society; third, to move towards the conceptualisation of gender as a social structure; and fourth, to understand the intrinsic linkages between gender and other structural inequalities. Such 'stages approach' is useful to organise the varied range of writings of feminist scholars, but it is wrong to assume that one stage either supplants or builds upon the former (Rege 2003b: 5). Studies in India suggest that an unproblematic treatment of women's status and role as 'social problems' coexists with sophisticated analysis of the performative aspect of gender (Chaudhuri 2010a; Krishnaraj 2005). It has been argued, therefore, that it would be more productive to conceptualise the changes in terms of different intellectual genres rather than cumulative phases or stages.

This too is not easy, for intellectual genres change and blur as they travel, mostly from the West and into India through messy institutional contexts. An obvious instance is the influence in Indian sociology of the modernisation framework from the 1960s, with its theoretical mix of evolutionism, structural functionalism and acculturation. These theoretical mixes coalesce with the angst that an erstwhile, colonised society generated vis-à-vis the West and its own subsequent take on ideas of Indian tradition, modernity and the West. The virtual industry of studies on role conflict, seen as the sole legitimate object of inquiry for gender studies within Indian sociology in the 1970s and still persisting in quarters, bears influences of a modernisation framework[3] as well as the complex recasting of Indian woman that marked the story of 19th century social reform[4] as well as Indian nationalist writings.[5] The contested but persistent narrative of the decline of joint family and the formation of nuclear family in Indian sociology can be understood likewise (Uberoi 1994).

Another reason for the difficulty in identifying distinct intellectual genres is that feminist transformations have been uneven across not just disciplines, but within themselves, as they are practiced at distinct institutional sites across India's uneven academic landscape (Chaudhuri 2010a; Patel 2011). Any effort to map and assess the intellectual genres of feminist sociologies would have to locate them within concrete institutional contexts, located in different nation states, which, in turn, are placed hierarchically in global

[3] For an early review of this, see Chaudhuri (1982).

[4] The various discriminatory practices against women were widely seen as 'social evils' that social reform sought to get rid of. See Uberoi (1996: Introduction).

[5] It is important to note here that Indian nationalism itself was also a mix of liberal modernism, socialist visions of justice and equity and cultural assertions of tradition and identity (Chaudhuri 1995).

geo-politics of power and knowledge. It is in this context that my location as a teacher in India becomes important, for, perhaps much more significantly than any other aspect, it is this experience, at the intersection of teaching and research, that has afforded me a different and, to my mind, a critical vantage point of how intellectual traditions emerge, travel and settle down in unexpected ways within sociology and women's studies syllabi, or become reigning tropes in research and scholarship (Chaudhuri 2002, 2003). In other words, I am arguing that when one seeks to map and gauge scholarship, one needs to do so not just in terms of texts as pure products of abstract intellectual engagements, but products of messy institutional contexts defined by, among others, universities, the University Grants Commission (UGC) and the Ministry of Human Resources and Development (MHRD), to mention the presence of just some state apparatuses in everyday academia. Contemporary higher education sector in India is also marked by an unprecedented mushrooming of private universities, a prolific developmental sector and myriad non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Many of them are engaged with research on gender and sociology. Further, Indian institutions have a small but significant presence of academics trained in the West, well versed in feminist and postmodern theory, cutting across disciplines of social anthropology, sociology, literary and cultural studies who also brought in a distinct intellectual body of practices and theories into this messy institutional field. Section II seeks therefore to look at questions of location and circulation.

If the unevenness of scholarship both within feminism and within sociology is one difficulty, the other is the lack of agreed-upon indicators by which we measure feminist recasting of sociology. The *first* possible measure is the presence of 'a more visible involvement of feminist scholarship' (John 2003: 266). The *second* could be the extent that studies on gender within sociology helped the women's movement in both understanding and articulating their concerns. For instance, Mary John observes that 'in the wake of the dramatic politicization of dowry in the late 1970s and early 80s, dowry was a subject crying out for sociological attention' (ibid.: 270). Yet, the institution of marriage upon which purportedly dowry rested received 'little attention' (ibid.). This is a contention that I differ from, for few subfields of sociology in India have seen the kind of 'feminist recasting' as has been witnessed in the field of marriage, family and kinship. I return to this point in section III of this article where I focus on specific fields of intersections between feminisms and sociologies. The *third* way that

this interface has been gauged is with regard to other disciplines and their feminist recasting. Notable comparisons have been usually with history, English literature and even economics. Sociology, in this regard, has been seen as falling short of what could have been.[6] This view also needs some rethinking, for the very yardstick on which these assessments are made can be problematic. I return to this matter of yardsticks and contexts in section III and argue that a fourth route could be to draw attention to new areas of research and modes of which may have elided standard measures. I have already flagged studies on kinship, marriage, family and gender, but not the extraordinary work on caste and gender, which cannot be seen as one more field of inquiry but the framing of a new perspective that challenged traditional understandings of caste (Rege 2006). Mention can also be made of sociology of education that many within the field feel has been short charged (Chanana 2002; Nambissan and Rao 2013) and of the unanticipated engagement with question of pedagogy and the challenges of India's transforming classrooms.[7]

I propose, therefore, to attempt a mapping of what feminist interface with sociology looked like from the 1970s through the next four decades. I frame it as a fresh reading of the past with an attention not just to the content of the intersections but the contexts within which they took place. Such a reading, I argue, would be possible by bringing to the fore the question of locations—of production, circulation, reception and citation across national and global academic circuits. I argue that due heed has to be given to the manner in which the new global context impinges upon institutions in India, whether state or market run, whether peopled by scholars trained within the nation or globally. This is a historical context where knowledge, in general, and gender, in particular, have acquired new centrality in policy making. Further, internationalisation of the curriculum, the new buzzword, often conceals hierarchies within the global academia. Even as calls for internationalisation is the order of the day in both North America and Europe, the North still does occupy a privileged position as a centre for knowledge production and dissemination. This, I argue, holds good even as an increasing number of scholars of Indian origin play a leading role

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[6] It may be relevant here to remember sociologist Neera Desai, best known as the founder of India's first Women's Studies Research Unit, who also wrote the first analytical history of Indian women (see Desai 1957, 1995).

[7] The extraordinary work of Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women's Studies Centre calls for special mention here.

within North American universities and bolster the burgeoning field of postcolonial studies within which we in India now learn to see ourselves anew. In other words I argue that the institutional location of academics within nation states (and not so much of national origins) within which sociology and feminisms are being taught and written upon continue to matter. This is so even as ideas and paradigms now flow rapidly across borders and calls for 'provincialising' Europe grow stronger.

A small example may help me illustrate this. Polemically addressing the question 'where can theorists live', Raka Ray contends that 'doing feminist sociology in an increasingly globalized world must include not just the ability to learn from the social institutions and cultures of other parts of the world, but also *the ability to learn from scholars who live and work there'* (Ray 2006: 463, author emphasis). She then takes four examples of work she considers as productive for those who 'study gender within sociology', such as Frantz Fanon, subaltern historians, Veena Das and a few scholars who have worked on nationalism and gender. Most referred to do not 'live and work' 'here'. While in full agreement with the question that the article poses: 'Is the Revolution Missing or are we Looking in the Wrong Places?' and while realising that this is no exhaustive list, the absence of even one feminist scholar from India brought home more sharply than ever the curious ways that locations and circulations of texts work. Many have precisely worked on the themes Ray mentions such as masculinity (Chopra 2003, 2006; Srivastava 2007), marginal group (Nongbri 2011, 2014; Rege 2006), religious power (Bhagwat 2004; Rajan 2004 [1998]; Sarkar 2000) and gender and nationalism (Chaudhuri 2011 [1993]; Uberoi 1996). Ray's other observation that historians and anthropologists in the United States (US) have incorporated the scholars, whom she mentions, into their syllabi and that American sociologists have failed to do so, reaffirms the point I make through this article regarding the persisting salience of national trajectories of disciplines.

This is the global context within which one asks: how are we to understand 'locations', 'disciplines' and 'intersections'? This sociological emphasis on contexts anchors my article and I shall be tempted to return to it to ask whether the term 'postcolonial feminism' adequately captures the decades of rich scholarship that feminists inside and outside sociology in India have produced. The two terms, locations and intersections, flagged in the title anchor this article. Section II with its focus on contexts and travel of concepts serves a dual purpose. First, it facilitates my effort to

map issues and concepts that defined the many intersections of feminisms and sociologies from the 1970s, the decade that saw the beginnings of institutionalised women's studies and feminism within the academia in many parts of the world. Second, it helps to problematise the contexts of production, circulation and reception of intellectual representations in this present historical juncture where intellectual international exchanges are both intensive and far reaching. My article rests on the point that Bourdieu made about 'International exchanges' being 'subject to a certain number of structural factors, which generate misunderstandings' (Bourdieu 1999: 221).

> The first factor is that texts circulate without their context…they don't bring with them the field of production of which they are a product, and the fact that the recipients, who are themselves in a different field of production, re-interprets the texts in accordance with the structure of the field of reception, are facts that generate some formidable misunderstandings and that can have good or bad consequences (ibid.).

II
Locations: Texts, travel and contexts

Location is a term that gained both popularity and urgency in the West, in particular within the US academy in the 1980s. Its significance cuts across disciplinary boundaries but found deepest resonance within anthropology, cultural studies, literature and feminism. The term travelled well, the context did not. I quote from one of Mary John's early writings to highlight the context. Still a graduate student in the US in the 1980s, she alludes to Adrienne Rich's 'Notes Toward a Politics of Locations' to examine the limits of Foucault's' 'enunciative' modalities and models of the 'universal' and 'specific' intellectual. She wonders: '…What might it mean for me—a Third World feminist whose current institutional home is in the first—to take the following commitment seriously?' (John 1996: 11). A little later, drawing from Adrienne Rich she revisits the question, 'What happens to us after we go West?' (ibid.) and whether one could any longer quote Virginia Woolf's statement, 'As a woman I have no country. As a woman I want no country. As a woman my country is the whole world' (Rich cited in John 1996: 11).

Feminists in India invoked the 'country' too but differently. Most often it was invoked in the sense of its people, their poverty and challenges. Vina Mazumdar's remarks in this regard are worth restating to problematise the category of nation. As her personal narrative suggests, 'the independence of the country and of women had become so intertwined as to be identical'. writes that

> Much of my adult life represented elements of struggle. But, what had been an individual woman's effort at 'managing' the demand of professional and family responsibilities, changed into a collective and ideological struggle for rediscovery of the nation, the world, the past, the present and the future—from the perspective of India's hidden and unacknowledged majority, i.e. poor working women in rural and urban areas (Mazumdar 2001: 135).

Mary John astutely remarks that the time when national identity could be claimed easily seems to have gone, especially for feminists. and by affirming a politics of location, she tries to conceive of the beginnings of an 'alternate internationalism for feminist theorists who wish to be equally accountable to unequal places' (John 1996: 11). That is no easy task since locations in nations matter not just as markers of identity but because the nation and state matter in an everyday fashion in our personal and professional lives. In such a context, I am not entirely comfortable with a particular genre of scholarship whereby nation and nationalism are analysed entirely in terms of cultural constructions. The focus appears to have shifted entirely to an analysis of rhetorical tropes, sidestepping specific histories of anti-colonial nationalism[8] as well as the political economy of a world system based on nations. In many such accounts, the sovereignty of the nation is pitted against the autonomy of the woman. If for Vina Mazumdar, it was impossible to separate the two, for others, it was intrinsically an oppositional and exclusionary relationship. If we are to confine ourselves to a discursive analysis of historical material, this dichotomy is most likely tend to be confirmed,

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[8] It may not be irrelevant here to mention that attempts by the Indian government headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in 2016 to impose an essentially undemocratic and exclusionary idea of nationalism have been fiercely resisted, often invoking India's constitutional nationalism that gave recognition to certain core principles of equality, irrespective of caste, creed and race that defined the Indian national movement.

much like the spiritual–material binary of Partha Chatterjee's nationalist resolution of the women's question (Chatterjee 1989). If as sociologists we step outside the discursive arena into the messy world of social life, what we may witness is more complex negotiations and bargains between the two (see Kannabiran 2005).

In the US, the context of the 1980s was different. The increasing presence of diverse 'national' groups, rise of identity politics, redundancy of a felt 'economic determinacy' of Marxism and a focus on sexualities in the US demanded a different kind of intersection of sociologies and feminisms. Stacey observes that Michele Barrett in the 1990s, while ruminating over the title of her 1980 book *Women's Oppression Today*, remarks that the only word in her book's title that she still felt comfortable retaining was 'today', a signal of how profoundly poststructuralist theory had revised her epistemological and political perspectives, and even her disciplinary affiliation (Stacey 2006: 479). Formerly a sociologist, Barrett, who had once served as president of the British Sociological Association, not only had forsaken Marxism, but sociology as well, and has since assumed an appointment in literary and cultural studies (ibid.). Stacey observed that while such a theoretical conversion is certainly more extreme than most, it was emblematic of larger shifts in feminist and critical social theories that have taken place over the past 20 years.

Developing this point further, Stacey who revisited in 2006 the 1985 debate on the missing feminist revolution in sociology (Stacey and Thorne 1985) expressed a legitimate sense of collective achievement that 'feminist theory and knowledge across the disciplines have come a great distance over the past two decades' with 'the salutary impact that such intellectual developments as intersectionality, transnational feminism, queer theory, critical race theory, and the like have had on trans-disciplinary feminist scholarship' (Stacey 2006: 479). Intellectually, these developments worked to de-centre and multiply the concept of gender as a category of analysis within feminism. Institutionally, this reflected in the author's professionally changing location of 'woman's studies' in the 1980s and early 1990s '…"gender studies"…in 1997, and…in 2003, "gender and sexuality studies", which has just "merged with diverse ethnic studies, American studies and metropolitan studies programmes into a brand new interdisciplinary department of social and cultural analysis"' (ibid.).

This trajectory did not replicate itself in India. If we were to see this as a failure of feminist sociology, we would make the common error of using

a measure that is not just context specific, but is perhaps not a measure at all, being just an empirical account of what happened in a specific context.[9] In some strange ways, such a yardstick would evoke the unilinear spirit of modernisation theory, even as its content would be antithetical. For a moment, I would like to return to each of the intellectual developments that Stacey names as significantly contributing to the sense of 'collective achievement'. These are intersectionality, transnational feminism, queer theory and critical race theory. It may help to look at each of these. This matter of intersectional analysis is curious. I have discussed this elsewhere, arguing that a common critique by feminists located in the West (even if of Indian origin) about Indian feminism through the 1970s and 1980s was its focus on the 'other': caste, religion, class, community, peasants instead of speaking about one's self. This was seen as a denial of 'selfhood', a silencing of her 'private' selves, desires, body and sexualities. Twenty years later, this very fact—Indian feminism's persistent engagement with matters of diversity, identity, religion, caste and difference—led to the relabelling of Indian feminists as intersectional analysts (Chaudhuri 2004: Introduction, 2012).

Regarding transnational feminism, a point made often has been that, unlike the West, where it is only in recent decades that engagement with the transnational has occurred, we as an erstwhile colonised society had little choice but to take into account transnational developments (Chaudhuri 2012); the term 'transnational' itself though may be new. However, a colonially mediated modernity in India had perforce led to deep engagement with transnational intellectual trends, evident in both early Indian nationalists and feminists (Chaudhuri 2004). In more recent times, transnational feminism has acquired new forms with decades of institutionalised feminism that has led to adoption of gender rights in key legal instruments of international institutions (IIs). This, I have argued elsewhere, has altered both nationalism and feminism (Chaudhuri 2010b, 2010c, 2014). The point that I seek to highlight here is the difference in both context and content of transnational feminism.

Not all of those working on sexuality in India have embraced the sign of the queer. But there is an increasing and rich body of scholarship on gender and sexuality (Agrawal 1997; Chopra 2006; Kumar 2014a, 2014b;

[9] Significantly, both Mary John's reflections on locations and challenges to feminisms and Kamala Ganesh's review of women studies, with the focus on the household, were written in the mid-1980s. That they have little in common is important to my argument.

Srivastava 2007; Thapan 2009). However, here too a caveat is in order. As Srivastava writes: an 'important impetus for the contemporary focus on sexuality in South Asia … derives from something that is far easier to define and far more devastating in its consequences than scholarly reflection: the rapid and seemingly unstoppable spread of AIDS' (2007: 15)—for such are the curious ways that contexts and texts interweave.

Finally, the intellectual contribution of critical race theory is discussed as follows. Some of the finest scholarship in India emerged from a caste and gender perspective (Chakravarti 2003; Rege 2006). But this cannot be read off as a mirror image of critical race theory, just as identity politics here was no mirror image of identity politics in the West. The contexts were different. India since the 1980s was marked by the growing assertion of dalit and backward class movements, the Mandal Commission recommendations, anti-reservation protests by 'upper castes' and new research on counter publics and its contested relationship to the nation (Rege 2003b). This is also the period marked by dalit interrogation of mainstream social sciences and of sociology in particular. Culture drew greater attention and new modes of inquiry influenced by cultural studies were deployed (Niranjana and Hegde 2003). But the nature of theoretical conversion that Michel Barrett underwent did not happen. What perhaps got missed out was the fact that mainstream sociology in India could be faulted more for its cultural determinacy than economic determinacy. As I reflect elsewhere, the texts did travel from North American academia but the context did not. Infused with postmodern sensibilities and identity politics, they entered right into my own classroom in India, marked by both new economic policies of liberalisation and post Mandal caste politics of the 1990s (Chaudhuri 2003).

III
Feminisms and sociologies: Fields of intersections

I have already stated my discomfort about yardsticks to measure our collective achievements and failures. I have also stated at the very outset of this article that I faced two difficulties in my attempt to map intersections of sociology and feminism. The first challenge was that the body of work that emerged at this intersection has been diverse and disparate. The second challenge was that the stages of research and intellectual orientations did not supplant previous ones, and, like many things Indian, 1940

models co-exist with cutting-edge research of 21st century and intellectual genres acquire new forms as they travel. Both Talcott Parson's sex roles and Judith Butler's impossibility of gender, thus, find their place in the many sociology syllabuses that dot different academic institutions of the country. This process, I argue, is most evident to a teacher in the course of everyday interaction in a classroom. The third challenge stemmed from the fact that there is no agreed-upon criterion from which one can assess the impact of feminism on sociology. Earlier in this article, I had mentioned three possible routes of measuring: the presence of 'a more visible involvement of feminist scholarship' in sociology; the extent that studies on gender within sociology helped the women's movement in both understanding and articulating their concerns (John 2003); and the way that this interface has been gauged in comparison to other disciplines and their feminist recasting.

If we proceed with the yardstick of a visible involvement of feminist scholarship, the study of marriage, family and kinship stands out. This, at one level, can be dismissed as 'natural', given the salience of women in the domestic space. The task of sociology is precisely to problematise the 'natural' and taken-for-granted dimension of women's role in the family and household, and this it did, effectively succeeding in showing that the 'harmony of the family' rested on 'subordination of women' (Ganesh 1985).[10] Importantly, this is not all that these studies did. Here one must recall that Indian sociology for long implied the study of village, caste and family. A distinct feminist caste and gender analysis reopened the study of Indian society in completely new and radical ways. This is not sufficiently recognised when we sit down to measure the recasting of Indian sociology (Rege 2003b). It is, therefore, not surprising that feminist intervention even when confined to the 'traditional' field of marriage, kinship and family offered a fundamental challenge to some basic disciplinary assumptions, a point I shall return to later. It is, therefore, not unexpected that it was feminist sociology that was at the helm of engaging with disciplinary histories and contemporary practices (see Uberoi et al. 2007: Introduction).

I draw from two observations that Mary John made regarding sociology and feminism. One, that in the late 1970s and early 1980s, dowry was a

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[10] Also see Maithreyi Krishnaraj, 'Women's Studies in Academia and Development Discourse', 22nd J.P. Naik Memorial Lecture Series, held at Centre for Women's Development Studies (CWDS), 27 September 2012. Available at www.cwds.ac.in/JPNaik/22JPNaikReport.pdf. Accessed on 5 November 2014.

subject crying out for 'sociological attention' (2003: 270). Yet, the institution of marriage upon which purportedly rested dowry received 'little attention' (ibid.). Two, that even when they did address marriage and dowry, the focus was on its commercial aspects, a subject both safer and easier to explain. On the contrary, I argue that the institution of marriage did receive a great deal of attention and that we need to rethink whether in Indian sociology there was indeed an emphasis on the 'political economic' and 'commerce'. Kamala Ganesh in an early review in 1985 of women's studies on the family writes that 'in the heyday of village studies in anthropology, women were studied mainly in terms of role within the family, kinship system, etc.' and in the 1960s, there was 'a profusion of studies on "working women"— educated and urban—in terms of role conflict (see Sethi 1976) between familial and office situations'. Ganesh critiqued such studies for seeking to 'explain complex Asian reality with narrow western framework' with 'an *implicit assumption that women's economic activity was a function of culture and attitudes*' (author emphasis). Reflecting on the context of the 1970s, she drew attention to how women's studies had turned attention to questions of 'unemployment' and women in the 'unorganized sector' (Ganesh 1985: 683). Turning to the debate between text-based Indological tradition of sociology and a field-based sociology,[11] she critiqued 'ideal-type accounts based on scriptural sources'. Ganesh observes that 'more recent studies focus' on *interlinkages between culture and economy*. There has been a *shift of emphasis from attitudes to economic and political structure* (ibid., author emphasis).

This turn can be read very differently. Mary John, for instance, sees this focus on commercial aspects when dealing with dowry as sociology's failure to address the 'spheres of "culture" and "politics"'. In a strong claim, she argues that 'both feminism and sociology in India share a common legacy, whereby it is much easier to politicize the economic dimensions of an issue, whereas its more directly social and cultural dimensions tend

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[11] This has been a long-standing debate within Indian sociology on the text and the field view. See Beteille (1974). It is relevant to refer to Chibber's contention that

> the traditional, Indological approach…was heavily oriented towards culturalism. This in turn made the field a hospitable ground for the entrance of post-structuralism, which, like mainstream Indology, not only eschews materialist analysis, but is largely hostile to class. [T]he decline of class analysis is now visible in Indian universities too, and this is largely caused by the overwhelming influence that U.S. universities have come to exercise over Indian elite academic culture (Chibber 2009: v–vi).

to be left in the background'[12] (2003: 271–72). The fact of the matter is that sociology in India did not share this legacy. Its legacy lay in structural functionalism, albeit either in its British social anthropological tradition or in its American Parsonian version, and in the amalgam that constituted the modernisation framework where attitudes really did matter. In such a context, the shift from 'attitudes to economic and political structure' was a significant way to break from the 'over socialized' individual of structural functionalism; ever-expanding studies of role conflicts; and cultural determinism towards a more critical understanding of gender (Chaudhuri 1982). Those familiar with the persisting idea of the village (see Jodhka 2012) on the one hand and the family on the other as a 'bounded entity' within sociology and social anthropology will appreciate the leap taken by feminist sociologists to focus on the links between the family and the economy. The attention to the concept of the household has to be seen in this context. It is, therefore, not surprising that Rege, like many sociologists of independent India, trained in the dominant 'objective', 'value-neutral sociology' of Indian institutions (unlike history and economics with a marked influence of Marxism), 'discovered the radical roots of sociology via its feminist critiques' (2003a: 288).

To return to the significance of studying the household, Ganesh emphasises that in Asia, 'the household is seen as the concrete entity in which resources are pooled' and reproduced, 'socialisation, consumption and … much of productive activity is carried on' (Ganesh 1985: 683), and that 'women's most intimate and important experiences are linked to the household, and this in turn varies with class, ethnic factor, caste, religion,

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[12] Significantly, Ganesh and Risseeuw make the same point but from a different vantage point. They remark that feminist scholarship in its earlier phase was more concerned with macro spheres of patriarchy and that its roots were enmeshed in patrilineal kinship needed to be worked out. For instance,

> *But the dynamics of change in intimate social arrangements are not confined to the practical level. Transformations can also take place on a conceptual level.* Resources can be renamed. When land changes from forms of shared property to individual ownership, the conceptual shift can have drastic consequences for participants in that process. The cultural context where, for example, the wife 'traditionally' has consolidated rights of access to her husband's land, who in turn shares the land with his male kin, changes fundamentally when she becomes the wife of a man who has individual rights to land which he can put to commercial use, or even sell (Ganesh and Risseeuw 1993: 2332, author emphasis).

etc.' (ibid.). The latter observation can surely be read as 'intersectional'[13] and 'decentering' as suggested by Crenshaw (1991), although neither term is used. This brings me back to what Meera Kosambi observed in quite another context, finding it difficult to address Ramabai's feminism, in both its incipient and full-fledged forms, 'because concepts which have "local habitation and name" today and which slide spontaneously to the tip of the tongue and pen ("gender construction", "patriarchy", "empowerment", "complicity", "co-option") were couched in different labels a century ago' (2000: 27). The same could be argued here even when the time frame is merely four decades, the context global and the concept 'intersectional'.

In a global context briefly etched in the Introduction, I had noted the considerable influence of North American academia-based postcolonial scholarship. Not surprisingly therefore, it would be easy to be persuaded by Appadurai's claim of a purported retreat of global interest in kinship in anthropology since the mid-1980s (see Appadurai 2004). Contrary to the claim, evidence suggests that the same period since then has seen new, innovative and rich scholarship by feminist sociologists in India on precisely this field. I confine myself here to a quick mention of some of the rich scholarships (Abraham 2014; Dube 2001; Ganesh 1985, 1995; Kaur 2004; Kaur and Palriwala 2014; Palriwala 1994; Palriwala and Uberoi 2008; Uberoi 1994).[14] A comprehensive treatment is not possible here. But these references should help draw attention to the rich body of scholarship and hopefully deter a hasty and, if I may say so, a lazy condemnation of sociology's 'missing revolution'. This propensity, I argue, is intrinsically linked to using borrowed and unquestioned yardsticks to measure disciplines. Further, I flag a couple of points regarding these studies: first, the engagement with colonial history, the role of legal codification on custom and its role in reshaping the 'public' and 'personal'; second, the interface between the domestic and macro structures such as the state and market; and third, the manner in which more recent sociology of kinship drew 'their inspiration eclectically from family studies, gender studies, migration studies and political economy' which proved a vantage

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[13] Intersectional analysis is widely seen as a contribution of feminism to sociology (Dennis 2008).

[14] Significantly, the claim about a decline of interest in kinship appears to be not valid even in the Western context. Anthropologists who attended a 1982 conference on Feminism and Kinship Theory 'stressed the relevance of the analysis of gender for broad areas of anthropological investigation' (Tsing and Yanagisako 1983: 511).

point to explore new directions and engagements (Palriwala and Uberoi 2008: vi). It is, therefore, not surprising that feminist intervention even when confined to the 'traditional' fields of marriage, kinship and family offered a fundamental challenge to some basic disciplinary assumptions.

Here one must recall that the staple objects of inquiry for Indian sociology were, for long, the study of village, caste and family. A distinct feminist, caste and gender analysis reopened the study of Indian society in new ways. This, I repeat, has not been fully acknowledged in the story of Indain sociology (Rege 2003b, 2013). It is here that Rege's seminal work on B.R. Ambedkar's analysis of endogamy and caste stands out, as here she offers a theoretically advanced interpretation of Babasaheb's thinking on the interstices of the caste and feminist questions (Rege 2013). Guru contends that Rege's work assumes significance, especially 'in the context of limited engagement with caste in mainstream feminism'.[15]

If one were asked in what ways did these cumulatively redefine Indian sociology, one could perhaps pose the counter question whether it would be possible today to study its traditional objects of inquiry—caste (Abraham 2014; Chakravarti 2003; Rege 2006), village (Chowdhury 1994; Dube 2001) and family (Uberoi 2006)—without not just gendering them but also problematising questions that bear on intersectional analysis. For that matter, can the 'processes' of sanskritisation, modernisation and Westernisation be taught in a gender-blind fashion, a practice that went unquestioned for decades. I draw here one example from Palriwala and Uberoi (2008) to indicate how feminist sociology fundamentally redefined traditional sociological understanding of core institutions such as marriage and economy. This work challenges the 'routine polarization of economics and modernity versus marriage and tradition' and queries whether a 'meaningful distinction' can be made between 'family migration' and 'labour migration'. But importantly, it recognises the institutional character of marriage, the role of kinship and custom, as well as its role in the reproduction of the community (ibid.: 26). Given that gender as an analytical tool redefined categories, it is, therefore, not surprising that it was feminist sociology that was at the helm of engaging with disciplinary histories and contemporary practices (Uberoi et al. 2007: Introduction). There are two significant points that Palriwala and Uberoi make here: 'probably few of them would care or dare to locate themselves theoretically

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[15] See http://navayana.org/blog/2013/03/01/against-the-madness-of-manu/. Accessed on 14 March 2016.

in kinship studies' and 'the comparative dimension' may pose a further challenge to Euro-ethnocentrism in family studies, and generate new insights in regional kinship studies, while uncovering gender biases in the migration literature (2008: vi). We would be missing the story altogether were we to measure kinship studies in the limited sense of that 'dauntingly arcane sub-field of anthropology' (Palriwala and Uberoi 2008: 24). The discussion so far would make it evident that the study of kinship saw the promise of feminist rethinking of the discipline as its ability to 'transform the apparently known into an area of exciting new inquiry' (Tsing and Yanagisako 1983: 511).

Now, if I were to measure the contribution of such studies to the women's movement or even to public policy, a ready answer would be difficult to find. The success of social science is more difficult to measure because its findings are appropriated by and become constitutive of society. It becomes central to social movements, state policies and, more broadly, public debates.[16] Discussions on sex ratios or female foeticide or of missing women, which are pressing policy issues, tend to be sociologically framed.[17] If I were to measure feminist recasting of sociology in disciplinary competitiveness with English literature and history, it would be like comparing oranges and apples. The impressive postcolonial recasting of English literatures is a story apart (Rajan 2008). Adopting its methods and tools in sociology (or its yardsticks) will not lead us very far, nor would a lament as to why sociology could not produce its own cutting-edge postcolonial theory. Here the matter of locations and circulations, with which this article began, is crucial to understand both legitimacy and visibility of scholarship. It is this invisibility that prompted the exploration here. The significance of economics and history as disciplines for a modern nation state and therefore their presence in public discourse needs no emphasis. Feminist recasting is not the issue here. Or is it, as Nair (2008) suggests, as to why has history remained somewhat impervious to the questions raised by feminist interventions, while other disciplines have felt the imperative of a turn to history in general and feminist historiography in particular?

I would also like to revisit the matter of yardsticks, a point that is central to this article. For instance, feminist scholarship in Indian history, economics

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[16] The intersection of law and sociology calls for special mention (see Baxi 2008, 2014).
[17] Ravinder Kaur's work in this regard is significant (2012, 2014).

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and English literature are unquestioned. However, if one were to look at the syllabi of these disciplines cutting across India, the way Rege (2003a) attempted in sociology in Maharashtra, the findings may not reflect this. The seminal work on ancient Indian history notwithstanding, very few answer papers to a question on the status of women fail to begin with the glorious status of women in ancient India. My reference to classrooms, students, syllabi and answer sheets reflects from my own location as a teacher doing gender (Chaudhuri 2002). In what could not be sheer happenstance, other feminist sociologists, quite independent of each other, have also reflected on doing and teaching gender (Rayaprol 2011; Rege 2003a, 2003b; Uberoi 1989–90). How would one explain this?

In an effort to answer this, I return to questions about specificities of disciplines. An explanation for feminist transformation of anthropology, as against sociology, has been that its epistemological and methodological premises render it more hospitable to feminist approaches. For instance, it has been argued that interpretive disciplines have been more amenable to feminist scholarship. This is because interpretive approaches are more reflexive about the circumstances in which knowledge is developed. In contrast, it has been argued that knowledge in positivist disciplines is phrased in abstract, universal terms. This dichotomous positioning between interpretative and positivist, and qualitative and quantitative has been an ongoing one. In referring to this, my purpose is to indicate that methodological debates have been central to the discipline of sociology and also to return to the point made early in this article, namely, the relationship of sociology and social anthropology in our parts is quite different from North America. What is most relevant here is that both have been essentially reflective, even when the grounds on which they are reflective are different (Oommen 2013; Thapan 1997). Perhaps that is the reason why it was inevitable that feminist sociologists, drawing both from feminism and the contra dominant tradition of sociology of C. Wright Mills (1959) and Peter Berger (1963), found it easy to see sociology as a humanist perspective and did not find the link between the personal problem and public issue so alien. Therefore, first, they had to engage with disciplinary questions and, second, almost compellingly got drawn to questions of education, 'falling standards,' India's transformed classrooms and pedagogy (Chaudhuri 2003: Introduction).

As the examples of Mills and Berger would suggest, there is no agreed-upon understanding of what the orientation of sociology ought to

be. However, one much repeated position in India has been that one has to 'insulate the practice of sociology from the demands of ideology'. In Beteille's words, 'sociology' is 'an empirical and comparative discipline … sociology is an empirical rather than a normative discipline' (2009: 196, author emphasis). In sharp contrast, Rege argues that indeed there is an ideology that marks mainstream sociology and

> …the core of the discipline is sustained through the taken-for-granted ways of perceiving social reality—despite an expansion in the subject matter—often to include the marginalized subjects. The marginalized, be they women, dalits, adivasis or the labouring classes, despite their inclusion in the substantive areas, remain on the *periphery of the cognitive structures of the discipline* (2003b: 17, author emphasis).

Rajni Palriwala makes a similar point stating that 'questions regarding the absence of a gender dimension can be labeled as group and identity claims, rather than as issues of epistemology and methodology' (2010: 321). Epistemological acceptance remains elusive. There have been few systematic critiques of feminist sociology in India, just an occasional disparagement (Gupta 1995), viewed as 'undisciplinary outpourings' by the large number of feminist scholars who responded to the critique (e.g. Chakravarti 1995; Karlekar 1995; Poonacha 1995).

I would, therefore, contend that there was stray ridicule of feminist scholarship but no structured resistance and feminism did redefine central fields of sociology. One of the ways that this has been measured globally is the presence of gender in standard sociology journals and edited books on mainstream sociology. I present examples of three mainstream texts that ought to stand as a good measure about feminist recastings of sociology. The first is a set of volumes edited by Shah et al. (1996), brought out in honour of M.N. Srinivas, of which the second volume is *Women in Indian Society*. Second, the Indian Sociological Society (ISS) celebrated its Golden Jubilee in 2001 and to mark the occasion, it published seven volumes on Themes in Indian Sociology. One of the volumes is Rege's *Sociology of Gender: The Challenges of Feminist Sociological Knowledge* (2003b). The third example is that of a festschrift volume edited by Baviskar and Patel (2010) in honour of A.M. Shah. The theme and title of the last, *Understanding Indian Society: Past and Present*, is clearly not gender. One section does refer to gender relations but what is striking

is that other sections, whether on disciplinary questions or on method, invariably engage with gender. The fact that many of the contributors are women is another story, perhaps one of the many perils of feminification of the academia (Beteille 1995).

IV
Conclusion

There are three points that I would like to make as I draw to a close. First, that what prompted me to write this article was a striking gap between the actual body of scholarship at the intersection of feminisms and sociologies and the widely held view that unlike history and literature, sociology in India has shown little evidence of feminist reworking. Reading Western literature, this narrative appeared a familiar one, prompting me to ask questions about locations, circulation and, critically, citations (Stacey 2006; Strathern 1987; Wharton 2006). It is in this spirit that my long list of references needs to be looked at, for repetition and iteration may be a way forward to unsettle the curious story of Indian sociology and feminisms.

The second point is that were it not for my location in the intersection between teaching and research in the messy and uneven institutional climes of India, I perhaps would not have plodded my path through the many intersections in quite the same fashion.

My final point is that while few can question the productive possibilities of feminist interdisciplinary scholarship, I would like to end by arguing differently—that it may be productive to revisit mainstream sociology to further feminist understandings. In other words, I ask, can we not claim categories and perspectives constituted in a non-gendered fashion and seize them for pushing feminist analysis?

Acknowledgements

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