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## The e-PG Pathshala Sociology Syllabi: Context, Contradictions, Failures and Successes

El programa de estudios de sociología e-PG Pathshala: contexto, contradicciones, fracasos y éxitos

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### ABSTRACT

This article critically assesses the sociology curriculum prepared for an e-learning platform between 2012-2015 called e-PG Pathshala whose objective was to provide a new perspective to post graduate students learning sociology in India. This paper, written by authors who were associated with this project, examines its successes and failures in displacing Eurocentric and narrow nationalist assumptions framing of sociology in India and its substitution with an interdisciplinary approach that uses India as a site for comprehending the global 'social'. It also evaluates its success and failures in terms of the time and context when it was introduced: when India had entered the path towards neoliberalism and a regime change in favour of rightist populist Hindutva governance had occurred. This article discusses the various constraints it faced and the challenges it had to overcome in terms of institutional inertia, red tapeism, budget decreases and in attracting module writers to develop a reflexive and inclusive syllabus. It argues that in spite of these constraints, it was able to create a novel set of syllabi for sociology students which came into use when the universities closed down during Covid times. Today this e-learning space provides the much-needed opportunity to rethink and revise the sociology curriculum and syllabi in India.

**Keywords:** e-PG Pathshala, University Grants Commission, high education, distance learning, sociology syllabi.

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## RESUMEN

Este artículo evalúa críticamente el plan de estudios de sociología preparado para una plataforma de aprendizaje electrónico, entre 2012 y 2015, llamada e-PG Pathshala, cuyo objetivo era brindar una nueva perspectiva a los estudiantes de posgrado en sociología en la India. Este artículo, escrito por autor y autora que estuvieron involucrados en este proyecto, examina sus éxitos y fracasos en el desplazamiento de los limitados enfoques nacionalistas y eurocéntricos que enmarcan la sociología en la India y en su sustitución por un enfoque interdisciplinario que se sitúa en la India para, desde el local, comprender lo “social” global. También evalúa sus éxitos y fracasos en términos del momento y el contexto en que se introdujo: cuando India empezaba su camino hacia el neoliberalismo y se había producido un cambio de régimen a favor del gobierno populista de derecha Hindutva. Este artículo analiza las diversas limitaciones que el programa ha enfrentado y los desafíos que tuvo que superar en términos de inercia institucional, burocracia, disminuciones presupuestarias y para atraer redactores de módulos para desarrollar un programa de estudios reflexivo e inclusivo. Sostenemos que, a pesar de estas limitaciones, el e-PG Pathshala logró crear un conjunto novedoso de planes de estudio para estudiantes de sociología que fue provechoso cuando las universidades cerraron durante la pandemia de Covid-19. Hoy, este espacio de aprendizaje electrónico brinda la tan necesaria oportunidad para repensar y revisar el currículo y los programas de estudios de sociología en la India.

**Palabras clave:** e-PG Pathshala, University Grants Commission, educación superior, educación a distancia, programas de estudios de sociología.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The e-PG Pathshala<sup>2</sup> is an open-access learning project initiated in 2012 that distributes the state of the art knowledge at masters' level in 70 subjects within sciences, social sciences, and humanities in India to teachers and students.<sup>3</sup> Knowledge on each of these subjects is distributed over 15-16 courses, each having 34-35 modules. Initiated in 2011 by the University Grants Commission (UGC),<sup>4</sup> it soon became the flagship of the government's new programme titled *National Mission in Education through ICT* (Department of Higher Education, 2023) after the UGC's standing committee started overseeing this project and made INFLIBNET centre its key technology partner.<sup>5</sup> In e-PG Pathshala the modules and its content are introduced to the learner through audio, video, and written texts all of which are available on INFLIBNET platform.<sup>6</sup> In addition, some courses also have downloadable e-books. Built in into the project was a mode of self-testing, which was thought to develop a reflexive attitude towards internalisation of knowledge.

This project was financially sponsored by the Government of India with the goal that it could reach out to all learners in addition to teachers and students, making learning inclusive and available to people lacking formal

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<sup>1</sup> This is a revised version of a draft presented by Sujata Patel at a conference on curriculum in November 2021 at the Department of Sociology and Social Policy at Lingnan University in Hong Kong. Thanks to all participants and reviewers for comments which helped to revise this draft. The authors would like to thank all course coordinators and co-coordinators whose vision and commitments led to the designing of the e-PG Pathshala courses in Sociology. They are as follows: Anurekha Chari Wagh (University of Hyderabad), Ashima Sood, (Anant University) late Edward Rodrigues (Jawaharlal Nehru University), Biswajit Ghosh (Burdwan University), Dev Pathak (South Asian University), Himanshu Upadhyaya (Azim Premji University), Kamala Ganesh (Retd from University of Mumbai), Manish Thakur (Indian Institute of Management, Kolkatta), N Purendra Prasad (University of Hyderabad), R. Indira (Retd. from University of Mysore), Sherry Sabbarwal (Retd from Panjab University), Surya Prakash (Indian Institute of Technology, Mandi).

<sup>2</sup> *Pathshala* in most Indian languages denotes a school; e- implies electronic based learning and PG means postgraduate. The e-PG Pathshala courses for all 70 subjects are available at the following url: <https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/>

<sup>3</sup> In its first meeting, the Standing Committee decided to build the platform to distribute this knowledge in 35 subjects. Later the number increased to 77. Today the platform has 70 subjects.

<sup>4</sup> University Grants Commission is a national level regulatory body of higher education for public institutions. <https://www.ugc.ac.in/>

<sup>5</sup> INFLIBNET, an inter-university centre established by the UGC, was tasked to help digitalise library resources and soon took over other tasks including the organisation of e-PG Pathshala. Today it hosts the latter on its platform <https://www.inflibnet.ac.in/>

<sup>6</sup> INFLIBNET made a contract with YouTube to make these available worldwide.

education and those who had hearing or sight impairments.<sup>7</sup> Learners needed to have access to internet and motivation to learn and comprehend the world around them. No wonder, the project had an ambitious vision – it not only argued that all Indian citizens can get acquainted with the state of the art in each subject/discipline, and thus educate themselves, but also assumed that knowledge developed in India’s university system was of high order and of comparative merit, and therefore able to attract not only learners in India but also learners across the world. Thus, in addition to access, equality and inclusion, the goal of e-PG Pathshala was to guarantee a distinctive quality in organising curriculum and syllabi; ensure that the references and reading material were included in the courses, and thus readily available, and presented a superior analysis of issues governing the various themes. It was thought e-PG Pathshala would be unique, so that it would set itself apart from existing learning interventions practised within mainstream universities.<sup>8</sup>

However, despite these lofty ambitions, it is important to understand the economic and political context in which the e-PG Pathshala project emerged in India. By 2012, India had already embarked on the path towards neoliberal economic interventions for over a decade.<sup>9</sup> Reformist policies were introduced one by one, in sector after sector over many decades while retaining its inherited public sector-social justice approach fashioned soon after independence in 1947 (Kohli, 2006a, 2006b). Ultimately these neoliberal economic interventions led the country to become integrated by the early 2000s with global and international trade flows via the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). This meant that deregulation of policies promoted businesses to play a role in the growth of various economic sectors and at the same time social justice stakeholders within the regime intervened to ensure that the principles of equity and inclusion to the deprived were not completely hijacked nor diluted. In the field of education, this meant that early reforms encouraged the expansion

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<sup>7</sup> In 2022, the Indian literacy rate – the percentage of people of age 15 and above who can both read and write with understanding a short simple statement about their everyday life – was 77.7 %, with literate males at 84.70% and literate females at 70.30%.

<sup>8</sup> These were some of the discussions in the initial meeting of the Standing Committee with the subject coordinators.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Jenkins has argued that neoliberalism in India was introduced hesitantly in the early 1990s as a behind the scenes “stealth” intervention (Jenkins, 1999, p. 172).

of private universities with the goal to increase enrolment (Chattopadhyay & Sharma, 2019). Consequently, investment by the private sector in education increased, leading to the rise in the share of enrolment in private higher education institutions, which at the end of 2012 was 58.5 percent (GOI, 2012). Efforts were also made to introduce privatisation in public universities through financialization. Although India has always had one of the lowest public spending on higher education, neoliberal reforms have further decreased government's expenditure on higher education from 0.46 percent in 1990-91 to 0.37 percent to 2004-05 (Sarker, 2015, p. 16).<sup>10</sup> This decrease in spending on this sector severely affected quality of public education leading to faculty shortages,<sup>11</sup> ill equipped library resources and declining standards of education. Increasingly, students migrated to private institutions leading many to ask what would become of public education in India.<sup>12</sup>

It is in this context that the e-PG Pathshala project was initiated. Unlike earlier efforts promoted by UGC in curriculum development,<sup>13</sup> the e-PG Pathshala was meant to upgrade teaching and learning in public universities and not meant to impose and standardise the curriculum for each subject. There was flexibility in this approach and an effort to make it bottom-up by giving access to quality information and knowledge existing worldwide in various subjects to both teachers and students and by extension to the public.<sup>14</sup> There was an expectation that with low investment and use of ICT technology, access to global knowledge would increase quality, enrolment and simultaneously help to solve the contradictions structuring India's

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<sup>10</sup> At \$406 per student, it compares unfavourably even with developing countries like Malaysia (\$11,790), China (\$2728), Brazil (\$3986), Indonesia (\$666) and the Philippines (\$625) (Sarker, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> 45 percent of the positions for professors, 51 percent positions for readers (associate professors), and 53 percent positions for lecturers (assistant professors) were vacant in Indian public universities in 2007-08.

<sup>12</sup> Despite this increase in enrolment in private universities, overall enrolment in higher education remained low – around 18 percent in 2012-13 compared to 26% world average (Sarker, 2015, p. 16).

<sup>13</sup> Since the incorporation of the UGC, it has promoted a standardisation of curriculum across the country in all subjects leading colleges and universities to replicate these as they have upgraded their syllabi over time. Sociology curriculum has been upgraded thrice, 1978, 1982 and 2000. e-PG Pathshala for the first time introduced the use of content as additional information and did not make it mandatory.

<sup>14</sup> Though India had the third largest higher education system in the world (after China and the USA) in terms of the absolute number of enrolments (23 million) and the largest number of institutions (35,539 colleges and 700 universities) (GOI, 2012; Sharma, 2014) this was inadequate in terms of its large population.

higher education system, wherein access to education was uneven not only across regions and provinces but also divided in terms of rural-urban, male-female, discriminated and occupational social groups and poor and non-poor populations (Thorat 2006; GOI, 2012). The e-PG Pathshala, it was hoped, would redress these problems by ensuring the introduction of the latest information and analysis in each subject thereby motivating all students and teachers to comprehend the world around them. Consequently, it identified key interlocutors<sup>15</sup> who could network with the widest number of teachers and scholars to build an inclusive syllabus for each subject.<sup>16</sup> Also, it was proposed that every two-three year the courses would be upgraded and that these would be translated into some of India's important official languages.<sup>17</sup> At a later stage, it was expected that, with further reforms in higher education, these courses would become credit courses and teachers would be appointed for online consultations.

However, many of the ambitions of this project were not realised, with coordinators asked to complete the project<sup>18</sup> in a year or maximum two, after a regime change took place in May 2014. This change introduced a rightist Hindutva<sup>19</sup> oriented government critical of liberal and left social science<sup>20</sup> perspectives. This change also led<sup>21</sup> to a decrease in budgets (e.g., workshops budgets<sup>22</sup> were slashed and so was the support for budgets for course upgradation and translations) and a top-down approach of decision-

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<sup>15</sup> One of the authors of this paper, Sujata Patel, was first appointed as national coordinator for social sciences and subject coordinator for sociology. Over time, the project dispensed with the status of national coordinators.

<sup>16</sup> The initial workshop for sociology included about 20 scholars who deliberated on the courses to be included and the nature of its content.

<sup>17</sup> In 2008 India had 22 official languages.

<sup>18</sup> It ended formally in September 2018 after it was audited.

<sup>19</sup> Hindutva is a form of Hindu nationalism and adheres to a belief in the cultural hegemony of a Hindu homogenized majority.

<sup>20</sup> On the impact of BJP's policies on higher education on social sciences see, Jayati Ghosh (2020); regarding its impact on science, see Pitambar Kaushik (2020).

<sup>21</sup> In May 2014 the Bhartiya Janata Party led government came to power with an agenda to make its educational system oriented to Hindutva, an ideology that advocates for Hindu supremacy and seeks to transform India's secular state, into an ethno-religious nation known as the Hindu. They immediately demanded an end to this project, but, as part of the funding was distributed, the entire project needed to be completed before it was audited. It was in this situation that we completed this project.

<sup>22</sup> Sociology could only have one workshop, in September 2012.

making was advocated.<sup>23</sup> Standing committee members were replaced; new subjects aligned to the Hindutva project were introduced.<sup>24</sup> However, despite these fundamental changes, the project remains on the INFLIBNET website and has become an attractive source for learning today. It has received 17,184,558<sup>25</sup> hits since 19 March 2014 and, in a recent interview, an INFLIBNET representative stated that the average hit is 30,000 per day.<sup>26</sup>

This paper assesses the content of the syllabi introduced in the subject of sociology. It argues the e-PG Pathshala sociology syllabus attempts to make an intellectual break from the syllabi framed in other universities. It used the methods employed by scholars across the globe who, in the light of the breakdown of positivist methodology, postulated new ways to think of the discipline. The intent of sociology courses in e-PG Pathshala was to enlarge the domain of the subject from its narrow methodological nationalist perspective (Patel, 2017), assess the historical origins of the field, engage with national inequalities and exclusions, introduce contributions made by scholars from other cognate fields while assessing global trends in the discipline. This paper examines how successful these attempts were for the courses in Sociology for e-PG Pathshala.

In the next section, we discuss the way sociological language developed in India and, in the third section, we discuss the content of the courses and modules introduced within sociology to indicate the departures that were made in the syllabi of e-PG Pathshala. In the last section we discuss the difficulties that we faced and what could not be done.

## Sociology in India, its teaching, and its curriculum

Sociology had a hesitant beginning as a discipline and a field in India. The first department of sociology was inaugurated at Bombay (Mumbai) University in 1919. During the headship of G. S. Ghurye, sociological analysis used the method of Indology, an analysis of Sanskrit texts, to

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<sup>23</sup> On neoliberal reforms and rightist interventions in the educational system, see Lall and Anand, 2022.

<sup>24</sup> Such as *Jyotishganit* (Mathematical astrology).

<sup>25</sup> As of 2nd February 2023.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Abhishek Kumar, who was made in-charge of the project by INFLIBNET. Given that the project is over, no effort has been made to classify which subjects are being accessed the most.

comprehend Indian society. During this period sociology and anthropology including physical anthropology were considered one subject. As the discipline grew after independence, there was a break from its earlier orientation as physical anthropology separated itself out from anthropology, and sociology was redefined as social anthropology with ethnography as its main methodological tool for research (Patel, 2010, 2011, 2017, 2021; Uberoi, Sundar & Deshpande, 2008). To this, was added structural functionalist thought and modernization theories which were to be used to assess and understand social change. In these circumstances, the focus of the teaching courses was an assessment of Indian social structure defined as the study of three institutions – family and kinship, caste and (Hindu) religion – and an assessment of social change within these. Also, there was an emphasis on the sociological implications of development and planning, an evaluation of which being the main concern of the nation-state. In addition, most universities and colleges started teaching basic courses in theory – classical and advanced (later called contemporary) – borrowed almost completely from textbooks published in the UK and USA (Patel, 2011). Within this general pattern, some differences remained but most often these were negligible.<sup>27</sup>

The late 1960s and early 1970s were critical years in the expansion of higher education and in the teaching of the discipline in India. With the Indian state investing in higher education the university became the main (and only) site for organizing the practices of the discipline. If before independence there were only three main universities (Bombay, Calcutta, and Lucknow) that taught sociology and/or anthropology, with Poona, Mysore, and Hyderabad housing small centres of sociology and anthropology, by 1977 this number had expanded to fifty. These universities departments were able to enrol 6,548 master's level students and 415 doctoral students (Patel, 2011). By 2000, the numbers had galloped upwards with the

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<sup>27</sup> A survey conducted by the UGC Curriculum Committee and published in their 2001 report indicated that between 40-49 Postgraduate Departments were teaching the following three subjects: Sociological Theory, Methods of Social research and Sociology of Development; between 30-39 departments were teaching Urban Sociology, Rural Sociology, Political Sociology, Industrial Society, Population and Society, and Society in India; between 20-29 departments were teaching Social Anthropology and Social Statistics; between 10-19 departments were teaching, Sociology of Religion, Sociology of Mass Communication, Sociology of Education, Social Psychology, General Sociology and Dissertation; and between 1-9 departments were teaching Sociology of Literature, Sociology of Law, Indian Diaspora, Sociology of Profession and Sociology of Science.



expansion of undergraduate teaching. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has recorded that nearly 50 per cent of the 200 universities taught sociology. Students graduating from these universities are nearly 100,000, postgraduates almost 6,000 and doctoral students number approximately 200 in sociology every year (GOI, 2001).<sup>28</sup>

The mass influx into higher education at the master's level courses and more particularly in undergraduate courses led many scholars and teachers to raise red flags. As early as in 1982, in their report to the UGC, the curriculum committee stated: "the quality of teaching being required leaves much to be desired" (GOI, 1982, p. 5). This issue came to the fore in the discussion in the journal *Economic and Political Weekly*, which ran a series of articles on the state of sociological research in India, known in shorthand as the "crisis of sociology debate". This debate asked whether the crisis was related to the negative consequences of the sudden expansion of higher education and the bureaucratisation of the academy or was it related to the history of the discipline and its identity with colonial discourses. It further asked: why was the average student ignorant of the discipline's basic texts, its seminal theses, the theories of the specialized areas in which they are doing research and caught up in generalities and over dependence on questionnaire as a method. Why was sociological research primarily descriptive and mainly empiricist? (Patel, 2010). Since then, this debate has taken place in other journals<sup>29</sup> and the discussions have revolved around the academia and its institutions, the nature of teaching, decrease in human and physical resources, availability of quality material in vernacular languages, while some others argue that it is a combination of all these (Patel, 2010). Today, to these attributes is added the issue of decreasing academic freedom consequent on the growth of rightist Hindutva politics (Sundar & Fazili, 2020).

These discussions were being held in a context when nationalist social sciences were in free fall<sup>30</sup> facing a crisis of legitimacy as young people

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<sup>28</sup> A more detailed history is available in Patel, 2011.

<sup>29</sup> See "Situating Sociology", the theme issue in the journal *Seminar* (Deshpande, Sundar & Uberoi, 2000).

<sup>30</sup> The Subaltern Studies volumes had started being published from 1982. These studies questioned nationalist historiography, while women's studies had queried the narrow conceptions of sociology on gender and the *Dalit* movement had interrogated sociology's narrow upper-caste focus. See footnote No 33

inspired by social movements from below demanded a place and a space in these academic institutions. These movements emerged to provide a critique of the patriarchal upper caste and class, Hindu majoritarian oriented understanding of the nation and its ideological apparatuses, such as the academia, the economy, and the state. With the growth of political movements by women, tribes, lower castes and by ethnic groups in addition to regional movements of self-determination, sub-nationalism and insurgencies in Kashmir and the Northeast of India, a new language of rights questioned the conception of passive citizenship being articulated by the nation-state (Shah, 1990). Such criticism brought back the debate on colonialism, through the concept of internal colonialism, and argued for a need to re-constitute a new way to comprehend the 'social' in India and in South Asia. Confrontations and conflicts together with violence between religious and sectarian groups became the new normal, with the state using its repressive apparatus with full force. While these debates were going on and groups were jostling to redefine the content of nationhood and citizenship, and before these deliberations could lead to some fruition, the Indian nation-state introduced, in the 90s, neoliberal reforms and, by 2014, a Hindu majoritarian resolution to this political crisis.

Since the turn of the century the field of education has been in turmoil. There has been an increase of private education, which is expanding at a geometric rate with little to no regulation, while public universities face a crisis dealing with financial, physical, and human resources shortfall. In this situation, some colleges and universities started using the 2001 curriculum formulated by the UGC as a standard. This adoption brought about some uniformity in the curriculum of public universities and for most of the respective disciplines across the country.<sup>31</sup> It is in this context that E-PG Pathshala project in sociology was initiated. Those syllabi are now being revised with the adoption by the government of the National Education Policy. The e-PG Pathshala courses became the only means of learning during Covid-19 pandemic, when universities were closed.

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<sup>31</sup> The minutes can be found at <https://ugc.ac.in/oldpdf/modelcurriculum/law.pdf>

## The e-PG Pathshala Project: sociology design and syllabi

In the first meeting of the coordinators<sup>32</sup> there was a recognition that we had an opportunity to introduce new ideas and new reading material to comprehend India's changing unequal structure and the aspirations of various groups, placing these within the debates that has seized global sociology in the late 1990s. Scholars felt that it was imperative that the curriculum reflected the new voices that had emerged in the country and through which new perspectives had been developed. These perspectives criticized the state-led development process for its narrow formulations. It was contended that new movements among women, tribal and indigenous groups and by the *Dalit*<sup>33</sup> had subverted and overturned mainstream sociology and had redefined the 'social' till then conceptualized in upper caste and class terms. Sociological scholarship in India, it was felt, had also elided the question of comparison and needed to assess comparatively the transition and transformation process being inaugurated in various parts of the global South. In addition, it was felt that the rich contributions by Marxist scholarship in India had to be integrated within the modules to introduce the students to an alternative interdisciplinary perspective.

The first meeting brought together a group of 25 sociologists. In this meeting it was decided that the following courses should be introduced: 1) Classical Sociological Theory, 2) Contemporary Social Theory, 3) Methodology of Research in Sociology, 4) Sociology of India, 5) Development, Globalisation and Society, 6) Agrarian Relations and Social Structure in India, 7) Sociology of Urban Transformation, 8) Sociology of Health, 9) Ecology and Society, 10) Sociology of Gender, 11) Economy and Society,<sup>34</sup> 12) Religion and Society, 13) Education and Society, 14) Social Movements, and 15) Political Sociology<sup>35</sup>. However, due to changes in the e-PG Pathshala structure, some scholars opted out as they did not want to associate with the new regime; the list reduced to ten. Consequently, new scholars were

<sup>32</sup> This was before the new regime was elected.

<sup>33</sup> *Dalits* means oppressed. This name has been adopted by the ex-untouchable groups in India.

<sup>34</sup> As the coordinator of Economy and Society could not complete the task, this course was substituted with the course titled, Sociology of Diaspora.

<sup>35</sup> Prepared only partially, due to illness, by late Edward Rodrigues from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, who later passed away. It was completed by Vishal Jadhav.

contacted and, ultimately, we had 15 coordinators. After a year or so, some others dropped out<sup>36</sup> due to the changing pedagogic principles on which the courses were consensually constructed.

While deciding which courses and how these should be designed, the course coordinators in their first meeting had insisted that a critical historical perspective should be introduced in each of the courses. This, they contended, would help reframing the courses in contemporary terms. This led to a discussion on rethinking the titles of the courses. For instance, there was a discussion on the title “Rural sociology”, a paper being taught even today at many universities in India, which needed to be renamed (it was changed to Agrarian Relations and Social Structure in India) or on the title “Sociology of Religion” steeped in western language, which was renamed as Religion and Society. Other questions were also put on the table, such as: Shall we float papers such as Family and Kinship or Industrial Sociology or Sociology of Caste and Tribe? If so, what would be its critical angle? A consensus was reached that courses should interrogate the dominant/hegemonic assumptions within contemporary research and teaching and substitute these with the subaltern perspectives. Sociology should include voices from various social locations. Given the way sociology is received and disseminated in the Indian public sphere, it was imperative to design a critical and reflexive curriculum that, in turn, would circumvent parochial nationalist narratives and embedded colonial imaginings of the discipline. Simultaneously, it was contended that there was an effort to present a global assessment of issues and themes, which would include diverse perspectives from various regions of the world.

Who would be the contributors to write up these modules? The next step was the selection of module writers – this decision was left to course coordinators. As each of the fifteen courses contained 34 to 35 modules, it meant that each course needed several module writers whose work would have to be constantly coordinated – a difficult task given the excessive teaching load for teachers. However, course coordinators were requested to ensure that module writers represented the diversity that constitutes India’s social landscape. Sociology e-PG Pathshala was initially able to

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<sup>36</sup> In its earlier phase, the project did not have audio and video sections. Most scholars were hesitant to engage with these technologies.

identify almost 300 content writers who were willing to participate in the designing and writing up of the modules for these 15 courses. This included a range of doctoral scholars, research scholars and teachers who volunteered to work on the project. They were trained at different universities and had disparate institutional histories, worked with teachers with varied theoretical leanings and, more importantly, their own social locations constituted their comprehension of the 'social'. A large section of the content writers comprised young teachers and scholars in the age group of 25 to 40, most of them unemployed given the demand being more than supply of jobs. The Standing Committee was able to pressure the UGC to recognize this work as part of teaching and this incentivised their involvement. Despite this, there were many dropouts from the module writers list. At the end, 90 scholars and teachers took up the task of writing the modules of various courses.

## How much did the sociology courses change? A self-criticism<sup>37</sup>

Given that there were no budgets to bring course coordinators and module writers at a site<sup>38</sup> the courses came to be designed autonomously with each course coordinator emphasizing her/his focus. However, as course coordinators read modules written earlier and engaged with the broad orientation outlined above, the designs that they had in mind changed.

Below we evaluate the courses introduced and assess how much they departed from earlier perspectives built-into standard UGC model syllabi. We have classified our evaluation into two groups: courses that present new perspectives; and b) courses where there was partial introduction of new perspectives. The table below presents course classification in the two columns.

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<sup>37</sup> Readers can check the courses and modules on <https://epgp.inflibnet.ac.in/>

<sup>38</sup> Zoom or Google Meet had not become popular at that time.

Table 1. Courses and their syllabi and the degree of changes effected

<b>A. Courses with new perspectives</b>	<b>B. Partial introduction of new perspectives</b>
Classical Sociological Theory	Methodology of Research in Sociology
Contemporary Social Theory	Education and Society
Sociology of India	Ecology and Society
Development, Globalisation and Society	
Political Sociology	
Religion and Society	
Agrarian Relations and Social Structure in India	
Sociology of Urban Transformation	
Social Movements	
Sociology of Gender	
Sociology of Health	
Sociology of the Indian Diaspora	

## Courses with new perspectives

### Classical Sociological Theory

In the course on classical sociology the syllabus presented alternate ways of studying the origin of sociology, which is absent from many of the past and present syllabi in most universities. This course begins with precursors of modern European sociology and introduces the sociology of Ibn Khaldun. The course coordinator also included a module on Harriet Martineau which is not taught in Indian universities. A module titled “Classics, canons and founders? A view from the North and the South” opened queries on Eurocentrism. A discussion on the Gulbenkian Commission Report was also covered in this module.

An attempt was also made to interject this course with feminist queries. A module on the feminist critique of classical sociological thought and its methodologies was presented. A discussion on Marx introduced the debates inaugurated by Indian Marxists and their assessment of the colonial question in Marx and their critique of Marx’s understanding of class, and its lack of applicability in the Indian context. A module was dedicated to the debate in India on workers in unorganized and informal sector given that these workers number between 86% to 92% of the total working population. The embeddedness of caste with class and existence of the semi-feudalism and

its articulation within capitalism – issues of debate within Indian Marxist scholarship – were deliberated.

The course includes Marxist theorizations from Latin America and brings into discussion the conversation between the former and Indian Marxism. There were modules on Jose Carlos Mariátegui and on Frantz Fanon, together with the introduction to his book *Black skin, White masks*. An attempt was made in the module on Fanon to discuss the parallels between caste and race.

Just as in the case of a discussion on Marx, Weber and Durkheim have been introduced in terms of their Indian context. The module on Durkheim highlights how his theory has been used to examine farmer suicides in India, while the one on Weber examines the subject matter on Jain Marwari business communities and asks whether the thesis on protestant ethic can be applied in their case. The course questioned and critiqued the western sociological canons pointing out the limitations of these theorisations.

## Contemporary Social Theory

In the course Contemporary Social Theory there has been a significant effort to introduce global discourses, including reflections on postcolonial, decolonial and other anticolonial theories. The course outline begins with an introductory module that distinguishes sociological theory of early to mid-20th century from social theory enunciated in the post 70s.

A module on Žižek discusses in detail his arguments on class, culture and power. Bourdieu's ideas on habitus, logic of practice and forms of capital are discussed in another module. The latter examines reproduction of class through cultural and social capital and its relation to the political economy at large. This, according to the module writer, facilitates comprehension of everyday life and links it to a broader understanding of capital flows and global cultural networks. It also compares Bourdieu's ideas with that of Weber and Marx and provides its contemporaneous context.

One of the modules in this course asks: what is modernity and how do we define reflexivity? There is a discussion on Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck's views on modernity. Another module discusses liquid modernity – Zygmunt Bauman's theorisation on changing sociabilities and social relations. Shmuel Eisenstadt's theory of multiple modernities is discussed,

as that of Goran Therborn's on entangled modernities. These modules allow for questioning simple linearities and unproblematized notions of history. The module on "Entangled Modernities and Sequential Theories" also introduces the work of Indian political theorist, Sudipta Kaviraj.

This paper also introduces the work on academic dependency and the notions of autonomous sociology and captive mind discussed by Syed Hussein Alatas, the concept of endogenous knowledge of Paulin Hountondji, and contrasts them with that of indigenous sociology of Akinsola Akiwowo and D.P Mukherjee. There is a module on Eurocentrism that includes an assessment of Samir Amin and Immanuel Wallerstein's contributions to the concept and discussions on Edward Said's Orientalism, on Southern Theory by Raewyn Connell, coloniality of power by Anibal Quijano and an assessment of the critique made by Arif Dirlik on postcolonial thought. These modules provide a synoptic view on postcolonial and decolonial theorisations being discussed today in global social theory.

## Sociology of India

In the course titled Sociology of India the course coordinator was able to set the context and histories through which sociology as a discipline grew in India and show how it was introduced in the country at various universities. The module "Disciplinary Histories and the Discipline at University Departments" interconnects with other modules to discuss the relationship between colonialism, anthropology, and sociology. This introduction is followed by a module that debates the hegemonic construction and methodologies defining sociabilities and social structures of Indian society. It questions the embedded epistemic and ontological categories located in upper caste-class, Hindu and patriarchal imaginings that have organized contemporary sociology.

In the module, titled, "Contesting voices from the margins: challenge of *dalit*, women and Muslim voices to sociology", there is an attempt to document the resistance of mainstream sociology through social movements and a narration of how this struggle continues to date. The module "Sociology from the regional margins" highlights the issues regarding the spatial diversities and how this aspect impacts distinct life worlds. There is



a discussion on how linguistic identity is politically mobilized in southern India. In addition to language identity, one module discusses ethnic identities and their assertions in the case of the ‘tribes’, called *Adivasis* in India. An attempt is made to relate it to capitalist exploitation which in turn is interlinked with Eurocentric ideas of modernization.

The module “Nation, nationality and nation building in India” raises queries regarding the nationalist principle of ‘unity in diversity’ and explores the way education and media reframe and impose this theme. The module “Family and household” discusses how feminists in India distinguish between the two. Another module explores intersections between caste, class, gender, religion, urban, rural in popular life worlds. Two modules discuss the interrelatedness of caste and class in India and debate the recent theories regarding caste and class in the Indian context. A module on affirmative action and the Indian reservation system (quotas) debates social justice issues in its implementation. The last four modules in this course assess contested ideas on how to comprehend modernity in India in this context.

### Development, globalisation and society

The course coordinator who designed “Development, Globalisation and Society” was able to combine two themes – development and globalization – which in sociology syllabi in India have been floated as two separate courses. This course covers the mainstream critique of the Eurocentric hegemonic ideas on development and globalization. It departs from the standard syllabus by making a critique of the contested character of globalization and assesses it in the context of neoliberal interventions that promote a new vision for the interface between state, market and society. The effects of globalization on class reconfiguration, urbanization and urbanism have been assessed in a couple of modules. The interrelated theme of globalization, caste and emerging inequalities have been presented in the Indian context.

Two modules discuss globalization in terms of its impact on social security and highlight its uneven effects in the country. There is a deliberation on the implications on various vulnerable groups of the State’s withdrawal from its objective of social welfare to the advantage of market logic. Related to this is a discussion on the politics of “microcredit and financing in the global

South” and an analysis on the World Bank discourse on poverty alleviation through microcredit. A critical appraisal of the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in market driven poverty is assessed.

Another important theme is the rise of religious nationalism in the context of globalization. Together with the modules “Globalization and culture” and “Religious resurgence” the course coordinator has highlighted the intersections between media and technology, popular culture and globalization. The polarization of identities and the rise of nationalist ideologies, sectarian politics and violence have been covered in the various modules.

The course introduces the students to contemporary issues of development and globalization in the Indian context. It also highlights themes such as displacement and forced migration, tribal assertions, class and caste inequalities. Ecological degradation through externalization of costs and exploitation of cheap labour and child labour in the global South has also been stressed. The role of the state and market in effecting changes in agrarian relations in India and the recent spate of farmer suicides has been interrogated. The course also examines the various civil society interventions and social movements in recent times and highlights their limitations in challenging the forces of globalisation.

### Political Sociology

In the course titled Political Sociology, the course coordinator examines the global scholarship on state-society relationships and relates these discussions to state-society relationships in India. This course diverges significantly from the standard syllabus on political sociology taught in most Indian universities on several grounds and replaces it with a discussion on liberal and Marxist political theory.

The course initiates the discussion by theorizing the Indian state and explores the role that colonial ethnography and anthropology played in constructing the nation-state. It examines the role of colonial governmentality in reproducing social identities and sociabilities such as caste, tribe, religion, region, language, race and gender – this, it argues, influenced post independent state-society relationships. This course assesses the rise of religious nationalism in post independent India and how the idea of Hindu

majoritarianism found legitimation in the political domain. It examines the patron-client relationship in the context of rent-seeking and relates it to the way caste politics reproduces political power.

The course explores the interplay of power and interest between landed castes, middle class bureaucrats and the capitalists. It asks: how does the state perpetuate inequalities even when it claims equal citizenship rights for all? How does the state co-opt various interest groups while still protecting the capitalist interests in the country? The course, through its theme-based description, presents the way state and society interface power, authority, inequalities, and exclusions. The case studies on civil society movements in India – peasant, women’s, tribal and *dalit*, religious, linguistic and regional self-determination movements – highlight the contradictory role of welfarism in the context of the capitalist nature of the Indian state.

## Religion and Society

This course provides new insights into popular religiosities in India and argues that religiosities are part of everyday lives of the Indian population and cannot be objectified as it has been done in the West, which has a tradition of separating religiosities from secular cultures. The course replaces a textual Indological perspective with a popular culture perspective. For instance, the module “Mystics, godmen and the ascetic tradition” examines contemporary forms of belief and religiosities and how they create social networks and patronage. The module on pilgrimages, festivals and commodification of religion explores the relationship between faith, media, and capital. It also discusses the growth of the religious nationalist movement which led to the destruction of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya, as an example of how majoritarianism has become a state ideology. The modules on caste in Hinduism and caste in other religions points toward the pan-Asian nature of caste. A few modules deliberate on the interplay between caste and religion and how they act as corollaries in some instances and remain opposed at other times. The module titled “Televangelism” introduces the students to the processes of cultural globalization and the role of the media in propagating popular religiosity. Themes such as sectarianism and religious intolerance have

been discussed through case studies. Examples of syncretism, pluralism and secularism have also been presented in this course. Theorisations of the relationship between the market and religiosity, state and religion in India have been presented in this course. The underbelly of Godmen and their empires is also highlighted in some of the modules, and they also discuss the intricate relationship between the political elite, business interests and popular religiosity.

### Agrarian relations and social structure in India

This course locates the discussion on agrarian relations in terms of a critique on ruralities – a construct that emerged during colonialism and constituted the rural-urban binary. It goes on to problematize this issue and incorporates various positions from the global South to question this hegemonic representation. Village studies, it argues, is a methodological intervention in data collection to legitimize this idea. The developmental state, it suggests, continued to collate data through ethnographic studies based on this notion of exclusive rurality. The course suggests that Marxist theory challenges this binary and through this intervention it debunks the exclusive ontological categories such as caste and tribe in agriculture.

Recent themes affecting the agrarian structure in India such as contract farming and corporate farming have been discussed in the module “New issues in agrarian studies: contract farming, non-agricultural uses of land and land acquisition”. The legislations through which the Indian state is converting green zones into commercial spaces is highlighted through some case studies. The emergence of townships and special economic zones and the shrinking of agricultural land has been deliberated. The modules “Understanding contemporary ruralities” highlight the role of globalization and the inroads the markets have made in reshaping and reimagining the rural. The impact of media and popular culture in depicting these changes have also been discussed at length.

There is also a module on the history of Maoist movements in India and the state’s repressive interventions and as well a discussion on the police state in India giving examples of excessive use of force to suppress freedom of speech and collective action.

## Sociology of urban transformations

In this course the course coordinators and module writers have highlighted various aspects of urbanization and urbanism with illustrations from India. After introducing the concept and various theorisations of urban to the students, the course introduces students to the interface between state and the market in creating urban spaces. The politics of urban development and urban planning in India is examined from the colonial to the post-independent period. The role of global capital in shaping city spaces, architecture, infrastructure, modes of transportation and city aesthetics is critically examined. Urban citizenship and the role of civil society movements in enlarging public spaces are also discussed. The role of the middle class in claiming urban commons and public spaces is illustrated through case studies. Middle class aspirations and its representation in films and media is deliberated. The role of digitalism and its control by the state provides is another interesting theme of contemporary relevance and impacts urban citizenship. The role of globalization and formation of global cities is illustrated with case studies and provides an insight into the interplay between global capital and the Indian state.

This course has relied on interdisciplinary methodologies and theorisations in examining the urban. It borrows from history, political science, geography, economics, anthropology, and literature/film studies to present a dense argument of how the urban is diverse and heterogeneous and cannot be captured through simplistic binaries as urban versus rural. It presents a vivid picture of the dialectics between caste, class, language, gender, ethnicities and cultural practices together with the interface between state and the market. Globalisation and its impact on cities and people are brought out through everyday lived practices. Contemporary redrawing of urban spatiality through introduction of settlements such as ‘gated communities’ and ‘townships’ are also highlighted in this course.

## Social movements

In the course on social movements, new social movements—environmental, tribal, new religious, LGBTQ and queer, and farmer movements – have been debated. This provides for a comparative frame to comprehend global,

national, and local based social movements, encouraging the students to relate the global with the local.

The module “Anti-globalization movements: the World Social Forum, Anti-WTO and Occupy Movement” initiates discussions regarding hegemonic knowledge constructions of global North and on how alternate discourses on globalization have emerged in the global South. The module “Civil Society, Academia and Social Movement” poses questions on bridging common pathways for global solidarities’ interests. The module “Ethnic movements in India” presents case studies that explicate the interplay between region, ethnicity, and self-deterministic social movements.

Recent mobilisations around construction of large dams leading to displacement of tribal/indigenous people and its effects on their livelihood are also discussed through various illustrations. Farmer suicides and farmer mobilisations have also been highlighted through various case studies.

The module “Cultural forms, techniques, strategies and social movements” deliberates on new strategies and sites of mobilisations. This module discusses the various ways in which civil societies groups from distinct geographical locations in the world use various platforms such as social media, popular media, street campaigning and other methods to outreach.

In the module “Youth unrest and student movement in India” there is a discussion through case studies on the mobilisation of the students and youth on issues related to employment and livelihoods and to their use of social media. The role of the state in suppressing the right to freedom of speech and of assembly has also been highlighted through various case studies.

## Sociology of gender

In the course Sociology of gender, themes such as engendering citizenship, masculinities and feminities, queer feminism, gender and contesting spaces are included. The relationship between caste-class and gender and its theorisations is brought out through illustrations from various social locations and geographies from India. The relationship between religion and gender is discussed and contemporary issues such as Uniform Civil Code, the Hindu Marriage Act, inter-religious marriages are debated in terms of how gender is imbricated in them.

The module “Constructing normative sexualities: homosexuality/heterosexuality” attempts to capture the recent interventions within Indian courts, which decriminalize homosexuality in India. It questions the colonial construction of these categories and relates it to its governmentality. Recent gay and lesbian movements in India are documented, leading to a discussion on the essentialization of binaries.

The role of the media in constructing hegemonic notions of masculinity and femininity have been discussed through illustrations from the Indian context. The relationship between gender and class and caste interests and its representations and reproduction through films is highlighted. The vigilantism of right-wing groups and its assault on women’s sexuality in private and public spaces is another theme that is deliberated in a module. There is a discussion on how religion and culture, customs and patriarchal practices shrink spaces and curtail women’s freedom. Institutionalized patriarchy and its reproduction through various practices and normalized behaviour are also deconstructed through illustrations from the Indian context.

The role of the state in propagation of hegemonic ideologies regarding sexualities and patriarchy have been documented through a case study in the module “A Bird’s eye view: education and girl child in India with special reference to elementary education”. The practices of dowry and domestic violence, how and why they are normalized in Indian society and their interplay with caste, class and religion are presented in another module. The Women’s Movement finds space in two modules.

The effects of liberalization and privatization have been discussed within themes of gender and livelihoods. The reorganization of workspaces and security of women have been highlighted, as also the intersectionality of caste, class, religion, state, and civil society.

In another module, “Violence at the public spaces and workplace (rape, sexual harassment, street sexual abuse)”, the course coordinator has sensitized the students to practices of normalized behaviour in Indian society. Communal/religious riots and violence against women and children and the role of the media and the state in protecting patriarchal interests is a continuing story line in this course.

## Sociology of health

The course on sociology of health introduces contemporary debates on biopolitics illustrated through a few case studies. Newer technologies and discourses that produce docile bodies and control sexuality have been discussed through the works of Mary Douglas, Foucault and Agamben. This module provides for a historical overview of how modern medicine and illness are intrinsically related to the notions of mind and body. The module “Theoretical perspectives on sociology of health: debating biology” examines five important themes. The first is “Theorizing biology” which questions biological and social relations beyond mere constructionism. The second “Structuring biology” highlights the interplay between biological and social factors, thus patterning health and illness, and relates it to factors such as class and ethnicity. The third “Embodying biology” incorporates discourses that highlight the interplay between the biological givens and social factors in a series of corporeal agendas and health matters. The fourth, “Technologizing / medicalizing biology”, emphasizes the relation between biology, science, and technology within and beyond medicine. The fifth “Reclaiming biology” encapsulates the debates around issues such as bioethical and bio-statistical dilemmas of health.

New forms of commodification of the body – for instance, surrogacy and how technological advancement is permitting new social realities – are discussed in this course. The role of the state in bringing about change in public health discourse, and in raising awareness and addressing social concerns and sensibilities towards issues like euthanasia and HIV is also illustrated. In the module “Right to health, people’s health movement in India”, an overview of this theme is discussed and its limitations highlighted. The Jana Swasthya Abhiyan (Peoples health movement) and its broader implications in terms of human rights have been examined in this module. This course has also attempted to locate spatially and temporally the practices of treating the body through alternative medicinal practices that question the Eurocentric assumptions of allopathy. In the module “Health policies and specific disease programmes in India: Epidemics”, the role of colonial governmentality and its extension through the post-independent Indian state is laid bare.



## Sociology of diaspora

The course on sociology of diaspora provides a wide historical trajectory to acquaint the students to this relatively new theme. Various aspects of culture, tradition, customs, memories and how these create an imagined community are also discussed. An attempt is made to intersperse diaspora studies with migration studies through a discussion on indentured Indian labour. The module “Identities, gender construction and sexuality” invokes concepts such as ‘third space’, ‘hyphenation’, ‘hybridity’ and ‘ambivalence’ to comprehend the varied and plural identity formations that occur due to migration. This argument is taken forward in the module “Diversities and identities: caste and class” and elaborates on how these sociabilities continue and reproduce themselves in new geographical settings. This is evident in the module “Transnationalism and the Indian Middle Class”, which highlights the relationship between caste, class, region, and gender in this process of migration. The three modules “Issues of integration in host lands: Caribbean”, “Issues of integration in host lands: USA and Canada” and “Issues of integration in host lands: Southeast Asia and Fiji” examine the issues of migrant Indians around citizenship, belonging and racial violence. The modules “Bollywood and the Indian diaspora”, “Diasporic performing arts and popular culture” and “Diasporic film making” capture the cultural aspects of rootedness and belongingness. The module “E-Diaspora” examines how new virtual technologies have permitted new connections to the homeland and to each other via telecommunication networks; thus, long distance communication across national boundaries has become a significant part of the construction of a transnational identity that transcends the spatial anchoring of diaspora. The module “Return and reverse migration” contextualizes the history of return migration and traces the geographical nature of the return; for example, where do the returnees come from and what are the socio-economic issues in the host country. Theoretically, the module problematizes the concepts of host and homelands and understands ‘return’ not as a finality but as a part of contemporary global movements of back-and-forth migration journeys, in which there is no ‘permanent’ or ‘settled’ movement.

## Partial introduction of new perspectives

Below we present our assessment of courses in which there were moderate changes through the introduction of contemporary themes, theorisations and methodologies. A self-criticism will help to revise these courses in the future.

### Education and society

In the course Education and society, critical perspectives from across the globe have been incorporated to enable the students to understand the major debates in education. The module on “Curriculum as the site for power struggle”, for instance, presents the ideological contestations that occur, and critically appraises the role of the state in reproducing hegemonic knowledge. The module “Undoing education: decolonizing the mind” resumes the theme of epistemic dependencies and academic dependencies. Another module on human rights and education discusses the relevance of emancipatory education in creating global citizens. The module “Curriculum, classroom as a reflection of society” presents classrooms as ‘spaces’ of challenges and opportunities and examines how these spaces can encourage reflexivity. The module “Experiments in education - education for all, distance and multimedia education” explores the dilemma of the state in providing this fundamental right while simultaneously maintaining its standard and credibility. The Indian experience of imparting education through vernacular has been discussed and issues highlighted in the module “Language and Education”.

However, the syllabus for this course is presented as it has been formulated in the 2001 UGC draft. There are no discussions on privatization of education and the impact of neoliberalism on the education system. Nor is there a debate on Pierre Bourdieu’s theorisations on reproduction of class through education; and the relationship between market, state and education needs to be included. For this reason, the course is placed in this section.

## Ecology and society

This course provides an outline of the interplay between the state, market and society with environment and ecology. The discussion on agrarian ecology and the issues of common lands and resources, together with the idea of sustainability and equity, has been highlighted in several modules. Indigenous agricultural practices, traditional seed propagation as opposed to corporate and contract farming and introduction of the genetically modified seeds and related issues have been thoroughly deliberated in this course. There is also a discussion on urban ecology and the issues related to commons and urban greens in major cities of India. Social movements related to sustainable development, protection of the forests and indigenous ethnic movements have been highlighted. Global efforts towards sustainable development have also been covered in the paper. Some of the modules overlap with the course on Development, Globalisation and Society.

The course Ecology and Society is of recent interest in the domain of sociology. With the emergence of global debates on environmental protection and sustainability, this course was introduced as a specialization very recently and is being taught in some departments. However, the course has not been able to bring into conversation issues regarding caste, class, gender, and tribal concerns that have emerged since the early 2000s in the country. Nor has it been able to engage with the way the ecological has interrogated the discourse of sociology. If these questions and issues were to be engaged with, this course would have provided an ontological alternative.

## Methodology of research in sociology

The course titled Methodology of research in sociology could not capture the paradigm shifts in theory and its methods that has taken place in recent times. This course repeats many of the standard discussions on qualitative and quantitative methods. Much of the course follows the standard syllabi floated across the country. It reflects the limitations that has affected the development of social theory in the country.

## Conclusion

How does one assess this exercise?

We have highlighted the structural contradictions under which we operated. But it is also important to accept that we did not understand these contradictions and were naïve and blind about the way the new regime was intervening and had little to no understanding of how to mediate with Indian bureaucracy and coordinate with about 100 scholars. We ploughed through the decrease in budgets for coordinators workshops and module writers training and of reduction in time to complete the project while remaining committed to our original design. This increased the pressure on all course coordinators. Given the pressure, the sociology courses were ultimately completed in 2015 with one course less and this was considered a major achievement.<sup>39</sup> Also, we had not fully grasped how neoliberal interventions had depleted human and physical resources in the public universities and had no estimation of how much overburdened the faculty with teaching and minimal research were. Consequently, there was a high turnover among course coordinators. In addition, we were intervening in a context when privatization had already diverted many students away from public education and we wondered who would benefit from this exercise. As with other programmes initiated by the preceding regime, as soon as the project ended, in 2017, the rightist Hindutva regime substituted it with a new e-learning mechanism called the MOOC or SWAYAM which was aligned with the new education policy of online credit system.<sup>40</sup> However, because this system had not got completely organized, the e-PG Pathshala became popular during the Covid pandemic as a learning devise. Many course coordinators have communicated to us that they have noticed that hits to their courses increased since March 2020 when the universities closed. Some module writers and course coordinators were contacted for further information. In addition, some colleges and universities included some of these modules and even courses on their websites, so as to enable students to access them, especially those located in remote areas of the country.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup>This project would not have been completed without the personal support of Rajendra Harshe, member of the Standing Committee and Mr. Abhishek Kumar, from INFLIBNET, both of whom ensured that we had all administrative help to complete this project.

<sup>40</sup>UGC MOOCs: A Vertical of SWAYAM: <https://ugcmoocs.inflibnet.ac.in/>.

<sup>41</sup>Summary of Classical sociological theory: <http://ilmsgug.inflibnet.ac.in/course/info.php?id=717>

However, some unanswered questions remain. What sections of society (caste, class, tribe, religion, gender, urban, rural) are accessing these modules? Would its translation in various Indian languages have made them more popular and made their reach deeper? Would an interactive teacher-student communication have helped to make these modules and courses more effective? Would having workshops between module writers and course coordinators helped to evolve a collective perspective on content? Since the syllabi in all the papers have questioned hegemonic forms of knowledge construction in sociology, we would have liked to know its impact on the readers and their practices.

Thus, what was accomplished happened because of the commitment of course coordinators to the idea of dissemination of quality knowledge together with the trust that existed and evolved between the subject coordinator and course coordinators and between the latter and module writers. Most of the time there were one-to-one discussions through which most of the issues and problems were resolved. However, the new situation in the field of education also created unexpected new possibilities; given that there was more demand for jobs than its supply, course coordinators could recruit new doctoral students who used their research in elaborating the themes in various modules. Various course coordinators have attested that this yielded sharp interventions and brought latest research for discussion in the module. This not only enriched the modules but also allowed discussions across module writers creating a new network between them. In the context of increase in the number of women doctoral students in the universities, there was a proportionate increase of women module writers. By accessing module writers from across the country, the team was able to rethink many issues and themes hitherto invisible to their respective institutional practices and locational experiences. Moreover, the exchange of teaching and learning methodologies further strengthened the inclusion of diverse voices to reflect the heterogenous and dynamic nature of the Indian 'social.' In addition, for some course coordinators, putting together the course gave them the autonomy to define the subject and elaborate its state of art.

Today we have the satisfaction that there is a data base available for students and teachers to engage with and understand contemporary India free from its past colonial and nationalist interpretations. Though dated it remains an effective engagement with critical thinking of current sociological imagination.

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