

Sociology (Giddens)

Learning sociology means taking a step back from our own personal interpretations of the world, to look at the social influences which shape our lives. Sociology does not deny or diminish the reality of individual experiences. ... Learning sociology is in part a process of self-exploration.

Indian and Finnish societies as I see them

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***Workshop on Social well-being and gender equity in a globalising world:
Dialogue between India and Finland, Helsinki, 27-28 November, 2007***

Topics of discussion

- **Background**
- **Population and people**
- **Education**
- **Family and its role**
- **Lifestyle**
- **To be a woman of Indian origin in Finnish society**
- **Social class**
- **Ageing**

Background

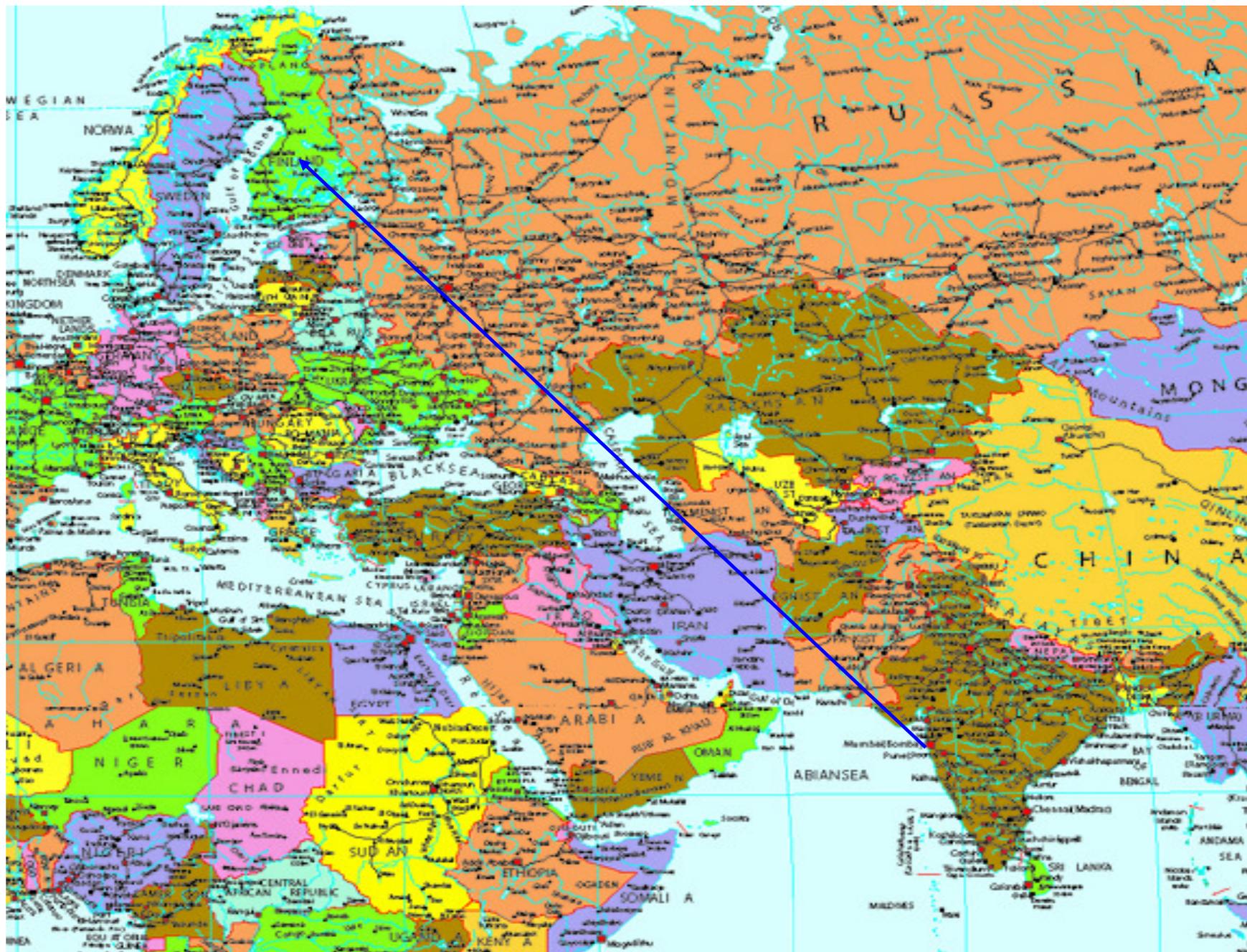
- **Born in Nashik, a small town in Maharashtra (present day population of Nashik is 1,077,236)**
- **Lived with parents, three brothers and grand mother in a small room for 15 years**
- **Family originally from Gujarat (Western India)**

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Background

- **Business community with men travelling for business and women expected to look after families**
- **Studied in Nashik till graduation and then moved to Pune city, 208 km from Nashik for master's degree and then continued for PhD**
- **Left India for the first time on September 29, 1996**



Background

- **Arrived in Finland on September 29, 1996 to pursue post-doctoral research work in mathematical statistics at the Rolf Nevanlinna Institute, Helsinki University**
- **Work contract – one year**
- **Went to the Netherlands in October, 1997 as a visiting researcher at the Delft University of Technology for three months**

Background

- **Comparison of the work cultural, social interaction etc. between Finland and the Netherlands started**
- **I felt very lucky to have come to Finland for my very first visit outside India!**

Population

- **Being a Sunday – a cold rainy autumn day, there were hardly any people on the streets of Helsinki**
- **I asked my host – where have the people gone?**
- **Indian cities have a much bigger population compared to the whole of Finland, but still in a place like Nashik also there is movement of people almost throughout the day and also during the festivals**

Population

- **India's population is younger than the Finnish population**
- **Unlike in Finland, it is this young population which constitute a sizeable part of the Indian society**

Population

- **In the present phase of growing affluence of the Indian middle class, this young generation is moving even faster towards globalisation and “westernised” culture by way of their clothing, eating, drinking habits and spending, but NOT in attitude**
- **My question is: do these things really define modernity?**

Population

- **When I spent six months in India after spending eight years in Finland, I saw a striking contrast between tradition and modernity on the streets of the cities and in the behaviour of our younger generation**
- **The change is mostly in the outer appearance, but there is no change in their attitude towards equality and simplicity**

Where I would like Indian society go?

- The present day movement shows that the Indian society is moving towards conservative-corporatist (Industrial based model)
- Ever since I have come to Finland, I have wished that Indian society follows the path which Finland took and accept the Nordic model (to begin with *equality* and *redistribution!*)

People

- **Finnish people: quiet, reserved, word can be taken as binding, use words very carefully, simple, say *YES* or *NO* honestly**
- **Indians: talkative (in general) and eager to get into conversation, like to say things in a very elaborate manner, cannot say *NO*, in some situations still word can be a binding**

People

- **In Finland there seems to be little social interaction**
- **Staying on alone makes one depressed and lonely – general thinking in India**
- **In India you have to be really strict if you prefer and wish to spend some quiet moments**

Education

School education (as I remember) –

- **basic values, general awareness, responsibilities, practical knowledge of home management, extra activities like music (in Finland)**
- **Focuses on subject matter and students can become expert in specific subject (in India)**

Education

University education –

- **Usually taken leisurely and not much competitive spirit (in Finland)**
- **Mostly taken with a lot of dedication and especially if receiving some fellowship and need for completing it before reaching certain age due to high competition (in India)**

Family and its role: General

Upbringing plays a very important role in life and the exposure to physically active lifestyle observed from the childhood make the younger generation to continue with those habits

Family and its role: Structure

- **Indian family is usually (or used to be!) a joint family with grandparents, parents and at least one son (or more) and his family**
- **Finnish family is mostly a couple and their children, if any**
- **Children get support from the parents in settling down in life – this is true in both the countries!**

Family and its role: **Sharing of work**

- **Sharing of household work: done by women in India (and expected to be done by women) while both men and women share such work in Finland (at least in the current generation)**
- **Clear demarkation of man's and woman's work – have observed this in Finland too!**
- **Men has to handle work outside home in India while in Finland such work is shared by both**

Family and its role: **Child bearing and rearing**

- **Man's duty also begins after the birth of a child**
- **Paternal leave is granted to new father just like maternity leave**
- **Both parents play active role in child rearing**
- **Spend time with children in the park and in seasonal sports and activities**

Family and its role: Interactions

- **A lot of interaction in day-to-day life, to the extent of interference at times in Indian families**
- **Finnish families try to gather together during festivals like Christmas**
- **Family support in case of difficulty but need to be asked for, in Finland**

Family and its role: Support

- **Support from elderly people of the family in looking after children in India**
- **Similar support is available in Finland by means of arranging to baby sit**
- **Are elderly people maintaining their freedom in such joint family structure with the support provided by the children?**
- **Is the Independent lives of Finns better with state support?**

Family and its role: Loneliness

- **Why the proportion of people feeling lonely and depressed is higher in Finland compared to India?**
- **Aren't people in India lonely in the midst of house full of people?**
- **Is it the life integrated with spiritual practices help people overcome loneliness?**

Family and its role: Summary

- **Strength and limitations of Indian family structure**
 - **Having family support in upbringing of children**
 - **Security: financial as well as emotional**
 - **Support in difficult times**
 - **Decision making requires approval from the family**
 - **At times high expectations from each other in the family**

Lifestyle: General

- **In Finland: self-reliant, self-sufficient, independent, simple, dignified**
- **In India: struggle to earn basic living or affluent class of India leading a sedentary lifestyle due to cheap labour for routine work (does not commonly accord basic dignity to such labour)**

Lifestyle: Habits

- **In Finland: people increasingly prefer vegetarian food and fish is included in that**
- **In India: vegetarian but it is mostly the way of life (influenced by Jainism), and non-vegetarian as well**
- **Smoking and drinking is socially accepted in Finland while in India it is increasingly being accepted (growing affluence?)**

Lifestyle: Hobbies and holidays

- **In Finland: spending time in summer cottages, collecting berries, mushrooms and spending time in the nature, doing physical activity**
- **In India: luxurious life where somebody else takes care of routine affairs, eating and drinking, partying (urban middle class)**

Lifestyle: Hobbies and holidays

- Finns prefer to have *real* holidays at least 2-3 times a year
- Older generation of Indians do not believe in holidays and go on working to save for the next generation

I love Finnish culture in this regard!

Lifestyle: Preservation and maintenance

- **Preservation and maintenance are an integral part of Finland**
- **In India, attention is paid only when something is being constructed; maintenance is mostly an after-thought**
- **If something is in abundance then it is not valuable, like human life in heavily populated countries like India?**

Gender issues: To be a woman of Indian origin in Finnish society

- **I was the first woman in the research group at the Rolf Nevanlinna Institute!**
- **Research groups in mathematics and statistics are male-dominated everywhere**
- **Shaking hands – being an Indian woman, many people were undecided about how to greet**

Gender issues: To be a woman of Indian origin in Finnish society

- **In India, I was always advised not to go out in the evenings and to certain places alone**
- **In Finland, there was no such advice but friends were quite protective (may be because I am an Indian woman)**
- **Home setting experience of Chandigarh and Helsinki (in 1998 and 1999)**

Gender issues: To be a woman of Indian origin in Finnish society

- **Dress code: In India, women are expected to wear sarees or a Punjabi dress which essentially covers the entire body**
- **In Finland, I had problem in deciding upon the formal dress code since I was not used to short skirts or trousers**
- **I always chose an Indian dress as a formal dress in Finland and to my surprise people were fascinated by that!**

Gender issues: To be a woman of Indian origin in Finnish society

- **In India, people would immediately advice and also help to dress in the local style but in Finland nobody seemed to mind (at least nobody ever commented on anything; comments on one's person is unacceptable, perhaps)**

Gender issues: To be a woman of Indian origin in Finnish society

- **Adjusting at work place with all male colleagues was not difficult because it was the same in Pune where I did my doctoral studies**
- **I felt that I was somehow given a somewhat higher degree of respect**

Social class

Flying from India to Finland brought me to a civilisation where social classes did not exist and everyone was *equal* (almost)

I got integrated into this civilisation easily because it was my imagined society

Social class

In India, one is born in a certain social class/community and one remains so (that is your identity). Nothing you do can change it!

In Finland, one is free to choose how one wants to be and whether one wishes to belong to any church or not.

Social class

The social status and basic dignity are accorded to everyone irrespective of the profession or way of life while in India, everything is integrated to define the social status.

Social class

India continues to have a deeply hierarchical social structure

In Finland the hierarchy does not seem to exist (at least not on the surface)

Social class

Finland - In whatever capacity one is, there is no hesitation in doing things by oneself including making tea at work place, riding a bicycle, walking etc.

India – Work and hobbies/habits are somehow always related to social status.

Social class

Simplicity, truth and non-violence are Gandhi's principles.

I had to travel so far north (and west) to Finland to find that these principles are used in practice.

People of Finland are honest, non-violent and prefer simplicity (recent incident of school shooting is an exception!).

Ageing

- **Addressing my host by his first name was rather difficult for me at first since he was so much elder to me.**
- **In India, usually the last name is used for addressing (and usually with a respectful prefix) while in Finland, it is the first name which is used.**

Ageing

- **When I saw deeper into the society, I realised that one communicates with children also at an “equal” level.**
- **In India, one is considered “wiser” as one grows older and a child’s voice is only an irritable intrusion and usually not heard. India has a lot to learn from Finnish ways here.**

Ageing

- **A 72-year old retired computer programmer (a Finn) leads a physically active life and still goes to work.**
- **In India, at the age of 40-45 years a man is expected to be at the peak in life with excellent job, family with children, own house, car and so on.**

Ageing

Why there is such a big difference in looking at life in both the societies?

Heart speaking

India is a diverse country ...

I must admit that in spite of all the comforts and social security structure of Finland, at times I have strongly felt that something substantial is missing in lives (could be because life is so predictable and hence, monotonous) and have longed for the hustle and bustle of India!

Heart speaking

My ideas actually being working in practice in Finland

I was convinced that a change in the society is possible

I returned to India with this determination of *changing* Indian society and taking it on the path where Finland has been

At the same time, also changing myself to accept some traditions

Heart speaking

**Time will tell whether both India and I
changed or only one of us or none changed!**

Wish

!!! Freedom of choice is what everyone should have, independent of the geographical location !!!

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