South Asian Sociological Society (SASS)

Code of Ethics

Introduction

Over the past two centuries, sociology has developed diverse theoretical traditions, methodological approaches, and modes of inquiry. It has been understood as the systematic study of human societies, cultures, institutions, social relationships, and structures of power. Sociology examines both enduring institutions and everyday life, ranging from intimate interactions to national, regional, and global processes.

Sociological inquiry operates at micro, meso, and macro levels, and in South Asia and across Asia, it has evolved through engagements with colonial histories, postcolonial transformations, indigenous knowledge systems, and complex social hierarchies shaped by caste, class, gender, religion, ethnicity, language, and region. Asian sociological traditions often combine empirical research with normative concerns, public engagement, and social critique.

The discipline of sociology in South Asia is approximately a century old and encompasses diverse approaches including social philosophy, ethnography, historical analysis, textual interpretation, surveys, digital methods, and participatory research. These approaches share a commitment to understanding contemporary social realities while remaining attentive to historical continuities and regional specificities.

Sociology offers a distinctive way of understanding social life and contributing to social transformation. It equips individuals and institutions to reflect critically on inequality, injustice, social change, and collective well-being. Given sociology's close engagement with lived experiences and vulnerable populations, sociologists require a clear ethical framework. The South Asian Sociological Society (SASS), as a regional and international professional body, is therefore an appropriate institution to formulate and uphold this Code of Ethics.

Preamble

This Code of Ethics articulates a set of guiding principles and professional responsibilities for sociologists as teachers, researchers, public intellectuals, policy advisors, and practitioners in South Asia and other Asian contexts. The Code is aspirational rather than punitive, encouraging ethical reflection, accountability, and integrity in professional conduct.

Adherence to this Code enhances the credibility of sociology as a discipline and strengthens trust between sociologists and the communities, institutions, and publics they engage with. The Code fosters a shared professional identity among SASS members and encourages reflexivity regarding power, privilege, positionality, and responsibility.

This Code also provides guidance for addressing ethical dilemmas commonly encountered in sociological research and practice in South Asian and Asian contexts, including issues related to social inequality, political sensitivities, cultural norms, state regulation, and community-based research.

General Principles

1. **Commitment to Scientific and Scholarly Practices**
   Sociologists must adhere to rigorous academic and scholarly standards appropriate to their methodological and theoretical traditions, while remaining open to plural epistemologies, including indigenous and vernacular knowledge systems.
2. **Core Ethical Values**
   Sociological practice must be guided by honesty, integrity, transparency, originality, intellectual humility, reflexivity, professionalism, openness to critique, and respect for diverse viewpoints. These values apply to teaching, research, publication, mentoring, and public engagement.
3. **Respect for Social and Cultural Diversity**
   Sociologists must respect the dignity, rights, and lived realities of all individuals and communities. Discrimination based on caste, class, gender, sexuality, age, disability, ethnicity, language, nationality, religion, or political belief is unacceptable.
4. **Sensitivity to Power and Inequality**
   Sociologists must remain attentive to asymmetries of power between researchers and participants, particularly in studies involving marginalized, indigenous, minority, or vulnerable populations.
5. **Commitment to the Public Good**
   Sociological knowledge should contribute to social understanding, democratic dialogue, social justice, and collective well-being. Sociologists should engage responsibly with public debates, media, and policy processes.
6. **Recognition of Contextual Limitations**
   Sociologists must acknowledge the historical, cultural, and political contexts of their research. Findings should be presented as context-bound and open to revision, rather than as universal or absolute truths.
7. **Scientific Integrity and Accountability**
   Sociologists must avoid misrepresentation, selective reporting, or exaggeration of findings. Public statements and expert opinions should be grounded in credible evidence and clearly framed within the limits of one's expertise.
8. **Promotion of Academic and Pedagogical Standards**
   Sociologists have a responsibility to mentor students and junior scholars, promote ethical research practices, and cultivate critical thinking and academic freedom within educational institutions.
9. **Respect for Intellectual Property and Knowledge Production**
   Proper acknowledgment of intellectual contributions—including those of students, research assistants, collaborators, and community knowledge-holders—is mandatory. Plagiarism and misappropriation of ideas or data are serious ethical violations.

10. **Public Accessibility and Knowledge Sharing**
    Where feasible and ethical, sociologists should promote access to research findings through open publications, translations into local languages, and community feedback, while protecting confidentiality and sensitive information.
11. **Professional Integrity and Independence**
    Sociologists must resist pressures from funding agencies, employers, political actors, or commercial interests that compromise academic freedom or ethical standards.

Research Ethics

1. **Training, Competence, and Reflexivity**
   Sociologists must acquire adequate training in research methods, theory, and ethics. They should engage in continuous self-reflection regarding their positionality, biases, and impact on the research process.
2. **Methodological Rigor and Pluralism**
   Researchers should select research problems and methods appropriate to the social context, recognizing the legitimacy of qualitative, quantitative, mixed, participatory, and indigenous methodologies.
3. **Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation**
   Participants must be fully informed about the purpose, methods, risks, and potential outcomes of the research. Consent should be voluntary, ongoing, and culturally appropriate, including oral consent where literacy is limited.
4. **Confidentiality and Protection from Harm**
   Sociologists must safeguard the privacy, anonymity, and safety of research participants. Special care must be taken in politically sensitive contexts or where disclosure may lead to social, legal, or physical harm.
5. **Community Engagement and Reciprocity**
   Research involving communities should, where possible, incorporate feedback, dialogue, and benefit-sharing. Sociologists should avoid extractive research practices and respect local norms and knowledge systems.
6. **Transparency in Data Collection and Reporting**
   Researchers must clearly document research design, data sources, analytical procedures, and limitations. Fabrication, falsification, or selective omission of data is unethical.
7. **Acknowledgment of Intellectual and Field Contributions**
   All contributors—including translators, fieldworkers, community researchers, and collaborators—must be appropriately credited, respecting both academic and non-academic forms of knowledge.
8. **Originality and Responsible Publication**
   Publications must be original, accurately referenced, and not simultaneously submitted to multiple outlets. Self-plagiarism and redundant publication should be avoided.
9. **Avoidance and Disclosure of Conflicts of Interest**
   Sociologists must disclose funding sources and institutional affiliations.

Research contracts or consultancies should not compromise independence or restrict the honest reporting of findings.

10. **Ethics in Digital and Online Research**
    Sociologists must apply ethical principles to digital, social media, and online research, including respect for privacy, consent, and data security in rapidly changing technological environments.

Implementation and Review

SASS encourages institutions, departments, and individual members to adopt and contextualize this Code. Ethical concerns or disputes should be addressed through dialogue, peer review, and appropriate institutional mechanisms. This Code should be periodically reviewed to respond to emerging ethical challenges in South Asia and across Asia.