

SESSION 10

Speaker 1: Farid Alatas

The logical consequence of the critique of Eurocentrism in the social sciences is the development of alternative concepts and theories in social sciences and the development of autonomous research agendas and so on. The critique of Orientalism and Eurocentrism in the social sciences is widespread. It is well-known and many works have been written but the emergence of alternatives is not as widespread and even less widespread is the implementation of these alternatives in teaching. So, what I want to do today is to suggest how the critique of Eurocentrism in the social sciences can actually be implemented in teaching in the social sciences and reflected in the teaching of the social sciences.

Before doing that it is necessary to define what we mean by Eurocentrism because that is also a problem in the sense that the term is often used but with different definitions. So, I am using Eurocentrism in the following way. I am referring to Eurocentrism in terms of four traits.

The first trait is the Subject-Object dichotomy. This is what you find when you read histories of the social sciences or textbooks in the various social sciences. The Subject-Object dichotomy is a pervasive theme. Europeans are the knowing subjects and to the extent that non-Europeans figure in these accounts, they are Objects of analysis but not sources of ideas and concepts. That is basically the issue. For example, a scholar like Ibn Khaldun has topic of much research and study but rarely used as a source for the development of concepts and theories that can be used to develop a Khaldunian Theory of Society or State Formation or what-have-you. There are many studies of non-Western thinkers but not as sources of ideas and concepts. So that is the Subject-Object dichotomy.

The second characteristic of Eurocentrism is the placing of Europeans in the foreground. In the teaching of sociology and many other social sciences, you have generally Europeans that are discussed even when it comes to the history of a particular discipline. If you take the example of economics, you have an interesting case of Dadabhai Naoroji's The Drain Theory. He is never discussed in economic textbooks in the West. And too the extent that he is discussed, he is discussed by non-economists. For eg. in the course that I taught on Development Sociology, we discussed many of these Third World thinkers as precursors of ideas that emerged in the west. So this fore-grounding of Europeans in the presentation of the History of Ideas or the history of a discipline is another trait of Eurocentrism in social sciences.

Related to this trait is the third, the idea of Europeans as originators. Europeans are generally regarded and written about as originators of various social sciences, even in cases where you have obviously important scholars from other parts of the world who should be considered as important precursors. To their credit, and I would like to give the example of Ibn Khaldun again, the earlier generation of scholars in the west around the turn of the century did give some credit to Ibn Khaldun. There are a few histories of

sociology which gave a lot of prominence to Ibn Khaldun and even regard Ibn Khaldun as the founder of certain theoretical orientations such as Conflict theory. Some European scholars such as Gumplovich and Oppenheimer, writing around the turn of the century, in the early part of the 20th century, were not economical in their praise of Ibn Khaldun and took him seriously. But this lasted for a generation or so and later generations in the west did not pay much attention to Ibn Khaldun and almost ignored him in fact. The same can be said about other social thinkers from other parts of the Third World.

For me what is the most important characteristic of Eurocentrism is the dominance of European categories and concepts. I would like to give one example - but this is pervasive in the social sciences - the concept of religion. It shows and exemplifies how backwards the social sciences are. In this way, we, in the so-called South are complicit. The whole notion or concept of religion is derived from the Latin and when it came to be applied to Christianity it took on Christian characteristics and for most of the history of the concept of religion or 'religio', it applied to Christianity and the term was not used for other belief systems that we now called religion, for example, Islam, Buddhism, Judaism, Hinduism, etc. were never referred to as religion. Hinduism, in particular, was referred to, as late as the 17th century, as heathenism. I remember reading some Dutch accounts in the Dutch encyclopaedias, of the Netherlands-Indies, where Hinduism is referred to as heathenism.

It is only in the 19th century where the term religion becomes applied to what we now call the various religions but even then, what you have, is a Christian understanding of these religions. What I mean is the characteristics of religion are understood in Christian terms. When Islam is said to be a religion, characteristics of Christianity are read into Islam. So you have a hidden intellectual christianisation of other religions. In a sense this was the process going on in India when the Europeans encountered Indian religions, they imagined that the various belief systems that you had in India are all part of a single entity which they regarded as Hinduism and the various belief systems that Indians themselves may have seen as separate entities in the 8th or 10th century were then regarded by the Europeans as sects within a larger single entity. So here you have a kind of intellectual christianisation of other belief systems. This intellectual christianisation took a concrete form when the colonial bureaucracy came to work and organizations were set up to manage temples, eg. the Hindu Endowment Board and these bureaucracies tended to concretize, to make a reality, what was imagined in the mind.

We can talk about the intellectual christianisation of Islam. Islam, for a long period in Europe, was seen as Christian heresy so it is read in terms of Christianity and therefore judged in terms of Christianity. Hence the expression 'Mohamedanism' which is a parallel of Christianity but of course since Mohamed was not a true messenger of God, it was heresy.

In every field in the social sciences, you will find this problem of the dominance of European categories and concepts and what is crucial is the study of the manner in which these concepts are problematic and dominate. An example of this study is the whole issue of the hidden intellectual christianisation of religion. Now if you pick up any textbook,

particularly in sociology, philosophy or anthropology of religion, you will get this strange use of concepts. In Anthony Gideon's textbook on sociology, there is a chapter on religion and there is a table on church attendance. There only problem in this table is the church attendance of all religions – church attendance in Islam, in Hinduism, in Buddhism. So here you are applying a term 'church' and along with that denomination, sect, cult, etc. to other religions, giving the impression that 'church' is to Christianity, as temple is to Hinduism, as mosque is to Islam. This is just an example. You will find this problem everywhere in social sciences and we have not been studying these problems, for the most part, in a serious manner.

The crux, the key to the development of non-Eurocentric discourse or counter-Eurocentric discourse is at the conceptual level, not at the level of identifying new topics of research or referring to non-European authors and so on. It's at the level of conceptualization.

There are some other traits of Eurocentrism which I discussed but I won't get into them. For me, the goal of teaching is to reverse Eurocentrism by turning these traits of Eurocentrism on the head. So when you talk about the Subject-Object dichotomy, what we need to do when we teach for example, the history of the ideas of sociology, is to foreground non-western social thinkers. What we should do is to look at non-western thinkers, not simply as objects of analysis. We should not be only interested in their biography and where they lived and mention a few ideas that they contributed but we should develop theoretical frameworks and concepts from their work and apply them empirically, to the empirical study of any phenomenon.

When we talk about the history of ideas, we should therefore reverse the Subject-Object dichotomy. We should put these thinkers in the foreground. We should recognize their rightful place in the history of ideas. Because our students do not know the significant role that Ibn Khaldun played. Even if mention is made of him, they think there were one or two interesting ideas but it is really proto-sociology and not real sociology. People are not even aware that European thinkers in the late 19th century took him very seriously and regarded him as a giant and did not simply pay lip service to him.

The whole idea of doing this is to start a process in which non-European concepts and categories get into the social sciences, not to displace western concepts, but to bring them into the social sciences and where possible have a merger between western and non-western concepts. For example, if one wants to talk about a Khaldunian theory of the rise of the Safavid empire of Iran, Ibn Khaldun has useful concepts. For eg. Asabiya, which enables you to conceptualise the cohesion among tribes, which were involved in the formation of the Safavid empire. But Ibn Khaldun has no notion of an economic system. It is possible to use ideas from Marx's Mode of Production or Weber's Notion of Pre-Bendel Feudalism to conceptualise the Safavid economic system. So here you have economic integration of ideas. We don't care where they come from. The thing is we don't want is to say that the only source of ideas is the west. Neither, obviously, do we want to throw the baby out with the bath water but we want to say that other civilizations

like the Muslims, etc. are important repositories of knowledge, of concepts and ideas and not just literature, folklore and music.

Therefore the question is, in the face of Eurocentrism, how do we bring non-European ideas and concepts into the mainstream. I talk about 7 ways, one of which has to do with Teaching. For example, conducting discussions at the method level, the theoretical level – looking at the methodological and the logical assumptions of the works of non-western scholars such as Ibn Khaldun. In the western social sciences, one way in which the ideas of thinkers gain acceptance and gain a certain permanence in the history of a discipline is through constant continuous discussions on their methods and their epistemology, their logical assumptions and so on and so forth. You create a body of knowledge that firmly roots them in their discipline.

There also should be exposition and analysis of the theories and views at the empirical level of the various non-western thinkers. There also should be attempts to build new theories from their ideas. It's not good enough to describe the views of Ibn Khaldun or Al Biruni or Naoroji. What theory-building can we engage in, taking off from their ideas?

Since we are talking about teaching, I would like to tell you what I did with a colleague of mine in Singapore. My colleague Vinita Sinha who is an anthropologist from India and I, have been teaching this module, on Classical Sociological Theory for a few years. One day we decided why are we only talking about this whole critique of Eurocentricism all the time, let's implement it in the course. Upto then we had been teaching Marx, Weber, Durkheim, the same way the course is taught in Delhi University, Dhaka University, University of Jordan, University of Tehran and a few other universities around the world. What we decided is that we're not going to kick out Marx, Weber and Durkheim but we're going to introduce alongside some thinkers who lived in the same period as Marx, Weber and Durkheim, who were non-white and non-male because our position was that there was not only a Eurocentric bias but also an androcentric bias in the teaching of social theory.

So we introduced Ibn Khaldun, Binoy Kumar Sarkar, Jose Vidal and we are planning to introduce some marginalised 19th century Russian thinkers, the thought of Alfred Weber, the brother of Marx Weber, who is also marginalised in sociology. We are for marginalised people, white or black. We are for the underdog, white or black.

Apart from introducing the non-western thinkers, and the non-male thinkers, we also give a particular focus on the western thinkers. In the usual sociological theory course on Marx for example, what is focussed on is the usual themes, the alienation, the labour theory of value, the pauperisation thesis and so on. In our module, while we discuss these issues, we also bring in those topics which are not usually discussed in a typical north American-based syllabus, for example Marx's views on India, on colonisation, the Asiatic mode of production, Marx's statements for colonisation of Algeria even though he was critical of the British conduct in Ireland. So we talked about Weber's views on Islam, Hinduism, on Judaism, topics which are generally excluded from the basic sociological theory course in the west and topics which would only be discussed if there

is a course on Islam. But we are saying that this has to be brought into the mainstream sociological theory courses. Our argument is that there are many important ideas in these western thinkers but in order to salvage these ideas, they need to be separated out from these Eurocentric and biased ideas.

Similarly, we bring alongside these thinkers, the non-western thinkers and do not simply pay lip service to them and be condescending to them but that these people were serious students of society and they had an impact and their ideas are still relevant for the study of the present. We need to begin to extract their ideas from the context in which they wrote and lived and develop modern theories. There is the example of Ibn Khaldun. Al Biruni is another example. He was an amazing person. In fact he is an important person, a major source, Indian or non-Indian, for the study of the religion of Indians in that period.

A proper study or contribution to the sociology of religion or the anthropology of religion would be to look at the concept of religion in the Latin Christian tradition, the concept of Deen in Islam, the concept of Dharma or Sampradaya in the Indian tradition and so on. Then you can come up with a concept of religion. You cannot come up with a concept of religion if you stay or confine yourself to the Latin Christian tradition. This has not been done for the most part. Pick up any textbook and you will find that it simply applies the Latin concept of 'religio' to other religions. It is basically a flawed way as far as concept formation and theory building is concerned. If you just take the concept of religion as an example, you will see the depth of the problem. And in every field in sociology and the social sciences, you have problems at this conceptual level.

There are also other ways to bring non-western sociology into teaching. Teaching alone is not enough. We have to be aggressive in terms of organizing conferences on these themes and topics at mainstream conferences to expose these ideas to others. We have to be aggressive in terms of publishing not only in our own journals and publications but also in mainstream journals and also in various languages even though we are not going to be rewarded for publishing in our own language because our own language periodicals are not international referee journals and publishing there is not going to get me promoted. But we should sacrifice a little bit. We can do both. And we need to cite each other and stop being proud, saying, I do not want to cite this person because I do not like the comment he made about me in such and such conference. We have to find out what each other's works are about. This is a problem because in Malaysia and Indonesia, people do not cite each other. They cite North American, Australian, British authors and not each other's works.

I want to end on a point on self-criticism. I would like to refer to two works which discuss in a succinct manner the problem of reverse-orientalism. There is the work by Sadiq al Azam, a Syrian scholar, on orientalism in reverse, published in the '80s and a work by John Lee, a Korean sociologist of Japan, where he talks about Japanese sociology, using the interesting term 'auto orientalism'. There are problems in efforts to create indigenous or indigenised or de-colonised sociology. There are extremes to which they go so we have to be mindful of these problems in order to avoid them.

Speaker 2: Partho Mukherji: Multiversity as Movement

I suggested this topic myself, the reason being because I myself have been a student of social movements and my studies span the Gandhian and the Maoist movements as well as the peasant movement. I have been a kind of *shudhra* (outcaste) in the hierarchy of social sciences, doing field work and whatever theoretical understanding emerges from these concrete contexts.

The second thing that I'd like to discuss very briefly is my own engagement with this kind of problem which has been with me right from the beginning. When I was studying the Sarvodaya Gram Dhan movement, one of our giants in the social sciences said, "It seems to be that you are doing interesting work, but it's not sociology. It's something good, but it's not sociology." That's how it all started.

We have all assembled here to discuss and deliberate on the re-designing of the social science curriculum, not just here and there, but across countries and continents. I think we have, by and large, accepted that social science is **one** of the most important sources of knowledge, not **the only** source of knowledge. There are other sources of knowledge – religion, literature, art and so on, and various mixes or varieties of ways of understanding reality - so social sciences as one, but also one of the most important sources of knowledge, because it does affect us, it does affect the world in terms of how the social sciences make us believe what we are.

Now if we accept that social science is what we are thinking of in terms of re-designing, then the 3 basic things in understanding reality are: data, a methodological orientation and a capacity to generalize beyond the context. If we were just to share experiences uniquely and not be able to abstract in order to be able to understand it in different contexts, it would be of limited significance. Therefore generalizability or universality, i.e like a science, is to make universal propositions, is the goal of social sciences. How far we succeed is not a simple question to answer but by and large, those who think critically of social sciences too, also believe that this is a worthwhile goal.

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.. follow a logic of enquiry. If we have a problematic, then it has to have a logic of enquiry and whichever framework contributes to that or your own innovation should be a part of that logic of enquiry and that is where there is scope for methodological innovations in the understanding of social phenomenon, social problems and the rest of it.

As I have been able to make out, our goal here is to initiate and bring about changes, particularly in the developing countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America where relations of dominance by the west thwart the development pattern of these countries, distorting it. This is because the asymmetries of power and unequal exchanges, which are facilitated and reinforced through paradigms of education, research and development. Basically this is what we are discussing in so many varieties of context. And as I could make out yesterday through the very perceptive observations and statement of Anwarji

that the Multiversity has emerged as a group of concerned activists and social scientists, consisting of three sets of groups – the Ph.Ds, the BSTs and the GTDs. If you don't recollect what BST meant, it is Blood, Sweat and Tears, a kind of echo of Winston Churchill, and GTDs is Getting Things Done. This was the kind of composition that was made explicit to us. This is what is part of the composition of the Multiversity concept.

Discussions as I could gather on previous occasions and in the last two and a half days are really in a process of defining its ideological position vis-à-vis the so-called western social sciences and the educational institutions through which it is disseminated. This is at we are really grappling with, wrestling with, and this is the ideological churning that is taking place in the context of the Multiversity. This fits into the model of an emerging global social movement in opposition to a western hegemonistic domination. It seems this is the context within which this group is trying to define, redefine, refine its own understanding of itself. What is Multiversity, with all its consequences? Hegemonistic domination, is what this forum is trying to find a place or space, to try and understand, to exchange notes, to conceptualise and so forth.

Therefore, as I see it the framework for such a movement scenario is that of conflict, structure and change. To have a movement where you are contesting the established and the dominant, obviously you cannot have it without conflict. There is a very high probability that you will have an area of conflict which has to be defined, which has to be sharpened, and this is with reference to the structure or the system, within which the conflict has to be understood in terms of the contradictions. And thirdly, obviously, we want to change within the situation, so conflict, structure and change. This is the model within which this global social movement, in the global space, drawing people from so many parts of the world is deliberating upon.

So if it is already the seeds of a movement, which I hope it is, then certain things, constituents of understanding the movement arise. One, the level of collective mobilization: what will be the level and the intensity of ideological commitment of its members? And how effective are they in understanding the contradictions. Based on these should emerge the strategies and tactics it is able to devise, perfect and employ in the praxio-logical domain of a movement. So, collective mobilization, intensity of ideological commitment which has to be defined as I believe is being done, and effective understanding of the contradictions.

The question then arises, as to what kind of strategy or tactics does the Multiversity movement look forward to. How does it decide? What kind of strategies, what kind of tactics, with reference to what kind of change, what kind of scale of change can it look forward to? I have done this exercise in the past, with reference to other social movements i.e. we classify levels of change and find out at what level of change should Multiversity movement pitch itself. It doesn't have to pitch itself at every level of change at the same time.

One level of change is to bring about changes within the system. There is a given system so you try to bring about changes within the system. This is the accretional, incremental

and cumulative way of approaching the change dimension. So it is changes within the system one is looking forward to.

The second order of change is change **of** the system. We are trying to change the system itself. There are two variants of it. One is you can do that by adding new structures if you can, so that the additional structure will make a change to the rest of the system because it enters the system as an additional structure. Or you can axe some structure. You get rid of some structure by whatever means, logically or theoretically. These will constitute what I call structural changes. Removal of structures or addition of structures in a given system of structures.

The third variant is the replacement of one or a set of structures by another one or a set of structures. This is a transformatory model. You totally try to change the system. This becomes revolutionary, transformatory. In every major social movement, they try to change the society and the entire institution. So this becomes the third and most hard level of transformation and change. In our discussions in the past two and a half days, either in terms of wishful thinking or actual thinking, all these three levels of change have figured in terms of what Multiversity should do. When you devise a strategy or a tactic, maybe you have to move from one to the other or come to know where you stand, given your objectives, your subjective preparations of collective mobilization and intensity of ideological commitment. So strategies and tactics will be dependent on that.

One has to enter into the nature of prevailing contradictions in the educational system, which is what is being discussed. One has to work out the contradictions which are already manifest and try to sharpen them. So the collective mobilisation which may be parts of departments in various universities and institutions would be areas through which the contradictions could be sharpened. They will have the feeling that there is the support of the Multiversity movement. Even if there is a single person in the department, who has a view different from the other but which is based on these commitments, he will know that behind him there is a world body of scholars at the Multiversity which will come behind, at least at the ideological support. So one has to make a judgement to what extent objective conditions are ripe because if objective conditions are not ripe and you are trying to take a leap, then probably you will flounder and probably it is not right to do that. One has to create sufficient sharpening of contradictions and sufficient preparation at the subjective level before you enter into various programmes of action.

Obviously for this, one has to create an environment for sharpening of contradictions generally and this is where a lot of work has already been initiated by Multiversity - working out an agenda for relevant knowledge research, and relevant knowledge production. Already relevant knowledge production is being disseminated, very many ideas and impressions have been thrown up in the last two and a half days and before and ways and means to disseminate these are already taking place. Therefore, the creation of an environment for identifying and sharpening contradictions is already in place in terms of the Multiversity movement.

I will just share two immediate things that I am involved in, which would be of interest to you. We are having our annual national conference in sociology in a place called Gorakhpur, where our theme is 'National Policy in Social Science'. For the first time, a professional body in India will discuss this. We are discussing this particularly because in the previous regime a national policy on social science was being constructed, and would have been probably imposed. Fortunately however that regime lost in the elections so the time is ripe for us scholars to come out of this. We will enter into these areas of indigeneity, of supporting relevant research, of letting parallel paradigms approach the same kind of phenomenon.

The second thing is a meeting of South Asian sociologists in February 2005, where the state of the discipline of sociology with reference to its relevance and rigour is being discussed. We are expecting South Asian sociologists at least to get together. There again we are discussing theoretical and conceptual issues, indigeneity dimensions, what is the relevance of stands and variations of research that we should engage in given our sub-continental dimensions of problems, innovations and methodological orientations, institutional aspects of promotion of excellence in our kind of work and an open panel which will discuss conflict, peace and development challenges before sociology.

Finally, I will end with the comment on this point of social science. Social science has its origin in the west. Let's accept it. It has been institutionalized in the west. It has developed in terms of encountering problems with reference to the west and in relation to its own colonies. Therefore social science has inevitably taken that kind of character. And we in the post-colonial phase who are facing contradictions have to get out of this captive mind and respond to these. It's not as if we are debunking social science in general but in fact what is the kind of social science that we have to bring about in contestation with the more prevalent and dominant paradigms.

Speaker 3: Anu Kapur : Disaster Management

Before I begin with my topic I would like to speak just a little on the Multiversity logo and try to decode it to see what it actually means. As a geographer, at the first count, it could mean the 5 continents. All these double 'M's, mean multi, M-versity. The 'V's, in this particular form could be interpreted as the hand moving in a particular way forward. The logo also seems to have an interpretation of palm trees. It also represents something like fibre optics. All of them get connected – so networking and all of us coming together - is also what the logo presents. Of these 3 interpretations we could axe the things we don't want, bring in what we actually want, and get to make social sciences dominantly where we want it to be and so this dominance of colour on top. So I thought the logo needs to be looked at. It's very intelligently designed and it has all these multiple aspects. The most important impact, which would give prominence to this particular movement, is that it has a number of 'V's which I think would stand for a lot of victory in the programme we set out for.

I want to shift focus now onto an aspect in social sciences, especially in India which has not been considered but which is going to be considered, I'm sure, in the next decade. So it's a right time to look at it, in a new context, which this particular conference has provided. This is a study of Disasters.

What disasters am I talking about? Earthquakes, floods, droughts and cyclones which hit our coast and other technological disasters - railways for instance, we have a railway accident almost everyday in India. All these, but what I'm excluding from this particular discussion is aspects of terrorism, violence, riots and epidemics, for reasons which I could justify.

Looking at this particular group of disasters in India, they have been part of India, for a very long time. In fact, we were hit by all these continuously over time and people have been affected by them continuously. Let me begin by giving you some data. In the last four years, India ranks as the No.1 country in terms of number of people killed. In fact from the year 1977 onwards India ranks among the top three countries, every time. The number of people affected by disaster each year is equivalent to 1.5 times the population of the city of Mumbai. That is very large indeed. For every one person that is on record killed, there are 2000 people affected by disasters. With a rank so high, with so many people killed, what kind of concern do social sciences actually provide to disasters?

A concern of a discipline in a particular country is also geared by macro forces and such concern percolates. I will therefore quickly show you the unconcern we have actually meted out to people. We have 43 ministries in India – tourism, youth, development, etc. but we have no Ministry on Disaster. In the 5-year plans, there is no mention of disaster. Only in 1995 was a chapter on Disaster Management introduced. The Finance Commission has taken on the responsibility of providing relief for disasters and it is called aid, or relief but disasters are never really looked at. Only in 1990 was it called the Calamity Relief Fund, with calamity defined as 'natural' - a category which we can also discuss.

As for laws, despite having major disasters like Bhuj, the Orissa cyclone, Latur, Uttar Kashi, there is no law which can even give a district administration the power to cancel people's holidays, call them back or declare an emergency. We have Environmental Laws. Out of 105 laws, 8 environmental laws and 5 safety laws deal with hazardous industries but they don't really focus on disaster. India till today has produced 1.7 lakh doctorates and of these, if you go only by titles, we have produced only 143 on all kinds of disasters which is a pitiful situation.

There's a scheme under the Sciences, called the extra mural research projects which are granted to scientists within departments to do research. Out of 19,000 research projects which were looked at in terms of titles, only 160 worked on disasters. Even among the social sciences, the Indian Council of Social Science Research also gives out projects each year and our survey showed that only 15 social scientists took on working on disasters.

Take popular research. India Today is one of the very well known magazines of India. Surveying just the cover pages we found that out of the 750 cover pages India Today has produced, only 22 deal with disasters and these 22 also come in a high bracket, when you consider that about 7 cover pages were devoted exclusively to Kargill. Results also show that more cover pages were devoted to fashion and elite rather than a theme of such relevance. Take cinema - popular cinema. I picked up a sample of 1758 cinemas which were listed in the Encyclopaedia of Cinema and found that 37 made disasters a kind of a backdrop, an accident which struck. One would have thought that organizations like the World Wildlife Fund or Centre for Science and Environment would have done some documentaries. I checked documentaries found that out of 2000 documentaries, only 50 had anything to do with Orissa, Bhuj, or Latur.

There is a missing agenda not only at this level but also in schools. I picked up a sample of the Central Board of School Education, which is one of the prevalent boards, and found that we have got optional subjects at the class 8th, 10th, 11th and 12th levels. Only last year was a manual introduced called "Together, towards a Safer India – an Introduction to Disaster Management". This manual which was introduced in the private schools but not in the government schools, which also shows it did not become part of the regular curriculum but was taught like a side note. In the 10th class we have 3 units of study, Heritage of India, Resources and their Utilization, and Economic and Social Development but there is no reference in any of them to the fact that India ranks No.1 among the number of people killed and affected.

At the Universities, the situation was even more shocking. India has more than 283 universities, with 11 lakh colleges and 8.3 million students enrolled. There is not a single regular course which offers Disaster Management studies, which means that nobody can take a degree at university on this particular subject. So you come out bereft of any understanding both at the school and at the university level. Two distance learning programmes, one at the Indira Gandhi National Open University in Delhi and the other at the Sikkim Manipal University in Delhi, offered from 1999 onwards a correspondence or regular course on disaster management.

So there is a very piecemeal kind of approach, which needs to be examined, at the syllabus level. Engineering syllabus for example, has 'Earthquake Engineering' as if earthquakes are only about building the correct kind of buildings. But how do we percolate these building designs all across India? Remote Sensing looks at how to map the flooded zones, etc. which doesn't really help people. Economics has 'famine' as a subject and in Geography, a few universities mention natural disasters.

So at the level of school and university, there is no introduction to this particular theme, which requires a lot of social science attention.

India has two competitive examinations that attract a large number of people. One, the UPSC, which enrolls all the bureaucrats, and two, the University Grants Commission test which enrolls all academics and research. In both these, which have a very vast syllabus

barely 5 disciplines make a peripheral mention of disaster management at the level of the bureaucrat exam and at the academic and research level, it's just not mentioned. As an integral component, therefore a basic study of disasters, which ranks very high in India, is missing.

A disaster is an event that is unscheduled, unplanned, unexpected; if more than 100 people die, international intervention is expected. One could first look at why it is called unexpected. We know that a large part of the Himalayas fall in the seismic zone and so earthquakes should be expected. Over 1000 epicentres have been mapped. So what's the unexpected aspect? We know that India falls in the tropical cyclone zone. We know that rivers flood. So, what's unexpected? The definition is definitely distorted.

Recently there has been a High Powered Committee report about what should be done in disasters. About 50-60 percent of the report looks at disaster management in terms of western technology which needs to be introduced to manage disasters – systems like forecasting and other technological inputs. Now, this is the kind of introduction to disaster management that is being incorporated into the syllabuses I have mentioned earlier. So looked at from another angle, whatever is being introduced is extremely dangerous.

Why I said that disasters will become an important subject of study and will be introduced into academia is because the decade between 1990 and 2000, were declared by the United Nations as the International Disaster Reduction decade. Once they have declared the decade, they have put pressure to have studies done. That's why the last national 5-year plan (1990-1995) was on Disasters. But nobody wants to look at what is the social construction, what is the social reality, how have people looked at disasters and managed them in India. This, I think is an agenda which we could look at in terms of social sciences - what subjects are missing entirely in syllabuses and what needs to be included into the thinking on these subjects.

DISCUSSION

Yusuf: Anu's presentation shows that the absence of that kind of study in schools, universities and governments is perhaps an indication of the staggering irrelevance of much of officialdom to what is really of concern to most people. It is something that really we have to take into consideration as we talk about reviving curriculum.

Radha: It is an accepted fact that traditional building technologies have contributed to saving a lot of lives when places are struck by disasters. In Uttaranchal (North India) these technologies were given up, interestingly as a consequence of India's war with China, when the army came in and built roads and a lot of other structures with cement. The roads further enabled people to bring modern material for construction much of which could be categorised as inappropriate technology. Now people are demanding only RCC in construction. It highlights the fact that we need to look at peoples' sciences

and how they get appropriated through our emphasis on sciences that come from elsewhere.

Hassan: I have a question for Farid. You mentioned that in your curriculum you have added other thinkers. If you look from the 19th century onwards, thinkers in Asia and Africa were and continue to be influenced by western thinkers. Does your curriculum show how their ideas have influenced contemporary Muslim thinkers and do you discuss that engagement critically?

Farad: I am doing some interdisciplinary hazard space research in S.Asia. Anu mentioned that remote sensing wasn't very useful to solve the troubles faced by the people. I believe that the infrastructure is very good and it is just a matter of using it appropriately and mixing methods. Part of my work is integrating physical and social methods and I am facing difficulties in accessing the work of academics in the South. Contrary to India, most research that is published about Bangladesh is about disasters. Multiversity could perhaps make a library of Ph.D theses and papers in local journals which then can be accessed by those wanting to do studies on it.

Vinay: I have a question or a comment for each of the speakers. Let me begin with Anu's presentation first. On Sept. 11, 2001, about 3000 people died in the US in what would be considered a disaster. It was unplanned, unexpected. That same day, 12,000 children died of diarrhoea around the world, 5500 of cholera and I could give you a list a mile long of all the things that happened that one day. My very simple question is this: What is the relationship of the visible to the invisible in our conception of what constitutes a disaster? How do you theorise your idea of a disaster? What is the politics of knowledge contained in this term and what is the political economy? We need to look at why is it that some so-called disasters receive attention while others do not. Do we need disaster management of the sort you have been talking about? I am not suggesting that you said we need it, but I would like to have some sense of how you look at this particular set of questions.

With respect to Farid's presentation, I agree with you entirely but I want to see if you are willing to go further and add a different analytical edge to the proposition that you have made. Take the example of studies of sexuality. If you look at cultural studies and India in the last 10 years, there are now a fair number of Indians who have started looking at sexual issues – same sex love, queer theories etc. Invariably all of them use the work of Foucault and his 3 volume History of Sexuality to try to understand what might have been happening in India. As far as I am aware, although Gandhi never wrote a thesis on sexuality, Gandhi had a very complex politics of sexuality. However, I do not think anyone would think of using Gandhi's practice of the body to actually interrogate Foucault's History of Sexuality. So, this a little bit further than what you are suggesting because now the idea is not that we simply tap Gandhi's idea of sexuality and perhaps think of him as a theorist of sexuality but how would we in fact use that to interrogate a received body of knowledge from the West, in this case Foucault and one could think of others as well.

My final comment-question is for Partho and it is with reference to your book *Indigeneity and the Universal*. It seems to me that that opposition already entails a hidden term, namely, the indigenous is always particular i.e. when one posits something opposed to the universal, which one calls indigeneity, then the assumption is that the indigenous has some co-relationship to what one might call the particular. But is it not the case that all universals in fact are also particulars in some way. If you look at the famous essay by A.K. Ramanujam, called 'Is there an Indian way of thinking' his argument fundamentally is that all Indian thinking is context-bound i.e. to say it is not value-free, culture-free. So if all universals are particulars as well, then what is the particular salience of this distinction between indigeneity and the universal.

Wasif: Farid's strategy seems to be the Euro-centring of the intellectuals of non-european thinkers, just an esoteric add-on of Ibn Khaldun or Al-Biruni etc. within the particular discipline. Within its own terms, within its own notions, within its particular philosophy or sociology, we just add what we were calling marginalized and thereby Euro-centrise. We always have a select list of these thinkers who perhaps had something congruent with the western form of knowledge which is why they are acceptable or palatable. There is also a whole body of knowledge which is invariably left out.

My second comment is with reference to Dr. Mukherjee's presentation. The goal itself is so disturbing. It is a universal proposition for human beings and human society that he seeks to propose which is so appallingly arrogant. In reality we cannot even propose a universal proposition for bees or ants or even large molecules. To actually describe a form of knowledge which is even attempting to do that for human beings with their societies, and within that to try to garnish it or make it more acceptable by adding a variety of thinkers and calling it acceptable to the non European world is disturbing. Thank God people like Ibn Khaldun and Al Biruni who wrote their own travelogues did not have the staggering power of state and academia behind them to universalize their thoughts. At best they are their own thoughts and ideas. To use those writings as a basis to theorise an entire body of policies, influences and so on to regulate a society in itself is a frightening proposition.

Chiu: My first observation is with reference to Farid's presentation. We have been talking a lot about what to include, in addition to what exists, in the university curriculum. Of course there are a lot of things that have been left out or neglected. May be before we think about overhauling the university or changing the curriculum, we need to look at the practice of pedagogy. It is the reading of the texts that is important. We can have a number of ways of reading the same text. So in my syllabus I just play the trick of listing all the readings I am required to do, but I have a discourse using different material to discuss the topic. I ask the students to read the text but in my lecture, I only talk about the discourse. I would like to hear more about the real practice of pedagogy.

Tariq: Not only the politics and economics of knowledge production in academia, but also its history needs to be understood. We know quite well that a number of concepts and analysis and empirical decisions are not neutral but are produced consciously to advance particular commercial interests, and particularly corporate interests. We know a

lot of work is done at the instance of the World Bank. A lot of knowledge is produced and funded by corporate philanthropy directly. Sometimes if you read an article in a journal, it would not appear to you that somebody has actually paid to get this research done. Amazingly, some of the most iconic texts in Western literature were actually funded directly and indirectly subsidised by perhaps the greatest corporation known to the world, namely the East India Company. It supported the works of John Stuart Mill, Thomas Malthus, Charles Darwin, Adam Smith, to name a few. So concepts and products are not necessarily produced in a neutral way. There is very little study made of the economics of knowledge production, particularly today when it has become so commercialized. It is almost impossible to explain to students how knowledge production is organized and the subtle ways in which various types of theories are promoted. So bringing out the history of knowledge production would be very helpful.

Meena: I come with the perspective of a law student who went to law school of a most oppressive kind but because of teachers and methodologies and new methods of thinking, I actually enjoyed the process. And the biggest educator has been the Consumer Association of Penang. I think that all students are actually interested in values and how these are integrated in social sciences, the purpose of education and so on. So, instead of looking at theories and thinkers, one could start off from the perspective of what education is about, why are we in social science or in law school or in any school. The relevance must be put up front so that students understand why they are there.

Second, the students must learn about society first and understand what the reality of the world is, before they study the laws that govern society. I don't know what that means for social science curricula because I think it is very important to put into perspective what the world is all about and then go into why we are learning and how we should redress that.

Finally, the methodology of teaching is paramount. Young people are very excited if they are allowed to think. We have all forgotten how to think because we are not allowed to speak and think in the classroom. Educating and learning has to be an empowering process. We have to build in opportunities for people with different kinds of knowledge. Many of our students join corporations because that's the only job they know that exists. But if we give them a different set of teachers how would they fit into the corporations with that kind of knowledge. So we need to show our students that there are different opportunities and a whole world out there which can give them a very creative experience.

Gloria: The weakest theory in the Marxist systems of ideas is the Asiatic mode. I think the theory of primitive accumulation is something we should make students familiar with. Secondly, we really have to improve our methodologies in terms of religion. Take Africa. A large majority of many of the countries are Muslim and yet when you look at some of the textbooks, that phenomenon is not properly noted. Africa also has two other major religious traditions. The Christian one is sometimes brought into the statistics but the third is never brought in i.e the system which one would associate with the Orisha tradition or Ifa. We do have works on Ifa. Ifa is pretty close to Shintoism. About a

hundred million people around the world actually practice Ifa. That would include a large percentage of people from Brazil, Cuba, Caribbean and also from the heartland from which it emanated, West Africa. That religious system has really been written out of the textbooks and something needs to be done about that.

Yusuf: Perhaps we could think of a core working group that could then take up these questions later on and discuss them in detail. Many people have mentioned that they are using various syllabi. I think we also need somebody who will take the responsibility of collecting those syllabi, working on them and bringing them together for the benefit of all of us.

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