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ಸಾಮಾನ್ಯಜ್ಞಾನ ಪ್ರಸರಣೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಶೈಕ್ಷಣಿಕ ಸಾಧನವಾಗಿ ಕನ್ನಡ ದಿನಪತ್ರಿಕೆಗಳ ಪಾತ್ರ: ಒಂದು ಪ್ರಾಯೋಗಿಕ ಅಧ್ಯಯನ
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Exploring New Paradigms in the Humanities and Social Sciences

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Abstract: *‘The crisis in Humanities and Social Sciences is of recent origin and caused by factors which constitute the contemporary socio-cultural-intellectual context. There is enough evidence to believe that the sense of crisis has always been a part of how the humanities and social sciences are perceived. Of course in several epochs there is a sense of urgency behind the notion of crisis. In the Indian context in recent times this sense of crisis has had more to do with factors, which can be categorized as institutional- lack of funds, diminishing interest/ preference among students for their disciplines, absence of competent teachers, poor quality of the research produced etc. At a slightly higher level the crisis is attributed to the ever increasing hegemony of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects in the globalised world which in the Indian context is specifically reduced to the dominance of IT. It is in this context the present article explores the new possible paradigms in humanities and social sciences.*

Key words: Humanities, social sciences, new paradigm, Orientalism, Sanskritisation, interdisciplinary, subaltern, feminism, cultural studies

Introduction

A phrase often used in relation to the humanities and social sciences is ‘The crisis in Humanities and Social Sciences. Though the argument usually is that the crisis is of recent origin and caused by factors which constitute the contemporary socio-cultural-intellectual context, there is enough evidence to believe that the sense of crisis has always been a part of

how the humanities and social sciences are perceived. Of course in several epochs there is a sense of urgency behind the notion of crisis. In the Indian context in recent times this sense of crisis has had more to do with factors, which can be categorized as institutional - lack of funds, diminishing interest/ preference among students for their disciplines, absence of competent teachers, poor quality of the research produced etc. At a slightly higher level the crisis is attributed to the ever increasing hegemony of the Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) subjects in the globalised world which in the Indian context is specifically reduced to the dominance of IT. Though not so visible, there have also been serious explorations of a theoretical kind into the developments within the disciplines themselves. These relate to the persistence of certain paradigms, the apparent exhaustion of theoretical models, the awareness of the deeply problematic nature of the universalistic frameworks etc.

This last perspective on the crisis in humanities and social sciences is what this article intends to focus on. The tentative plan is to first discuss some of the past and existing paradigms and the problems associated with them. Thereafter, some of the possibilities of reconceptualising these disciplines and the areas they open out for research will be discussed. As scholars have asserted one cannot plan for a new paradigm; new paradigms happen owing to a multiplicity of factors. What we can do is to interrogate the existing paradigms, articulate our sense of their inadequacies and continue to search for new possibilities.

Orientalist conceptualization

In her excellent analysis of the emergence and institutionalization of the disciplines of anthropology and sociology in India, Prof. Sujatha Patel traces their relationship with the binaries in the orientalist conceptualization of societies which were shaped by the project of colonization. The binaries are the old non modern static societies which are to be studied by Anthropology and the modern, dynamic societies to be studied by Sociology. This distinction itself depended on the orientalist paradigm in which non-European, non-modern or pre-modern societies constituted the 'other' of the West. Surely, anthropology had its origin in the colonial hierarchisation of societies. This also motivated the anthropological observation, studies and writings on the tribes of India by orientalist scholars and administrators. Though couched in the empirical, scientific register, these productions were of a piece with the large body of knowledge described by Edward Said as orientalism.

On the other hand, there was also the dichotomous perception among some of the orientalists that while there was much to be admired in the ancient Aryan past of Indian civilization, contemporary India was a society and civilization in decline. The Indian past had to be studied with a methodology which was Sanskrit-centric, high-textualist and abstract. The texts and knowledge production in the Bhashas were generally ignored. This led to the anomalies of homogenization of the Indian past, the preponderance of abstract categories like 'Varna', the communalized narrative of Indian history and the creation of the mutually exclusive and adversarial categories of Hindu and Muslim. These, you will agree continue to jeopardize the social sciences at both the popular and scholarly domains. With the rise of the right wing ideologies, the orientalist aberrations now appear in their new avatars.

Indian response to oriental paradigm

As against the orientalist paradigm Indian scholars constructed the nationalist paradigm which Sujatha Patel describes as methodological nationalism. As she points out ironically the 'nationalist' paradigm was based on the orientalist perceptions and categorises. For example, the thematic of tradition and modernity, the most powerful one dominating social sciences was formulated in essentially orientalist terms. Even in the early Marxist historiography and Economics these orientalist frames were operational. For example, notions of the Asiatic mode of production, the eternal unchanging Indian peasantry with its subsistence level production, notions of backwardness and underdevelopment were all a part of this paradigm.

In the early formulation of Sanskritisation by the great sociologist M.N. Srinivas, the deep seated assumptions are the belief in the hierarchical Varna system and the consequent belief that social dynamism in Indian society was always a unidirectional process with the 'lower' varnas imitating the higher varnas. There is undeniable evidence that the processes of social-cultural and religious dynamism were extremely complex and multidirectional. Deities, myths, modes of worship from the lower varnas were continuously appropriated by the higher varnas and by Vedic Brahmanical culture itself. Prof. S. Settar's elaborate studies of the artisans in India seriously question the very conceptualization of Sanskritisation.

Feminist perspective

Similarly the subaltern studies group was initiated to question both the imperial historiography and nationalist historiography models. Using the Gramscian frames of hegemony, subalternity, production of consensus etc., a huge enterprise of constructing history from below was taken up very effectively. The troublesome question is this rigorous reformulation of Indian historiography does not seem to have penetrated the pedagogy of history in our academic institutions. Leading scholars have also raised sharp questions about the manner in which the feminist challenge has been negotiated in the discipline of history. Has the feminist contribution been ‘ghettoised’? Have women’s studies centres in universities been used to keep all feminist work confined to them as an excuse to keep feminism away from the mainstream of intellectual work in several disciplines? These debates are very much in place both institutional as well as discipline centred spaces for discussion. Feminism has powerfully asserted the need to focus on the intersectionality of gender, caste and class thereby necessitating fundamental reorientations in several disciplines, including media studies and cultural studies. Of late discourses on merit as a universal category with no reference to caste and location have been subjected to close scrutiny. This has to be studied in conjunction with the previous work done by Sukhadeo Thorat from the Dalit perspective and with the recent work on the unarticulated presence of caste in the Indian diasporic IT professional communities.

Such interesting areas of research also help in emancipating humanities and social sciences from the grip of the universalist frameworks. The colonial production of knowledge was based on the assumption that the modern disciplines and forms of knowledge which developed in post-enlightenment Europe had universal applicability. This paradigm continued well into the post-colonial phase. The major scrutiny of the paradigm came from the post-colonial theories which dismantled the universalist frameworks by showing them to be Eurocentric and also shaped by particular conjuncture of historical and political contexts in Europe. The culmination of this effort is best summed up in Dipesh Chakravarty’s evocative concept of provincialising Europe.

However, he clarifies, this is not to mindlessly reject Europe or deny our historically imposed negotiations with European knowledge. The objective is to historicise and

particularize Europe to mitigate its claim to universality. Apart from the legacy of European universalism, we also confront today the problems associated with the global network of knowledge which has the tendency to once again turn us into consumers of theory and receivers of knowledge rather than producers of these. Latin American scholars have repeatedly spoken about the various forms of dependency on Euro-centric knowledge in scholarly disciplines in the 'rest of the world'. How do we negotiate with this issue?

Need for fresh frameworks

In the field of literary studies very exciting research work has been done in recent decades. Vasudha Dalmia's work on the nationalization of Hindu traditions with particular reference to Bharatendu Harishchandra opens up a rich field for similar research. Francesca Orsini's work on the impact of print culture on the popular narrative, performative and poetic traditions in the north is exemplary, just as the work edited by her on Hindi and Urdu relates the past and present of the cultural politics of languages. Kathrin Hansen's research on the Parsi theatre along with Anuradha Kapur's work on the same should be a model for those who want to work on the company theatre/ professional theatre in Karnataka. The work done so far in this area is introductory and sketchy. Equally important is the field of literary history in the Bhashas. The existing literary histories have rarely asked fundamental questions such as what constitutes the 'literary' or 'literature' in a Bhasha tradition? How does this become a strategy for exclusion? Why do we continue to study the New Historicism as only one of the many theories and not try to learn from it to reconstruct our literary histories? Why do we still adhere to histories of our languages which are Sanskrit-centric and ignore their relationship with prakrit and other bhashas? Velcheru Narayanrao's brilliant essay on Telugu and Telugu grammar and the yeoman work done by D.N. Shankar Bhat on Kannada and Kannada grammar positively demand fresh frameworks for our research.

It is now many decades since massive intellectual efforts began to be made to erase the boundaries between disciplines. Both theories and practices have demonstrated the need for trans-disciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches in the domains of knowledge. Owing to the inability of Higher Education Institutions to restructure curricula and courses to suit such approaches, except in some elite institutions, we have not been able to develop a strong interdisciplinary research culture. As Stuart Hall pointed out many decades ago, inter-

disciplinarity does not mean requesting colleagues from other disciplines to chip in and share their knowledge.

It means developing a competent knowledge of other disciplines ourselves. Prof. Shiv Vishwanathan in his inimitable style described inter-disciplinarity as ‘the fraternity of knowledges’ which a higher education Institution must support and nurture. It is always the trespassers who bring new knowledge. Prof. Settar a historian, with his revisiting of *Kaviraja Margam* and *Tolkapiam* enhanced the quality of our understanding of these texts. His work also reformulated the Kannada-Tamil relationships at a time when senseless linguistic chauvinism has been holding sway. Anupama Rao’s work *The Caste Question* provides brilliant insights into the use of popular cultural forms such as powda, lavani, jalasa in disseminating the Ambedkarite ideology. Kannada is awaiting such work on the use of songs, street plays etc., by the Dalit Sangharsha Samiti and Samudaya.

Cultural studies introduced a much needed political edge to the study of culture by arguing that all symbolic forms of expression and communication which constitute culture participate in the networks of power. This move also emancipated the understanding of power in modern societies without regressing to the outmoded notions of ‘ruling ideology,’ ideology as false consciousness, etc. Cultural studies also demolished the wall of separation between the mainstream ‘serious’ culture and popular culture. It also created modes of analysis of the media which were not ‘text centred’ but oriented to reception and audience which also brought in issues of class and gender. The rapid global flow of information, entertainment and ideas through the globalised cyber culture has almost completely overhauled notions of gender, identity, consumption and culture. As Lawrence Grossberg feared the flux and rapidity is such that there is no possibility to pause and reflect over these phenomena.

Challenges before cultural studies in India

Cultural studies in India confront a more complex problem in analyzing the impact of these phenomena on a still traditional and non-cosmopolitan society. As an example of the revisionist approach of post-colonialism, we could re-read Partha Chattarjee’s essay ‘Our Modernity’. The essay deconstructs the very notion of a homogeneous modernity in India by underlining the resistance to colonial modernity. While colonialism was imposing a certain

form of Western modernity as universal, the resistance to it came from the experience that this modernity in the Indian context was part of the colonial project. There was also the critique of western modernity in the writings of Gandhi, Aurobindo and Tagore. What is clear is that ‘our modernity’ was not the colonial modernity.

Unfortunately the social sciences developed in the Indian academic institutions inducted methodologies which were inadequate and unable to negotiate with the critique of modernity in the political and spiritualist writings of the period. A similar aberration is that until recently Dr. B.R. Ambedkar’s relationship with John Dewey’s pragmatism and the manner in which he employed it to arrive at a nuanced understanding of western liberalism was not discussed in detail. Recent contributions by Aishwari Kumar (*Radical Equality*, 2015), Ananya Vajpai (*The Righteous Republic*) have opened up significant areas for research.

As many historians of the social sciences have observed the thematic and the problematic of these disciplines are set by the national debates which in turn are generated by the historical and political contexts. Modernity, development, the economics of growth, the nature of the nation state, secularism such themes first appeared in the public domain and the civil society and then became concerns for the disciplines. in the contemporary context one could argue that the issues prioritized by the present state of the nation are the relationship between the state and democracy and the weakening of the democratic institutions. It is to be expected that these issues shall engage the humanities and social sciences for some time to come. There is also the ethical responsibility of rescuing debates on these issues from a vicious polarized public sphere and secure them as matter for serious research. Whether the circumstances supporting critical and objective research on them will prevail and survive is nobody’s guess.

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