

Challenges to the Social Sciences in the 21st Century

Some Perspectives from the South

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The Eurocentric world view has remained long after European political and economic domination waned by the end of the “Long Nineteenth Century”. European ideological hegemony still holds sway over the humanities and social sciences in the developing world. The colonisation of the mind that this entails is a challenge to be overcome politically, academically, as well as ideologically.

While discussing the human and social sciences in the 21st century we need to first remind ourselves that historical periodisation does not necessarily follow 100-year sets. The 19th century, for instance, is often seen to continue till the first world war and the 20th century is perceived to end with the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union in December 1991.¹ As I shall argue presently, what this periodisation meant for the part of the world we can loosely call the south, did not necessarily match with what it meant for the developed world, again loosely characterised as the north, or perhaps more appropriately the west. However, by and large I use this periodisation to suggest that many of the new challenges of the 21st century emerged in the last decades of the 20th century itself.

When the various disciplines of the human and social sciences, such as history, economics and political science evolved in the 19th and early 20th centuries, much of the present developing world was under colonial rule and European ideological hegemony held sway in most of the world. The human and social sciences in this period remained largely Eurocentric. Although Europe’s domination, measured on a long-term human civilisational scale, represented a tiny blip covering at best two to three centuries, its intellectual/ideological hegemony or the Eurocentric world view has remained long after European political and economic domination waned by the end of the “long nineteenth century” with the first world war. Though the 20th century is described as the “American Century”, it needs to be noted that the United

States (US), as Eric Hobsbawm (1995: 14-15) puts it,

in spite of its many peculiarities, was the overseas extension of Europe, and bracketed itself with the old continent under the heading ‘Western civilisation’ ... (and) the ensemble of the countries of nineteenth-century-industrialisation remained, collectively, by far the greatest...economic and scientific-technological power on the globe.

Human society from the ancient period to the present, thus, continued to be often viewed, understood and interpreted in Eurocentric-western ways. The 21st century will have to face this challenge and recover and forefront alternative voices. Notions of what constitutes modernity, development, progress, scientific achievement, secularism, nation, justice, ethics, and aesthetics have to be widened to incorporate the much wider human experience. The point is not to minimise the great material and intellectual strides made by Europe and America in this period, but to be able to locate the part in the Eurocentric/western world view that was colonial, that dominated, ignored or erased the viewpoint of the earlier civilisations, which were subordinated in the process of building the European/western civilisation of the modern and contemporary period.²

The ‘Long Nineteenth Century’

I shall illustrate with one example, even at the cost of a diversion. It is notable that even a scholar of Eric Hobsbawm’s eminence and sophistication, a Marxist and staunch anti-imperialist, interprets the 19th and 20th centuries in a way that suggests a Eurocentric-western bias. For example, in his celebrated work cited above (ibid), which he wrote in 1995 (well into the 21st century by his own definition), he sees the “Long Nineteenth Century” as “a period of almost unbroken, material, intellectual and moral progress, that is to say of improvements in the conditions of civilised life”. Similarly, he describes the

“Short Twentieth Century” as an “Age of Catastrophe from 1914 to the aftermath of Second World War...followed by twenty-five or thirty years of extraordinary economic growth ... a sort of Golden Age, coming to an

This is a revised version of my keynote address at the National Congress on “What Human and Social Sciences for the 21st Century?”, University of Caen, France, 7 December 2012.

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end in the 1970s. The last part of the century was a new era of decomposition, uncertainty and crisis – and indeed for large parts of the world...a catastrophe”.

The picture appears considerably different when looked at from the perspective of India or China and indeed many other parts of the Third World. Even by themselves, the two countries are large enough and with sufficient proportion of the global population so as not to be ignored while making macro generalisations. China and India in the beginning of the 18th century were the two largest economies of the world contributing together about 47% of the global gross domestic product (GDP). Asia (excluding Japan) contributed to the global GDP more than two and a half times what the entire western Europe put together did. India alone contributed more than eight times the GDP of the UK and was the world's largest exporter of textiles.

The Long Nineteenth Century, instead of being a “a period of almost unbroken, material, intellectual and moral progress, that is to say of improvements in the conditions of civilised life...”, was a period of catastrophe for India, China and much of Asia and Africa and Latin America. India and China were economically, politically and culturally brought to their knees under colonialism. By 1913, their share of the global GDP was less than half of west Europe, and by 1950, around the time they gained independence (India in 1947 and China in 1949), it was less than a third of west Europe.³ Egypt's valiant and greatly successful effort to modernise in the early decades of the 19th century under Mohammad Ali, anticipating the Japanese effort by about half a century, was also extinguished by colonialism from about the 1840s, with long-term consequences the country is still to recover from.

Similarly, the period from 1914, which Hobsbawm describes as an “Age of Catastrophe”, was an age of *opportunity* for colonial countries in many parts of the world. It has been shown that the crisis faced by the metropolitan countries in this period with the two wars and the Great Depression, led to the “loosening of the links” with the colonies, enabling the colonies to experience sharp spurts

of economic growth and often political concessions.⁴ Again, the last decades of the 20th century, which Hobsbawm sees as an era of “decomposition”, of “catastrophe”, are precisely the decades when the global balance once again began to tilt towards the east, and countries like India and China (and many other former colonial countries), having spent a few decades unshackling the colonial structuring their societies were subjected to, were now on a high-growth path gradually scratching their way back to the global economic high table from which they had been so unceremoniously thrown out in the recent past.

Space on the intellectual/ideological high table, however, did not follow automatically. It is not so easily achieved and involves a process of ideological struggle reminiscent of the national liberation movements that led the countries of the south to freedom. Just as the Eurocentric world view far outlives European economic domination, there is a major time lag between the East/South coming into its own economically, and regaining its intellectual/ideological self-confidence. Almost all the major existing “schools” of thought in the various social sciences and humanities still emanate from the First World. There is a virtual absence of any “school” emerging from the countries of the South, several of which have had more than 5,000 years of civilisation interrupted only by the colonial interregnum.

Challenges to the Eurocentricism

The challenges to the Eurocentric world view in the 19th century began to emerge from movements that challenged the dominant colonial order. The early nationalists in India from about the middle of the 19th century were among the first in the world to develop a comprehensive economic critique of colonialism, decades before Lenin, Hobson or Rosa Luxemburg.⁵ These challenges, however, were mainly in the political and public domain and did not substantially alter the academic disciplinary order, partly because academic institutions were controlled by the dominant colonial state.

After the end of the second world war, the decolonisation process and the

democratisation process got a boost globally. In India, we see an effort after Independence, especially in the 1960s (a decade or so after Independence), to make major breaks from the past in the social sciences, especially in history, economics and sociology. A very high level of scholarship emanated in the premier universities questioning and rejecting the colonial and Eurocentric paradigm in the understanding of Indian history from the ancient to the modern period, in the understanding of the Indian social structure, especially the caste structure, and in the understanding of economic development. Evidently, the breakthrough in the social science disciplines was inspired to some extent by the anti-colonial struggle and had an impact on the academic world with a certain time lag. As I said earlier, the history and economics written by the leaders of the movement during the anti-colonial liberation struggle had already made the break from the colonial paradigm. This could affect the academic disciplines in the universities only after they were freed from the control of the colonial administration.

In the 1960s, in India, the independent Indian state directly intervened through the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) to replace the colonial and communal paradigm that the school textbooks reflected in the colonial period. The country's best historians and other social scientists were persuaded to write model school textbooks at the primary and secondary level, based on a modern, independent, secular and scientific understanding.

Understandably, the discipline of history was the key, attracting a great deal of attention, being the most “ideological” area, an idiographic rather than nomothetic discipline (a distinction highlighted by the Gulbenkian Commission Report).⁶ It was not an easy task to change the colonial mindset based on more than a century of colonial education, from the days of Macaulay in the early decades of the 19th century. As the recent history of the developing world shows, it is easier to overthrow foreign political domination than to overcome

economic domination. It is arguably even more difficult to overcome the colonisation of the mind, and gain freedom in the intellectual/academic sphere. As argued below, the challenge is still with us.

Resurgence of Colonial Paradigm

There is a resurgence of the colonial view, particularly since the 1980s and continuing till today, which argues in favour of the positive role of colonialism in developing the colonies. The success of rapidly growing postcolonial countries like South Korea, China, India, etc, in the last quarter of the 20th century, is sought to be linked to their colonial pasts. This, when the current developments in these societies became possible precisely because of the break from colonialism and a conscious “un-structuring” of the colonial structure in all areas, be it the economy, society or culture.⁷

In fact, this colonial view conflates the erstwhile globalisation process, which occurred under colonial hegemony, with the recent (second-half of the 20th century) globalisation process under the hegemony of independent nation states, seeing them as part of the same process. It demonises the three to four decades of un-structuring of colonialism attempted by nation states (led by Jawaharlal Nehru in India) as the “dirigiste”, “protectionist”, “wasted” years. Whereas in reality, as mentioned above, it was this un-structuring that enabled these former colonial societies to participate in the current globalisation process with some advantage to themselves, unlike the previous globalisation process. It is not an accident that both China and India opened up to the globalisation process, in 1978 and 1991 respectively, a few decades after their independence from colonialism, which for them was a period of forced colonial globalisation.

Along with the resurgence of the colonial paradigm, the more than a century long intellectual tradition of studying and critiquing the political economy of colonialism has been hijacked, since the 1980s, by a motley stream occupied by postmodernism, postcolonial culture studies, subaltern studies, etc. This stream emanates in the First World and is promoted by what Arif Dirlik calls the

“Third World intellectuals (who) arrived in First World academe”.⁸ The contribution of Indians to this stream is very large. They are shifting the focus from the political economy of imperialism to its “representation”, they critique “nation” and “nationalism” as the oppressive “master narrative”, and “celebrate the fragment”, making the task of nation building, of creating “unity in diversity” that much more difficult.

The academic elite in the developing countries who are migrating or trying to migrate to the First World reproduce the above paradigms for acceptability. Their social science, the questions they ask, is not linked to the impulses and needs of their own society. It is significant that it was the intelligentsia that had initially posed a challenge to the colonial/Eurocentric paradigm. But, at that time the intelligentsia was linked to, if not playing a leading part in, the anti-imperialist movement. Today, in the 21st century, the intelligentsia in countries like India is by and large not linked to any popular movement and that gets reflected in the regression that is occurring in the practitioners of the human and social sciences. They are increasingly allowing the dominant ideologies of the west to set the paradigm within which they operate. Is this surprising, when the overwhelming section of society, which has access to higher education in these countries, plots and plans as to how they can emigrate to the First World or at least get their children to do so?

Note must also be taken of how the postmodernist turn is destructive of the social sciences, whatever be its utility to literary criticism; how, by questioning any notion of objective generalisations, it is extremely status quoist. Postmodernism, thus, can emerge as an ideological instrument for the powerful. An approach that perhaps was intended to give voice to those on the margins can in certain situations end up doing the opposite!

Treating the nation, nationalism and the nation state as the master narrative that extinguishes the smaller voices may reflect the reality in some of the most advanced countries, whereas the nation, nationalism and the nation state is often the “channel” through which the people

of the backward countries are able to make their voices heard, and the “instrument” through which they are able to strike a bargain in their favour vis-à-vis the more advanced countries. Immanuel Wallerstein (1974) has noted the role of nation states in moving the countries at the periphery end of the core-periphery spectrum towards the core and becoming what he calls semi-peripheries. The nation state would be crucial in the process of moving the peripheral countries further towards the centre.

There is a need also to distinguish nationalism and the nation state as it emerged in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries, from anti-imperialist nationalism as it emerged in the colonised countries. In the former case, it often flattened out difference and emerged as the instrument for the promotion of capitalist development. In the latter case, as in India, it often celebrated difference and emerged as the instrument for the liberation of the oppressed, colonised people. Also, it must be noted that the multiple regional linguistic aspirations were complementary to the process of nation-making in countries like India, rather than becoming obstacles to the process.

Globalisation in the 21st century often emerges as a threat to the role of the nation state in the less developed world, whereas the nation state and nationalism reign supreme within the more powerful, developed world. This dichotomy is perhaps felt even by the weaker nations of the European Union in eastern and southern Europe.

Perhaps one of the most pernicious and long-lasting legacies of colonialism has been that the colonised countries were left deeply divided on the basis of religion, race, caste, tribe, language and other identities, viz, the cases of India, Palestine, many parts of Africa, Ireland, etc. The 21st century sees the humanities and social sciences still affected by it.

There has been an effort to rewrite, particularly history, but also the other social sciences on a sectarian basis (relying on identities of religious community, caste or ethnic group) in order to facilitate political mobilisation based on these divisions. Scientific social science gave way to use of mythology, privileging of

faith and belief over facts, and selective selection of facts to promote immediate, sectarian political agendas. This acquired dangerous proportions in India during 1999-2004, when a government led by a right-wing sectarian Hindu party was in power. They banned scientific and secular school textbooks written by the tallest scholars since the 1960s and sought to replace them with works based on their sectarian political agenda, defying all accepted standards of any of the disciplines of the social sciences.⁹

This tendency borrows again from the colonial legacy where the colonial state privileged and promoted division to thwart the process of “nation in the making” attempted by the anti-imperialist nationalists who were trying to create “unity in diversity”. The shocking thing is not that this colonial mindset should continue among the divisive forces that were nurtured in the colonial period, but that it has remained even amongst a section of the left. Marxism is clearly no guarantee against being infected by the colonial/Eurocentric outlook. The writings of Perry Anderson (celebrated editor of the *New Left Review*) have in recent months in the *London Review of Books* (July-August 2012) rubbished Indian nationalism and the Indian nation state, demonising every nationalist icon that emerged in India from the secular platform of the Indian National Congress (INC), from Mahatma Gandhi and Maulana Azad to Jawaharlal Nehru, using essentially the tools of analysis perfected by the colonial Indian state!¹⁰

Analysing Perry Anderson

Given the fact that Perry Anderson is an influential thinker globally, a slightly longer look at his first foray into modern Indian history may be in order. I will take up here only one strand of the numerous colonial assumptions in Anderson’s view of India. Anderson sees the INC as essentially a caste Hindu party. He is here echoing British Viceroy Dufferin’s characterisation in the late 19th century, dismissing the INC, which had become the vehicle of the rising anti-imperialist nationalism in India, as representing a “microscopic minority” rather than the Indian “people” as a whole, as it claimed.

A characterisation that was fleshed out later by the so-called “Cambridge School” of historiography, led by Anil Seal, saw the Congress as essentially a party of upper-caste Hindus fighting for their narrow prescriptive interests. This, when the INC in the colonial period was more a platform of the Indian national movement, rather than a party, on which an increasingly wider section of the Indian people from different classes, castes and religious communities began to be represented. For example, the tallest socialists and communists, the most charismatic workers’ and peasants’ leaders, emerged from the ranks of the Congress and reached its highest decision-making bodies. Surely, they were not there to protect the caste Hindus.

Anderson further reiterates the Muslim League argument, promoted avidly by the colonial state, that since Hindus are in majority in India, universal franchise would deliver power to the Hindus represented by the INC (an argument used by the colonial state to deny the elective principle to the Indians, as demanded by the Congress). Anderson, therefore, applauds “the British (who) realised the dangers of this in India and... granted separate electorates as a limited safeguard for Muslim minorities”.

Anderson would have been well advised to heed the warning of the British Marxist W C Smith in his pioneering work, *Modern Islam in India* (1946), that while choosing categories of analysis for India (non-western societies), it is important to try them out on western societies as well. Using the logic Anderson applies for India, it would appear that in Britain, universal franchise has meant that the Protestant majority rules over the Catholic minority and other smaller groups, such as the Jews, Muslims, Hindus, etc, and therefore a separate electorate must be introduced for non-protestant minority groups; a prescription Anderson is unlikely to recommend for Britain. Different standards are used for India based on the colonial notion that the colonial people, the “child” people, if not the “barbarians”, could only be mobilised around primordial identities of religion, caste, tribe, etc, and not around “western”, “modern” notions of nation and class.

The pernicious concept of separate electorates introduced by the British divided Indian society irreparably at the very initial stages of modern electoral politics. Inherent in it was the two-(or more) nation theory. Under this system, people of a particular religion would vote for and elect a member of only their religion. The candidates would have to appeal only to their co-religionists and not to the whole society as they would have had to if they were representing a common constituency, even if the seat was reserved for a particular religious community. It is for this reason that the Congress opposed separate electorates for Muslims and other minorities, and later for the “untouchables”. It was not, as Perry Anderson would have us believe, that the Congress, including its foremost leaders like Gandhi and Nehru, essentially represented the upper-caste Hindus and refused to accommodate the Muslims and the untouchables.

It is no surprise, then, that Perry Anderson does not hold the colonial state responsible for the partition of India, a state which, for nearly a century, assiduously cultivated the divisive principle in India, especially that of the separate electorates. Who then was responsible for the partition of India? Not the colonial state, not even the communal religion-based organisations like the Muslim League or the Hindu Mahasabha, which grew under colonial patronage. But, it was the INC whose “persistent...claim to speak for the whole country...precipitated the crisis and made partition inevitable”. The demonisation of the chief vehicle of the anti-imperialist movement does not end there. Anderson adds that not only was the Congress responsible for Partition, it “acted in a way that ensured it would take the cruellest form, with the worst human consequences!”

Such balm to the colonial conscience was sprinkled with other gems, such as the “modernising force of the Raj” and “The idea of India being theirs [the Raj’s]”. Another equally dubious formulation is that “independence did not come from passive resistance” led by Gandhi, but “was the result of two other dynamics”. The first was “the broadening of the electoral machinery first introduced

by the British in 1909 and expanded in 1919”, and the second, the Japanese forces reaching the Indian borders. These formulations would delight the hearts of the likes of Niall Ferguson, B B Mishra, Judith Brown, Tirthankar Roy and his admirer Ramachandra Guha, Joya Chatterjee, Meghnad Desai, Christopher Bayly, etc, many of whom appear on Anderson’s reading list on India, which almost entirely ignores the enormous Marxist and nationalist contribution to the field. Anderson’s position that the national movement had nothing to do with either Indian Independence, or creating the idea of India, or bringing modern ideas and institutions to the Indian people, as all this was done by the British colonial rulers, has a striking resemblance to the liberal imperialist view promoted since the early decades of the 19th century.

The distinctive colonial feature of Anderson’s argument is the denial of legitimacy to the category of nation and nationalism and the constant privileging of narrow identities even when they are articulated in communal or casteist, divisive, separatist, and often fundamentalist and even fascist ways.

The recent First World/postmodernist tendency of privileging the local over the “national” also feeds this tendency of denying legitimacy to any national aspirations of the people of the South. Here, the local or the part is not privileged in order to sensitise and transform the nation or the whole, but to destroy national unity and the nation altogether. We are witnessing today this atomisation of politics, often aided and abetted by the “first world guardians of global order”, destroying many nations without empowering the fragments.

The Information Revolution

The information revolution is another major challenge in the 21st century, just as it is an opportunity for the social sciences and humanities. The internet and the social media have created an entire “reality”, which is challenging to study. The information on the web is often not archived like newspapers and other printed material, which can be mined by the scholar.

Also, what appears on the web must be carefully analysed. Eunan O’Halpin,

an Irish contemporary history expert, recently told me that while visiting the us in the 1990s, he surfed the net and was shocked to see that if one went by what was on the net, then the us had a few dozen political parties and most of them were Trotskyists! It also had the Democrats and Republicans. Similarly, studies have shown that if one surfs the net for India, one would go away with the understanding that the overwhelming influence in Indian politics, culture and history is that of a narrow right-wing Hindu “fundamentalist” strand. The latter conclusion is almost as absurd as the former. So, surely, what one can scientifically draw from this major resource of the 21st century created by the information revolution is a big challenge, especially because, as one wit observed, “today increasingly research is being substituted by search (Google)”. The politics and economics of the search engines themselves have to be taken into account.

Neglect of the Social Sciences

Science and technology has been promoted in the south neglecting the social sciences, as the former was seen as the driver of the current knowledge society. However, this was to some extent inevitable. Developing societies had to forefront and privilege science and technology, as this was the area that had been denied to them and kept absolutely barren by their colonial rulers, and this area has now emerged as a key factor of production.

In India, Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister after Independence, anticipated this global change and made a major break from the colonial past. The First Plan (1951-56) that he prepared gave overwhelming importance to the setting up of a large number of institutions for research and teaching in the areas of science and technology. It is this that has enabled India to participate profitably in the information revolution today.

It must be noted, however, that the creation of huge scientific and technical humanpower has changed the nature of what India (or the South) loses to the advanced countries. When land and labour were the key factors of production globally, the world saw transfer of labour,

as slaves or indentured labour, and the grabbing of the lands of entire continents in favour of the then dominant powers. When capital became the key factor of production, there were huge transfers of resources as colonial “tribute”. Today, knowledge is the key factor of production and there is mass migration of knowledge workers to advanced countries. India, for more than half a century since the 1960s (when the product of the Nehruvian efforts at education painfully created on the backs of the country’s poor became available), has been losing virtually the entire cream of its scientific and technical personnel to the First World, mainly the us.¹¹

A recent 2012 study by the us National Science Foundation shows that about 95% of Indians doing their PhDs in the us in the areas of science, engineering and health, stay on there. India’s loss and that of many other less developed countries is what enables the us to rake in for itself a large part of the global knowledge pool. While in the 1960s only 17% of us PhDs were by foreigners, today (2012) it is 40% (Srivastava 2012). The neglect of the social sciences and humanities and the promotion of the colonial world view in these spheres in the South contribute to the transfer of scientific humanpower from the South, rather than forefront the need to create conditions that would arrest it. A leading professor in one of India’s top scientific institutions once told me with great pride that his entire class of students successfully migrated to the us!

One consequence of the global demand for scientific and technically trained people has been that, not only are the social sciences suffering from neglect by the state, but society too is pushing in that direction. Elite secondary schools in India are closing down various social science and humanities options for lack of demand. Insufficient funding by the state and the migration of trained people is definitely threatening the social sciences in the South.

Decline of the social sciences and the privileging of the natural sciences has also led to a large scientific community insensitive to the “wisdom” of the social sciences. Indian émigré scientists remain

major funders of fundamentalist and regressive forces like Hindutva.

Also, science graduates and engineers are now entering the Indian Administrative Service, where earlier history and economics graduates dominated. This often leads to a socially insensitive administration that may be technically superior. (The fact that China's rulers today are almost entirely trained scientists and engineers has its social implications.)

Moreover, the neglect of social sciences in the developing world or the south further cements the domination of the social sciences as evolved in the developed world.

The Way Ahead

There is a need to free the social sciences from a "centre"-dominated discourse. In this, the nation states of the developing world still have a role to play. There is a need to resist the excessive critique of the nation states of the developing world, emerging in the developed world, where paradoxically the nation states are extremely powerful and developed.

The states of the developing world must promote academic interactions of social scientists from other developing countries. South-South cooperation must not be focused on only the economic and the geopolitical, with academic interaction being relegated to, what is euphemistically called, Track II diplomacy. This is my experience in attending India-Brazil-South Africa conferences.

A major social scientist from Senegal, Ibrahima Thioub, after a talk delivered by me in France in 2010 about the political and economic challenges faced and handled by India and its historical roots, exclaimed, "We need social scientists from India to come to Senegal, not only the Tatas!" So far, his entire knowledge of the Indian experience had come from scholarship in the west, and this was the first time he got to hear a perspective that emerged from India. Typically, the scholars of the south learn about each other via the north/west, they barely interact with each other. At present, the overwhelming academic interaction is between the centre and the periphery.¹²

It must be recognised that there is no, so-called "neutral" or "objective" social

science that can be pursued anywhere one wishes. The historical specificity of each situation must be recognised and one way of discovering that specificity is increased interaction and comparison with countries that are at a similar historical conjuncture. In fact, even scientists today are recognising that scientific excellence too is related to a context. A brilliant study of Indian scientists in the us showed that despite putting together the best brains selected out of a billion people, their creative contribution at the highest levels was rather meagre. Indian scientists did extremely well in the initial stages of their career, but over time they by and large all ended up becoming nondescript members of an "ensemble" conducted by the "American scientific establishment" and almost never emerged as the "conductors of the orchestra". Science, too, the study argued, is not universal and the scientist's capacity to reach his full potential is critically determined by the societal context he is placed in.

However, "the ethos of the universality of science or rather their understanding of this ethos, made [Indian] scientists disdain ideas of creating institutions and knowledge appropriate to the need of their own societies. Colonialism in science was accepted with hardly any resistance."¹³ As I argued above, the neglect of the social sciences and humanities in the south and the persistence of the colonial/First World discourse in these spheres contributed substantially to this denouement.

Finally, it should be recognised in the social sciences and humanities that alternate routes to modernity are not only possible but have taken place historically. The European "French Revolution" model of transition to modernity and nation building is not necessarily the only and the best model. Other societies have alternate meanings of the notion of "secular" and what constitutes a nation. They have not chosen a path to nationhood that flattens out differences, wipes out linguistic and religious differences. Countries like India and South Africa have chosen to define their nationhood as "unity in diversity". So did the great civilisations of Turkey and Iran, till that attempt succumbed to external pressures.¹⁴

One has to stop "rubbishing" the traditions of the so-called premodern world seen from the eyes of a fixed notion of modernity. The need is to learn from alternate traditions and creatively use it for the present. As Ari Sitas (2008), the brilliant sociologist, playwright and Marxist activist from South Africa, argued in his book on the Truth and Reconciliation experiment, an imaginative use of traditions in Africa was made to successfully launch one of the world's most creative experiments in reconciliation with the erstwhile "oppressor". What constitutes "Justice" need not be restricted to the politico-judicial system evolved historically in the west.

Gandhi, too, was able to tap alternative traditions to build a massive non-violent mass movement against British colonialism without virtually any racial animosity against the whites, or religious fervour against Christians, or animosity against the British people.

There is an utmost need in the social sciences to rediscover the value systems of the "defeated" and not canonise those of the "victors" alone.

NOTES

- 1 Hobsbawm (1995) makes such a periodisation, which has considerable merit.
- 2 For a discussion on aspects of how the rest of the world contributed to the making of modern Europe, see Mukherjee (2010). The title of the paper is a take-off on a recent unabashed defence of imperialism by Niall Ferguson (2003) and was written as part of a global book project initiated by Sven Beckert (Harvard) et al called *The Global Origins of the Old World*, where an attempt was made to arrive at a non-Eurocentric explanation for Europe's rise.
- 3 The figures in this and the previous paragraph are not any wild "nationalist" imagination, but derived from an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development publication, a monumental work tracing the economic history of the world over two thousand years, by Angus Maddison (2007).
- 4 Bipan Chandra has argued this effectively for India. See Chandra (2012), Chapter 6. A similar argument is made for Latin America by Andre Gunder Frank.

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- 5 The remarkable achievement of the Indian early nationalists in this respect is perhaps still not adequately appreciated among scholars in India and remains virtually ignored globally despite the definitive and monumental work on the early nationalists by Bipan Chandra. See Chandra (1966).
- 6 See Wallerstein (1996).
- 7 For a detailed critique of the resurgent colonial positions see Mukherjee (2007).
- 8 For a useful collection on imperialism see Peter J Cain and Mark Harrison (2001). The Introduction to this series surveys the material from the 19th century till the late 20th century. A useful article included in this collection, Patrick Wolfe, "History and Imperialism: A Century of Theory from Marx to Postcolonialism", critically surveys the literature. The Arif Dirlik quotation is from this article. For an important and detailed critique of the treatment of nationalism and popular resistance to colonialism by the "subaltern studies" and associated scholarship, see Mridula Mukherjee (2004), especially Part 2 in this work titled "Interrogating Peasant Historiography: Peasant Perspectives, Marxist Practice and Subaltern Theory". Also, see Mridula Mukherjee (1988). The "subalterns", to my knowledge, have not responded to this critique.
- 9 For a detailed critique of this kind of sectarian social science being promoted in India, see Mukherjee, Mukherjee and Mahajan (2008).
- 10 These essays of Perry Anderson have now been put together in a book. See Anderson (2012). See also Anderson's interview with Praful Bidwai (2012) on this book.
- 11 For a discussion on the Nehruvian effort and its consequences see Chandra, Mukherjee and Mukherjee (2008) and Aditya Mukherjee (2007, 2010).
- 12 In India, the institution I helped create, the Jawaharlal Nehru Institute of Advanced Study (JNIAS) in a very small way tried to address this situation. The JNIAS, in keeping with the

vision of the Jawaharlal Nehru University, of which it is a part, has tried to ensure that the Institute is not dominated by scholars from the First World, that too only west Europe and the US as it always tends to be, and made special efforts to get scholars from the developing world, from Africa, Asia, Latin America, east Europe, etc. Details about the JNIAS may be seen at <http://www.jnu.ac.in/jnias>

- 13 See Swadesh M Mahajan and E C G Sudershan (1986). The authors are eminent physicists who made multiple attempts to set up premier scientific establishments in India and are currently at the University of Texas, Austin, US.
- 14 See, for a brilliant exposition of this view, Tadd Graham Fernee, *Enlightenment, Modernity and Nation-making: India, Turkey, Iran and West Europe*, doctoral thesis at Centre for Historical Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University (Forthcoming 2013, Sage Publications).

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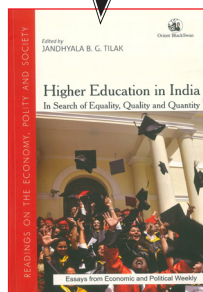
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Pp xiv + 538 Rs 745
ISBN 978-81-250-5131-2
2013

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