Sociology of Globalisation

Perspectives from India

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Globalisation, Modernisation and Development

Northern Discourses and Southern Reality

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While understanding post-independence Indian history and India's social, cultural and economic formations, several social scientific discourses have been made use of. Globalisation, modernisation and development are a few of such discourses. These discourses or social scientific ways of thinking, speaking and writing have come to India from the West. In fact, as a way of looking at social reality, the social science itself came to India from the West. It arrived India during the early twentieth century when the disciplinary sub-divisions were strongly articulated and fortified in the West. Along with disciplinary sub-divisions came the social scientific discourses containing in them models, theories and paradigms that attempted to explain/understand socio-cultural reality from the westerner's vantage point.

In this brief paper, I will attempt a description of these discourses and their ideological roles, pragmatic suggestions and utopistic potentials when they came to India and when attempts were made to build the Indian nation-state on the models provided by these discourses.

Discourse as Knowledge and its Social Basis

That knowledge is a sociologically produced fact in a particular historical context by some groups of historical agents is an insight of

pioneers in the field of sociology of knowledge. Marx (1864), for example, developed a thesis in his early works that all knowledge was a reflection of class interests and such knowledge was the partial understanding of reality and called it *ideology*. He challenged the traditional assumptions about the objective nature of reality and the possibility of obtaining unbiased knowledge.

Mannheim (1952) argued for the study of all ways of thinking and knowing available to people in particular social and historical situations. Some questions to be raised are: (1) What was accepted knowledge? (2) Who decided this? (3) What procedures were used to resolve disputes about truth and error, bias and objectivity, personal beliefs and collective interests?

Interpreted broadly, the term 'knowledge' can be referred to several cultural products: ideas, ideologies, juristic and ethical beliefs, philosophy, science, and technology. In Merton's (1957) view, sociological study of knowledge is not concerned with the truth of ideas; it is concerned with knowing the social functions of idea and their relation with social groups and interests. It studies both truth and error as forms of thought, which are both socially conditioned. His arguments are very pertinent while analysing the social relevance of immigrated discourses of modernisation, development and globalisation in India. "As long as attention was focused on the social determinants of ideology, illusion, myth and moral norms, the sociology of knowledge could not emerge...The sociology of knowledge came into being with the signal hypothesis that even truths were to be held socially accountable, were to be related to the historical society in which they emerged" (Merton 1957). When the political elite that took on the responsibility of building the Indian nation-state that did not exist in history and reconstructing the Indian nation that existed notionally in the subcontinent's civilisational ethos, the true model of desired future, then in currency, was modernisation. Because the western societies were modernised and therefore developed, the urgent task of the newly independent nation-state was to start the belated run towards development through the path of modernisation. The idea that modernisation was a true and hence desired social process as put forwarded by the modernisation theorists can be analysed through the sociology of knowledge perspective.

The social constructivist position views that all knowledge of the world is essentially a human creation rather than a mirror of some independent reality. Combining these notions with the structurational notion of reality, we can posit that all knowledge of the world contributes to the creation of socio-cultural world too. On the basis of these premises of sociology of knowledge, we can argue that the discourses of modernisation, development and globalisation are socio-culturally constructed knowledge systems and compose social reality in turn.

For those who are aware of the above premises of social theory of knowledge it may appear hackneyed to say that the discourse cannot be separated from the reality that it addresses. However, these premises need our attention here for the simple reason that the discourses that are dealt with here are related to their contexts in rather complex ways. The moot question asked here is: how to look at the emigration of discourses, which originated in some socio-cultural and historical context to make sense of that context, to some other contexts? Because they are of alien origin, should we reject such discourses or contextualise them or build altogether new and alternatives ones or reformulate them/indigenise them?

With regard to modernisation and globalisation these questions appear anachronistic because of certain reasons. The reality addressed by them is human reality in general. They are not simply theories of mere academic concerns, but foregrounded in them are ideological compulsions and international political praxis. In this sense modernisation, development and globalisation are discourses; social theories are just a few of their components.

Globalisation, Modernisation and Development: Discourses and Ideologies

First and foremost we must note that the above three discourses can be looked as both ideological projects and conceptualisations of social change.

Globalisation is the so-called buzzword used extensively to refer to the socio-cultural and economic processes that have been dominating the current juncture in world history. A few decades back, the nomenclature characterising the nature of social change was modernisation. Whereas the former has entered the social scientific repertoire just a few decades ago, the latter had been in currency for

more than three centuries. Both these concepts denote processes that have been rooted in the enlightenment agenda of ensuring progress and development on the lines conceived and envisaged by the occidental elite—philosophical-intellectual, cultural and political.

The modernisation theory, as an intellectual discourse, notes Johnson (2000), emerged in the 1950s as an explanation of how the industrial societies of North America and Western Europe developed, especially through the growth of industrial capitalism beginning in the eighteenth century. The theory developed during the cold war between the First and the Second World. It is the product of the ideological competition between capitalism and socialism as viable framework for development in the Third World and the newly independent nation-states. On its ideological agenda has been the desire of the Western powers to convince the Third World countries that economic development and social justice were possible under capitalism. Three major assumptions of the theory are: (1) societies develop in fairly predictable stages through which they become increasingly complex; (2) development depends primarily on the importance of technology and the knowledge required to make use of it; and (3) as a result of technological transformation and increased control over nature a number of political and social changes come about. The cardinal belief of this discourse is that progress is inevitable given the continued rationalisation of the world.

The modernisation theory elucidates the characteristics of modernisation as a socio-cultural process such as increased levels of schooling, development of mass media, democratisation of socio-political institutions, increased sophistication and accessibility of transport and communication, increased population mobility, nuclearisation of families, bureaucratisation of organisational sphere, increased division of labour, and decline of religion in the public sphere.

What is globalisation? Defining globalisation narrowly, many critics of the modernisation and development project conceive it as the conscious attempts by the First World to globalise its socio-cultural and economic organisation to continue its hegemonic dominance but without success. Discourses that followed such a definition argued for whither development. A clear statement of the same is found in McMichael (2000:277):

Development was perhaps the 'master' concept of the social sciences, but it is no longer clear if this continues to be the case, because the concept now appears to be in crises. The nineteenth century European social thinkers, who gave us our theories of development, saw social development evolving along rational industrial lines. Eventually, the European colonies were expected to make the same journey. Development spoke to the human condition, with a universal expectation. This expectation was formalised in the development project, but it proved to be an unrealisable ideal. It has been replaced with another unrealisable ideal, the globalisation project ... it is old wine in a new bottle.

Now, therefore, there is a plea for rethinking development to find out alternatives to development such as sustainable development and participatory development. Therefore, modernisation, development and globalisation are not spontaneous socio-cultural processes but have more discursive and reflexive elements. They are also discourses that have dominated human thinking and planned action. Because they originated in and disseminated from the technologically superior part of the human civilisation and culture, they have assumed hegemonic proportions and are setting standards for actions in all spheres of life. The nation-states like India respond to this through varied plans for national development and the common men and women too respond to this as per their perceptions of the nature of the new social order.

Oriental Reality and Occidental Discourses: Ideologies and Attempts at Understanding and Making Reality

The orthodox theories of development as they had been developed in the West have been challenged by the cultural and ecological critiques of such theories. Some theorists plead for their abandonment and for some others the Western industrialised countries still serve as the model for the rest of the world. Both these views are extreme (Guha 1994: 20).

The social changes in the local and the regional cultures now need to be addressed by locating them in the global-national-regional-local continuum and also by looking into the ideological components of programmes and actions towards directed/desired changes. The question what should be the natɪe and direction of

change is central to the issues of desired changes. What role the social scientists can play? Should they just objectively analyse the transformative roles of ideological projects like development and globalisation? Or should they facilitate formulating counter ideologies?

Plea for indigenisation of social scientific programmes was a long-standing attempt at the backdrop of hegemonic dominance of occidental discourses in making sense of and transforming oriental socio-cultural reality. For Saran (1962a, 1962b, 1968) indigenisation of social science discourse meant total rejection of the occidental models; however, for his teachers (Mukherjee 1958; Mukherjee 1960) the social scientific task was a new synthesis between physical sciences, philosophy and social sciences (quoted in Bose 1995: 2). Now, if we try to remodel our social science discourses on social change on these lines there is all possibility that we will be labelled as *Hindutvavadis*. Notwithstanding this fear of academic and political stigmatisation, as recommended by Guha (1994: 20), the idea and ideologies of these early critics of the discourses of modernisation and development need to be reappraised. Also relevant is the redefinition of indigenisation discourse by blending it with the glocalisation discourse developed by Robertson (1995a).

As globalisation, modernisation and development imply in them conscious attempts at making reality on certain perceived and desired future by many people who are unequally situated, the dilemmas abound. The social expressions of these dilemmas need to be studied along with the possibilities for future (Guha 1994: 21).

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