

Absence of Nomenclatorial Uniformity in Indian Cultural Studies as a Stand-Alone Discipline in the Indian Universities/Institutions of Eminence!

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ABSTRACT

Indian Cultural Studies cannot claim to be a new entrant in the arena of Indian higher education. More than three decades have elapsed ever since it made its presence felt as a discipline in the field of higher education in India. A journey that began in earnest, has since been trapped into a quagmire of complexities and equivocations. Besides a few Universities adopting it as a STAND-ALONE entity, it has unfortunately recorded a ridiculous regression as per the statistics of the last three decades. Furthermore, different institutions of eminence have embraced the discipline without any nomenclatorial uniformity. A close scrutiny of the curricula of these institutions would openly reveal that the discipline is still an assortment of either similar/dissimilar disciplines or it is an amorphously conceived entity. This paper is a vehement critique of the glib assertions of many an academic that Indian Cultural Studies is a stand-alone discipline at Indian Universities and it is also a work in progress!

Keywords: Indian cultural studies, discipline, stand-alone entity, complexities, equivocations, regression, universities and institutions of eminence, nomenclatorial uniformity, amorphous, similar and dissimilar disciplines.

INTRODUCTION

Indian Cultural Studies, as some Ivory-tower scholars believe, has made rapid strides into the firmaments of higher education; an ostensible claim that bears testimony to the cognitive dissonance that abounds the scholarly and intellectual circles. More than three decades have uneventfully blown past since this discipline

first found its feet as a stand-alone entity on the curricular horizon of Indian Universities. Yet, for a discerning pair of eyes, it is all very self-evident that Indian Cultural Studies as an independent entity at different institutions of eminence has remained amorphous in terms of the nomenclatorial uniformity required of its curricula. The primary purpose of this article is to throw insights into the contemporary scenario where a morbid ecology has overwhelmed Indian Cultural Studies as a discipline in various institutions of eminence. This author has read a substantial number of scholarly articles on the subject. Respects are certainly due to the erudition of every intellectual who has offered to illustrate how much of water has flowed under the bridge ever since Indian Cultural Studies found its way into the country's universities or accredited institutions. However, it is time to stick one's neck out and say that most of these 'scholarly articles' have for mysterious reasons, fallen into a trap of what a psychologist defines as confirmation bias. An honourable exception that deserves mention here is Dr. Ratheesh Radhakrishnan's candid article Cultural Studies In India, A Preliminary Report On Institutionalization

(<http://cscs.res.in/dataarchive/textfiles/textfile.2008-07-04.3578111600/file>) A close perusal of the article throws light on the empathy this eminent academic has for the current plight of Indian Cultural Studies!

Is Indian Cultural Studies, a new entrant in the Universities?

The Academic circles have been deeply entrapped in the belief perseverance that Indian Cultural Studies is a new entrant in the Indian Universities or institutions of eminence. The mythical belief also gives room for the self-serving argument that these are early days for the discipline to develop as an independent entity. The OSTRICH EFFECT (a cognitive dissonance or bias) is so apparent that these erudite scholars believe that a time span of three decades is too good to be productive as far as Cultural Studies as an independent entity is concerned!! Despite evidences to the contrary of many other independent disciplines (relatively new entrants!) being

big draws in the Indian Universities, these scholars or the intellectuals continue to be overwhelmed by confirmation bias that is difficult to dislodge!

How does one define Cultural Studies?

The phrase 'cultural studies' throws in ambiguities and equivalence if one looks for a cursory definition. However, with some equanimity and perseverance, one could certainly arrive at a nuanced definition of the phrase. The following recommended reads would certainly not disappoint us if we were to embark upon an endeavour to address the complexities in the definition of the phrase many scholars grapple with at the first or rather cursory reading:

Recommended reads:

Bennett, Tony, Lawrence Grossberg, Meaghan Morris, and Raymond Williams. *New Keywords : A Revised Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub., 2005.
Grossberg, Lawrence. *Bringing it all Back Home : Essays on Cultural Studies*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.
Grossberg, Lawrence. *Cultural Studies in the Future Tense*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010.
Grossberg, Lawrence, Cary Nelson, and Paula A. Treichler. *Cultural Studies*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
Storey, John. *What is Cultural Studies?: A Reader*. London; New York: Arnold, 1996.

No academic discipline in humanities and social sciences would allow itself to be defined concretely and without a complexity if one were not to be prepared to look beyond a cursory glance. How would one define Psychology, Sociology and Anthropology? How have the off shoot disciplines like clinical Psychology, Social Psychology and Social Anthropology evolved and developed to be stand-alone disciplines? Credits are certainly due to the painstaking endeavours that must have preceded the task of assigning definitions to these disciplines as stand-alone entities?

Indian Cultural Studies-the arguments on equivocation

Many scholars argue that INDIAN CULTURAL STUDIES requires a definition that transcends the shady boundaries of ambiguity and equivocation. The very word CULTURE took centuries to evolve in terms of a definition that had been rejected, critiqued, challenged and even resented for centuries. Finally, for all those who can discern well, culture has its

definition today (born out of a consensus drawn from various scholarly interpretations over the centuries).And the definition is nomenclatorial. What is sauce to the gander should invariably be sauce to the goose!

Indian Cultural as a discipline in Universities and institutions of eminence in India

Dr. Ratheesh Radhakrishnan's article (a report) cited with the link has already dealt with the samples of how EFLU (English And Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad), Tezpur University and Centre For The Study Of Culture And Society, Bangalore deal with Indian Cultural Studies as a stand-alone/ inter-disciplinary entity. Any further discussion on the same would only render this article redundant. However, this author would like to add that the curricula followed by different universities as regards Indian Cultural studies are amorphous, ambiguous and equivocal. The curricula of disciplines like Sociology, Anthropology, Media Studies and English studies have a nomenclatorial

uniformity across the Universities in the country notwithstanding a few value-additions in the form of extra credits chosen by different universities. This nomenclatorial uniformity is conspicuous by its absence in Indian Cultural Studies as a discipline.

The absence of nomenclatorial Uniformity

There is no gain saying the fact that Universities and institutions of eminence are well within their rights to design the curricula for the courses they offer. India has a federal system under which such discretionary powers to institutions operating in different geographical zones are very much part of the country's rich political ethos! However, debates and conflicts of ideologies crop up when discretionary powers lend credence to alleged arbitrariness and self-serving biases! Every institution of eminence has designed its curriculum under heads such as LITERARY & CULTURAL STUDIES, ENGLISH&CULTURAL STUDIES or CULTURAL STUDIES. The following links will shed light on how the curricula are conceived by EFLU, FLAME UNIVERSITY, TEZPUR UNIVERSITY, CHRIST UNIVERSITY, TATA INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES and CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY:

https://www.efluniversity.ac.in/cultural_studies.php

<https://www.flame.edu.in/academics/ug/program-structure/major-minor-courses/literary-and-cultural-studies>

<http://www.tezu.ernet.in/dtcaf/>

<https://christuniversity.in/commerce-and-management/business-studies-and-social-sciences/ma-english-with-cultural-studies/syllabus/428/2018>

<https://www.tiss.edu/view/6/mumbai-campus/school-of-media-and-cultural-studies/about-us-http://cscs.res.in/>

There are many other Universities and institutions of eminence that offer

CULTURAL STUDIES either as a stand-alone or as part of another entity. A quick online search would throw in more details. But, here there are TWO pertinent questions to the Universities or institutions that offer this discipline in the formats mentioned above:

1. Are There Challenges Or Complexities In Developing This Discipline As A Stand Alone Entity?
2. Why Is There Such A Pronounced Absence Of Nomenclatorial Uniformity In The Curricula Of This Discipline Designed By Different Universities And Institutions Of Eminence?

To be fair, credits must be given to CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY, BENGALURU for looking at the discipline as a stand-alone entity and providing academic and research opportunities for its further enrichment.

As regards the other institutions whose links are provided above, a cursory or deeper look into their curricula and the course credits offered, would leave a discerning researcher dazed! The aspirants of Post Graduate courses in EFLU have a 'bounty of autonomy' to earn credits in courses of their choices (mostly media studies, literature or some other allied studies) and be awarded transcripts that qualify them as Post Graduates in Cultural studies! Dr.Ratheesh Radhakrishnan in his article(a report) provides a sample of the modus operandi of course credits in MA-Literary and Cultural Studies at EFLU.

The Morbid Ecology

The absence of STAND-ALONE status and the absence of nomenclatorial uniformity in curricula have fast become the morbid ecology that Indian Cultural Studies in general and Indian Universities or institutions of eminence in particular are yet to outgrow. The reluctance in acknowledging Indian Cultural Studies as an independent entity and the indifferent use of federal powers vested in the Universities (and institutions of eminence) in designing a

uniform curriculum will only continue to aggravate this morbidity!

Scholarly biases

Biases and cognitive dissonances always abound every domain of work or profession. As regards the scholarly biases on the subject, we have ONE in every TEN scholars exhibiting a dissonance widely and popularly known as CONFIRMATION BIAS. This is one cognitive dissonance where in the victim looks for supporting information to confirm and support his existing beliefs despite there being proofs to the contrary. Most of the scholarly articles on Indian Cultural Studies and its status as a stand-alone discipline demonstrate how confirmation bias and the resultant belief perseverance have overwhelmed the authors, especially men of letters. The dissonance further leads to fallacies such as OSTRICH EFFECT, HYPERBOLIC DISCOUNTING, BASE RATE NEGLECT and SEMMELWEIS REFLEX. The last fallacy mentioned is the direct outcome of confirmation bias; a mental disposition to reject new findings because they contradict the existing ones! The other fallacies mentioned are well-explained or illustrated by psychological studies. Alternatively, an online search shall indeed shed some insights on them.

Are there political predilections?

One question that troubles unfettered academic minds is an apprehension that there could be political predilections in designing/ popularizing Indian Cultural Studies as a stand-alone discipline. This link-<https://samvada.org/2016/articles/cultural-studies/> will shed some light on a certain political predilection that resents Indian Cultural Studies as a discipline. Are the views expressed the author's own or do these views reflect a certain political sentiment shared by a herd of political acolytes? Is there a political belief (veiled or open) today that has an axe to grind against Indian Cultural Studies as a discipline? The

article authored by Prasanna. A. Deshpande, an Assistant Professor at Fergusson College, Pune describes Cultural Studies as a discipline intended to subvert India's ancient culture and promote modernism as advocated by the Marxist or Leftist ideologues. While one has to agree that Marxist predilections have contributed to the evolution of Cultural Studies, there are no available evidences in the course curricula across the country to support the glib assertions made by the author of this article. The Disclaimer by the publisher about the views being purely the author's is ludicrous as the afore-said views are laced with political predilections and affinity a reputed academic publication usually discourages. That the article appears in a non-academic publication eventually helps the publisher enjoy the benefit of doubt.

The Role of UGC

University Grants Commission is the nodal authority that monitors the central, private and deemed-to be universities in the country. Through its various advisories, notifications and exhortations, the UGC has urged the universities and all institutions under it to promote inter-disciplinary paradigms. And for the last two decades, the UGC has encouraged the formation of new disciplines. However, this nodal authority has been reticent about the way the curricula of Indian Cultural Studies have been designed by various universities and institutions across the country. Nevertheless, here one has to drive consolation from the axiomatic proposition that bureaucratic blues are always in matrimony with India's nodal authorities controlling all domains!

Could Cultural Studies be detached from similar and dissimilar disciplines?

Integrity in perspectives would demand that Indian Cultural studies be detached from similar and dissimilar disciplines to allow it the status of a stand-alone discipline. In this context, there are strong opinions in the academic circles to the effect that the discipline would not

survive without being taught/studied alongside other disciplines(similar or dissimilar).These are passionate opinions backed up by no tangibility studies. For, emotions are far from tangible. If CSCS Bengaluru could do it without being plagued by excuses, the other institutions are doing their cause no harm by taking a leaf out of this institution's book! It is a travesty to award a candidate a Post Graduate Degree in Cultural studies when he/she has demonstrated his understanding/knowledge predominantly in other disciplines and (as allowed by an institution's course credit policy!) has apparently gained very few perspectives on Cultural Studies. But the institutional policy of the curriculum being an assortment of different disciplines could seldom be held against the candidate. The shoe pinches elsewhere!!!

CONCLUSION

Academic integrity is important in standing up to a demand for nomenclatorial uniformity in the curricula of different universities. Furthermore, it is time to shed the confirmation bias that Cultural Studies cannot be detached from allied or similar-looking disciplines. Academics need to write to the nodal authorities and the government demanding that the issue be addressed. Scholarly articles should abandon 'platitudes' and propound and expound new paradigms that could help the cause of Cultural studies as a stand-alone entity.

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LINKS

<http://cscs.res.in/dataarchive/textfiles/textfile.2008-07-04.3578111600/file>https://www.epluniversity.ac.in/cultural_studies.php
<https://www.flame.edu.in/academics/ug/program-structure/major-minor-courses/literary-and-cultural-studies>
<http://www.tezu.ernet.in/dtcaf/>
<https://christuniversity.in/commerce-and-management/business-studies-and-social-sciences/ma-english-with-cultural-studies/syllabus/428/2018>
<https://www.tiss.edu/view/6/mumbai-campus/school-of-media-and-cultural-studies/about-us>
<http://cscs.res.in/>
<https://samvada.org/2016/articles/cultural-studies/>

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