Mainstreaming the Re-orientation Approach in Communication Education: Nepal's Perspective

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Article Info

ABSTRACT

Though communication education in Nepal is largely remained focused on the exogenous source(s) for a long time ongoing endeavors in the recent years – especially in the field of communication theory – have been forwarding the agenda of a paradigm shift in the communication discipline. The ongoing paradigm shift is looking beyond de-Westernization and forwarding the notion of "Re-orientation." De-Westernization has been the dominant perspective while critiquing the theorization of communication, but there needs "Re-orientation" for re-centering indigenous perspectives in any discipline. Hence, it is pertinent to observe and promote the re-orientation initiatives in the discipline. Drawing on instances both from the East and the West, an appraisal on contemporary endeavors to re-orient communication theory towards philosophical and cultural heritage of Nepal has been presented.

INTRODUCTION

As it has been discussed elsewhere (Adhikary, 2011a, 2012a, 2013a, 2013c, 2014a), as a modern discipline, communication has been problematic in the context of non-Western countries like Nepal. Whereas communication is familiar to them as a process which is inherent to every human being, it was institutionalized as an exogenous discipline in the academia. Consequently, communication education in Nepal largely remained focused on the exogenous source(s) for a long time.

The non-Western countries, including Nepal, had three options while they were developing curricula of communication and/or allied disciplines. First, they could have drawn on native perspectives thereby primarily incorporating indigenous concepts, if not theories and models, of communication. Second, it was much easier for them to adopt solely the Western discursive paradigm. Third, they could have adopted comparative approach thus incorporating both indigenous and Western contents, and facilitating 'indigenization'[1]. Of these, the adoption of the Western paradigm has been the general practice as it suits the project of globalization, which legitimizes unidirectional gateway for the flow of information.

Meanwhile, even though Westernization-as-Globalization perspective is still dominant for the discipline of communication, the emerging practices signify an ongoing paradigm shift. The ongoing paradigm shift is not limited to the discourse of de-Westernization; rather, it is forwarding the agenda to more advanced level in which the emphasis is on re-orientation of the discipline for re-centering Nepal/ *Bharatavarsha* in the scholarship. In fact, an increasing emphasis, though in a very slow motion, to re-orient communication scholarship in order to embrace indigenous communication tradition(s) can be observed.

DISCUSSION

Re-Orientation: Beyond De-Westernization

Communication scholars across the world are beginning to realize the multicultural, multidisciplinary and multi-paradigmatic nature of the discipline. Theorizing communication from Asian perspectives is advancing thereby generating the discourse of *Asiacentricity*[2]. The advancement is expected to open further avenues in the field of communication research and theory. The notion and discourse of de-Westernization have certainly contributed for critiquing the theorization of communication and opening avenues for non-Western scholarship. However, the framework of de-Westernization is insufficient for furthering the agenda of re-centering indigenous scholarship in the communication discipline.

Now, the time has come for communication scholars to put the agenda beyond de-Westernization. They should not be limited to de-center the Western discursive paradigm only; rather, locate themselves to different cultural centers such as South Asia. In other words, the communication

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[1] The two terms – indigenous and indigenization – have been distinguished thus: Whereas indigenous theories are native, rooted in specific cultures, and emphasize the human experience in specific cultures; indigenization refers to processes of transforming U.S. theories so that they are appropriate in other cultures (Gudykunst, 2005, p. 85).

[2] For further discussion on Asiacentricity, see: Miike, 2010a, 2010b, 2012.

scholarship should not be limited in just de-Westernizing communication theory[3], but, more importantly, the emphasis should be given to re-orient communication theory towards, for instance, *Bharatavarshiya* culture for mainstreaming indigenous theorization of communication. As discussed elsewhere (Adhikary, 2014b), the communication discipline requires re-orientation and there are sufficient grounds for that.

The importance of re-orienting communication discipline in general and communication theory, in particular, should be well understood. *Bharatavarsha* represents old civilization with a known history of thousands of years and has a distinct cultural identity of its own. *Bharatavarsha* is the inheritor of a culturally rich civilization rooted to Veda, and also home to many non-Vedic and post-Vedic cultures. Communication is not a new concept for *Bharatavarsha*. Likewise, communication theorization is also not alien endeavor here. Rather, both communication and theorizing communication are indigenous here. There are many traditional, theories and methods, which can be unearthed to garner their contemporary relevance and significance.

By virtue of insights on fundamentals of human communication, many classical Sanskrit treatises have contemporary value even in the age of mediated communication (Adhikary, 2014a, 2015). Even a mere perusal of the contents of many classical Sanskrit texts, including *Natyashastra*, *Vakyapadiya*, Jaimini's *Mimamsa Sutra*, and so on, shows that they treat of the basic concerns of any treatise on communication. In fact, the abovementioned treatises have been explored from communication perspective in order to theorize communication (for instance: Adhikary, 2003, 2009, 2010, 2012c, 2014a, 2016).

Moving ahead of de-Westernization and re-orienting the communication discipline is crucial for realizing communication theory as an indigenous (as opposed to exogenous) entity that is part and parcel of own scholarship. Communication scholars have apparently shown their vitality in multicultural turn of communication discipline and in this regard the role of non-Western in general, and Nepali communication scholars, in particular, is crucial.

From Theory to Methodology of Theory Building

Theorizing communication from different perspectives is advancing. There seems growing emphasis on theory in recent years even in Asia and *Bharatavarsha*. In 2003, the *Sadharanikaran* Model of Communication (SMC) was developed and presented (Adhikary, 2003). The SMC has been further discoursed, revised and improved in due course of time (Adhikary, 2009, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b, 2014a, 2014c, 2016). Thus, there have been 'formulations' of the SMC. Moreover, there is scope for further revisions, improvements, and adjustments in the model.

The SMC is a representation of communication process from *Bharatavarshiya*/Hindu perspective. It is a systematic description in diagrammatic form of a process of attaining mutual understanding, commonness or oneness among people. It illustrates how the communicating parties interact in a system (i.e., the process of *sadharanikaran*) for the attainment of saharidayata. *Sahridayata* is the core concept upon which the meaning of *sadharanikaran* resides. It is the state of common orientation, commonality, mutual understanding or oneness. Communicating parties become

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[3] Also see: Ayish, 2003; Curran and Park, 2000; Dissanayake, 2009; Gunaratne, 2008, 2010; Kim, 2002; Miike, 2010a; Ray, 2012.

Sahridayas with the completion of the process of *Sadharanikaran*. In this light, the SMC envisions communication for communion.

Another communication model has been developed from *Mimamsa* philosophy (Adhikary, 2012c). In this course, first the Bhatta School of *Mimamsa* philosophy has been explored from the perspective of communication and its relevance for the communication discipline has been examined. Then, classical *Mimamsa* texts have been drawn on in order to theorize communication thereby constructing various elements of the communication process as envisioned in the philosophy. Finally, it presents the *Bhatta-Mimamsa* model of communication, in which the elements of communication can be classified under four key-themes (namely: *Karta*, *Sadhan*, *Itikartavyata*, and *Sadhya*). The model shows how the *Bhavakas* (communicating parties) accomplish communication and the persuasion for Karma is attained.

In fact, there are many traditional concepts, theories and methods in South Asia, which can be unearthed to garner their contemporary relevance and significance. The terminologies, approaches, strategies, assumptions, and findings may be different; but there exist a vast number of texts, which are relevant to communication studies, even from Western paradigms. These must be consciously explored, appraised and interpreted. And, they are to be rearticulated in such a way that they bear own cultural-intellectual identity, and also have a vision for contemporary society.

Through an exposition from a classical Sanskrit text *Charaka Samhita* (Adhikary, 2013b), it is shown that there existed *Bharatavarshiya* version of theory and theorization. As discussed in the exposition, the definition of theory outlined in the classical Sanskrit text corresponds to the notion of theory in the strict sense of modern natural science. Meanwhile, it is broader enough to embrace modern definitions of theory in the humanities and social sciences disciplines too. In addition to defining theory and its typology, an approach of theory building is also presented there (ibid.).

This indicates toward the vast scope of classical Sanskrit texts for developing a methodology of theory building. In other words, the evidence of theorization and methods of theory building in ancient Sanskrit texts certainly encourages for re-orienting the discipline of communication. Now, communication/media scholars should move further, and explore and employ indigenous research methodology in order to theorize the practice and to practice the theories.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

A cursory search of the curricula of many South Asian universities shows inclusion of at least some classical concepts from Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and others into the course contents. For instance, the theory of *Rasa* and theory of *Sadharanikaran* have got broad acceptance across South Asian universities as basic communication theories. A growing interest on classical Sanskrit texts is significantly witnessed in conferences and seminars of communication scholars in Nepal and India these days. Such endeavors substantiate that the field of communication theory has been witnessing a paradigm shift thereby promoting multicultural and multidisciplinary theorization of communication. In fact, such instances mark a forthcoming trend of communication scholarship.

The ongoing paradigm shift has moved the communication discipline beyond de-Westernization and put forward the agenda of re-orientation. Institutional support from universities and sustainable efforts by the academia are essential in order to promote the re-orientation initiatives in the

discipline. Only then, the vision of re-centering indigenous scholarship of Nepal and India – and of many other countries – through the field of communication theory can become a reality.

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