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The Turn of Postscript Narratives

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Recalcitrant narratives are ever relegated to the status of dispensable appendages of dominant ideological and epistemic regimes. Vadiya's paper captures the turn of such postscript narratives' epistemic concerns that are gaining critical significance in African, Latin American and Asian countries, emerging from intellectual and sociopolitical movements within and outside the Western context.

The driving force being the inadequacy of Eurocentric philosophical and epistemology to engage with contra Western cosmologies and the critical recognition that epistemology is no pure science but mediated by ideologies, shaped by historical factors and undergird by institutionalized epistemic suppression and entrenched in power. Such turn fundamentally foregrounds fidelity to 'fact' and universe of study rather than acquiesce to epistemic mimesis and has immense potential to bring in critical reflexivity into newer disciplines like exclusion and discrimination created precisely due to the failure of traditional disciplines to deal with issues concerning the marginalized.

Prior to making some very preliminary points to think about future directions in exploration of these issues would require recognizing problems dominant epistemic practices pose, especially in thinking about marginality in the Indian context. Proposed here is a promising mode of enquiry to disentangle the over-determined idea of the oppressed, i.e., the aesthetic frame.

An Essence of Oppression

It is increasingly recognized that the predominance of western epistemology based on dualism, certitude, and mechanistic conception of the universe is culmination of negation of contra episteme, worldviews and technologies. Its methodological and ideological epistemic filters occlude range of ideas, experiences and processes from its purview that can barely pass through scientific rationalist sieve or appear within a specific form; power should appear in the political, reason must be untainted by emotion, fact must correspond to the principle of bivalence, and true belief could be certified as knowledge if it arrived in a particular mode, any non-rational detour could consign it to false knowledge – deformed episteme, methodless technologies, illogical mythical, irrational sensorial etc.

Thus, the simmering discontent in non-western societies, especially its marginalized collectivities, against a soliloquy of the western rational self which entitles itself as arbitration of true knowledge; and whose provenance of authority is expanded and reinforced by its apologists outside itself by virtue of institutionalization of epistemic authority in the image of the western 'form'. Such that the West is the transcendental form, and replication being impossibility, the rest are at best 'copies' or duplicitous entities whose trajectory is deeply bound to the center.

For the diverse ideologies, grounded in positivism and enlightenment philosophy, the non-Western subjects (especially the marginalized amongst them) are the feral boys, who have accidentally strayed into civilization and ought step into universal history to reclaim humanness. Such modernist discourses riddled with a priori conceptions have impoverished

the oppressed and resulted in mystification and entrenched impertinence towards other cognitive modes has caused damage both in representations of and self-representations by the non-west/marginalized on the validity and relevance of their forms of knowing, and technologies.

The crisis in Marxist politics and ideological framework, despite its brief revolutionary spells and significant role in generating radical consciousness in few regions, is too evident despite its entrenchment in the academia. While it has rendered native categories and non-western world as regressive deviance the crisis is reflected in politics too, with exit of oppressed from the Marxist bands, paradoxically due to its own convoluted caste bias and negative valuation of their worldviews.

Inversely, the Subaltern subject is a peculiar species whose appearance and consciousness in finitude nature of appearances/traces is at best mediated, its very essence or ephemeral ontology simply lost in the many layers of obfuscating consciousness; an ontology of the disembodied subject. Thus, the Freirean pedagogic vision was in India at best an inadvertent idyllic where the epistemic base for liberation couldn't take off, given the many 'lacks' in the subject/cognitive agent and distorted worldview and materiality. It is against this history of many interstices in cartographies of repression that B. Sousas Santos's subversive stance resonates and foregrounds break from the epistemic center as a necessary condition for emancipation.

Diversity and Homogeneity

Thus, standpoint perspectives' critique of positivism marks a fundamental shift making legible/accountable cognitive agency and diversification and revitalization of discursive space. Positivist epistemology's conception of scientism and universalism (unadulterated by particularities) is consequence of homogenization, which allows for transposition of singular particularity (of the West) as the universal. Scientific method by implication is premised on the presupposition that truths and representations are products of cognitive process free from cultural and ideological bias.

Thus, the conception of the knower as outside the world of enquiry by implication reinforces a positivist common sense, that errors/distortions are solely a consequence of method, absolving the epistemic agency (complicity/accountability) of the knower, precluding recognition of the nature of relation between epistemology and worldview. While, epistemology originates in the need for exposition and justification of ontological and metaphysical truth claims. As such it creates discursive space both within particular philosophical tradition and outside it for debate and justification of its claims and thus epistemology is a collective dialogical process and open to critique and revision.

Thus, within Indian philosophical tradition deeply antithetical ideas (eg., multiplicity of standpoints on truth or ideas of self/selves/non-self) could be disputed/conceded as a consequence of epistemic plurality and debate (as exemplified in the theory of sources of knowledge).

Worldviews/structures are founded on cultural substratum with their own rendering of the ontology of ideas/mental artifacts- i.e., the cognitive, unconscious/conscious and experiential states by which axiomatic truths are arrived at from the seamless flows between intuition, reason, emotion etc. Such ontology is complexly interwoven with the distinctive conceptions of self and effect the ways in which the knower is defined in relation to the objects of knowledge or the phenomenal world. Application of a mechanistic worldview or historical materialism is incapable of engaging with entirely different universalisms opposed to it.

Also, while dominant codified systems offer coherent theories in grasping the essence of ideas, understanding oral tradition is beset with problems over form and validity of knowledge. In speech traditions codified text (of art, technology or knowledge practices) where knowledge and skills are transmitted orally by collectivities textualization marks a crisis in a culture. Text at best is instrumental for purposes of legible affinity or entitlements rarely a referent for practice or validation of epistemic claims.¹ Failure to appreciate such epistemic practices have resulted in repression of technologies and cognitive systems of the marginalized as invalid forms of knowledge.

Genuinely Overcoming Domination

This double bind of falsified traditional representations and positivist accounts have led to creative explosion of other representative forms that enable more critical introspection as in literature, fiction and the autobiographical. Dominant ‘disciplinary matrix’ overlooks ‘crisis’ as a dissoluble diversion. Such politics of knowledge fetters the marginalized in a double bind; tradition has its own pernicious facets while modernity, (its antidote to internal repression and non-recognition), and its evocation serve as a justification of the credibility of such episteme and politics.

Struggles of emancipation find legitimacy within a specific mode, i.e., through eliciting proof of their abomination-the prototypical ideal of the oppressed, and irreverence to oppressive tradition. This entails a conscious repression of histories and traditional forms of cultural critique, grounded in a logic and worldview that is in contradiction with modern values. It is within this contradictory pull of modern/negation of tradition and pathos and pre-modern/positive self-affirmation that the consciousness of the oppressed wrestles given the distortion of these spaces with the privileging of textual and singular dominant historical and cultural representations. Abandoning such discourses constricts routes to retrace the lost epistemic/metaphysical ground and its non-redundancy via folk cultures and further obstructs the resources for a grounded critical subject.

¹ Observations are based on folk/marginalized communities of Southern India wherein knowledge is hereditarily transmitted. For example, communities have cultural mechanisms for transmission of particular types of knowledge within each community, for example among the leather workers, potters, ironsmiths, masons, sculptors, stone cutters, artists, toddy tapers, rope makers, weavers, washermen, healers, acrobats, jugglers, nomads, and tribals etc.

It would be erroneous to assume that the domain of the marginalized is distorted/disjointed part of the whole, incapable of unfolding universals or coherent systems. Claims to validity of such cognitive systems and technologies rest on its firm anchoring within the whole. By nature of inherence constituent parts of a whole possess the potential to reveal the whole. Thus, the margins is a site of immense potentiality, as signifier of a space that has no fixed or categorical relation with any single institutionalized or hegemonic discourse. Its potentiality rests in refractory power and thereby offers pathways to retrace the basic organizing principles of Indic systems of knowledge.

The evidence for such epistemology is offered in the perceptible folk/marginalized non-androcentric worldview. Such universe as a play of elements, the distinctive ontology of the elemental body, transfigures the conception of and interrelatedness between spirit and matter, non-human entities, spatiality and the many planes of existence and states of consciousness and their relevance for relating to realities beyond conscious mind, the value attributed to work untethered with profit, meaning of and relation with land, difference/hierarchies, ethics, the cyclical nature of time, etc.

This metaphysical substratum mediated by and enlivened through enactments, myths, rituals, customs as part of coherent system is formative of Indic universalism and it is this shared ground that is expressive of the inherence of truth claims of the marginalized discourses. Undeniably, presentation and disputations against dominance, violations and counterclaims manifest within this form and experience. The material artifact, a product of collective labor, itself becomes a universal metaphor for positive self-affirmation, and re-imagination of the universe, radically centering collective self in cosmology. The modern conceptions of labor, materiality and individualism substitute such aesthetic with a mechanistic and atomistic worldview.

The Validity of Validity

The hegemonic deontic texts and archives with a purposive language enunciate a desired ideal and a 'fact' isolating it from the diffuse cognitive/cultural system and can barely provide a clue to the aesthetic. What then are the sources of validity of such folk beliefs and experience? This question strikes at the core of any epistemology founded in orality; 'uncodified' technologies, cognitive systems and experience and problematizes the naive idea of the detached knower and the distant object of knowledge. Such an enquiry necessitates understanding the general folk epistemic orientation and the identifiable connections between the folk and the classical to grasp the continuities and disjunctions.

The folk is the proximate arche and constitutes the substratum of a culture. Pervasion of orality signifies its primal quality in virtue of which it transcends the definitive value attributed to it in philosophical and epistemic practices. Thus, its validity lies as much as its locus within the general knowledge tradition as its inherence to ontology and synchrony with the essence of its cosmology. Given the current limitations some very basic links can be identified between folk modes of knowing and 'formal' epistemology.

Word or testimony/sabda is recognized, though not uncontested, among most schools of Indian epistemology as a valid source of knowledge, and has two broad conceptualizations;

one in terms of the self-evident, infallible truth of the Vedic scriptures and the other the truth claim of statements of reliable person accompanied by necessary conditions (absence of deceit and specific form of presentation). Uniqueness of orality is evidenced by the creative combination of various skills of narration, argumentation and presentation/artistic representation in highly stylized form involving a sensibility and intimacy different from Mimamsa hermeneutics and Nyaya logic.

Another shared epistemic resource is analogy/upamana with divergent conceptualization as source of knowledge and subject to intricate analysis. Generally it is a specific type of cognition generating new knowledge through similarities or resemblances. For folk cultures analogy possess a truth bearing quality, as a proof of an idea, wise dictum of deontic value that shed light in times of moral dilemma, or exposition of a metaphysical truth.

Analogical reasoning for the folk has special significance as a didactic and literary device to elicit truth, in establishing common ground, in grounding disputes and subversion and allows for seamless flows of ideas and experiences. Off the repertoire of the reliable knowers analogical and logical reasoning is a skill cultivated optimally.

Thus, self-evident truth of such beliefs are referents of ‘facts’ or of factive collective experience whose meaning and value is tied to and codified in custom, mythologies, collective rites, festivities, everyday life and tales people tell about themselves and others. Thus, orality has a very distinctive metaphysical and epistemic value in this context.

It thus cannot be strictly translated as orality for in subsumption of other epistemic forms it radically attains a quality of universalism. Sustained by specialized communities (geneologists/bards) as testifiers/transmitters of such primal truths untethered by external justification, verdicality is intrinsic in its efficacious quality to produce culturally desired goals and reconfiguration of the world. It gains legitimacy from collectivities that participate in its recreation with the knowers.

Subversive Aesthetic

Such being the overarching frame of reference subversion and conflict are presented in specific cultural forms that resonate with the spirit of the whole. Such an aesthetic mode (continuous with the theory of emotions/rasa vada) is grounded in a positive valuation of emotions and sense experience different from western aesthetics/formalism. Emotions in folk aesthetic have a positive value as catalytic states for realization of higher states of being and grasping of truth, of the heroic, and refinement. If any it is the marginalized who have sustained the robust tradition of aesthetic as it is in this form that their representations of their self and the world are anchored.

Ironically, Nietzsche would have found an unlikely protagonist in the ‘Pariah’! Inevitably, any systematic exploration of aesthetic, and its cultural trajectories would mandate a return to its basic connotation as relating to sense(s)/perception, for discerning root categories, foundational to epistemology and metaphysics. It then becomes possible to trace the broad

trajectory of primacy accorded to reason and its affinity with sense of sight in western thought (from the Platonic allegories, idea of panoptican vision, concept of gaze) to its deployment as a mechanism of power, (as in racial differentiation, color being secondary property of vision) and technologies of surveillance. Any uncritical application of such concepts, originating within a particular historical context, to non-Western contexts obscures other realities, mechanisms of power and worldviews founded on contrary conceptualization of the senses.

Thus, sustainability of critical ‘pluriversal’ epistemology demands an investment in comparative philosophy/epistemology. It would be a fallacy to assume that engaging with the oppressed is little more than working on the fringes, with the residue of dominant knowledge systems. These vital sites allow for looking at the whole from the peripheries in enriching ways and paradoxically as one of the solid anchors by which to retrace the credence and rootedness of culture specific epistemological traditions in its critique of traditional forms of oppression.

To maximize the progress made thus far entails identifying newer sources of knowledge, exploring knowledge practices, generating root concepts that can enable coherent understanding of the many universalisms in comparativist perspective. Fundamentally, such quests are about restitution of lost ground of the oppressed, undoing the immeasurable damage of epistemic stigmatization through demystification of hegemonic myths and repositioning of and meaningful dialogue across alternative ethical cosmologies.

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