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Editorial

The Need to Promote Indigenous Knowledge Systems

We are in the midst of a knowledge society that, endowed with technological innovation, promotes the production of new 'useful knowledge'. While knowledge flows are increasingly diversified and complex today, what underlies them are hierarchies of knowledge and webs of neo-colonialism. The boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate knowledge are still as stark, and governed by the schism between the developed and the underdeveloped worlds.

This hierarchization organises knowledge that is plentiful, nebulous and ubiquitous, into categories of importance. At the top exists western scientific knowledge, propelled by the positivistic spirit. Below this, exist all other forms of knowledge. This hierarchization consequently, forges dichotomies, for instance, between the physical sciences and the natural sciences, western and indigenous knowledge systems, theoretical and commonsensical knowledge etc.

In the field of research and academia, the iron-hold of western knowledge and concomitant objectivity was challenged by a number of theorists from the 1960s onwards. The significant distance between the researcher and the researched, the lack of subjectivities in the research outcomes, and the distortion of data, signalled the advent of alternative methodologies. One pertinent alternative to the problem of objective research was addressed through the incorporation of subjective research. In this regard, indigenous knowledge was believed to be a strong tool for credible and ethical research. For instance, Patricia Hill Collin's (1990), "Black Feminist Epistemology" was an alternative attempt towards understanding the intersectionality of race and gender. This was a grass-root approach that took into account multiple subjectivities. Likewise, the correction of the male bias in ethnographic accounts emerged around the 1960s-1970s. This comprised a revisionist

reading of former ethnographies by white male anthropologists, who lent a prominent voice to their male subjects, and approached the theme from an 'objective point of view' (Ambruster, 2000).

Shifting the focus from dominant western knowledge to indigenous knowledge however, is an ongoing process, where the latter seeks to attain "legitimacy." It is also a broad theme, with several contestations, which we will avoid, bearing in mind the topic at hand. Now, below indigenous knowledge in the pyramid of knowledge hierarchy prevails the commonsensical indigenous knowledge of quotidian life. Efforts to theorise the differences between western and indigenous knowledge have proposed that the former is more concerned with the abstract; with theoretical ideas and philosophies, while the latter comprises knowledge of the immediate world (Agrawal, 1995, pp. 15). While this is one way of approaching the distinction between the two, a number of accounts have also pointed out the rich repository that indigenous knowledge is. It includes both knowledge of the abstract and knowledge of the everyday life. According to Dei (1993), indigenous knowledge is the "common sense knowledge and ideas of local peoples about the everyday realities of living" (as cited in Agrawal, pp. 8). This definition is very close to the argument we seek to make on indigenous knowledge.

A number of development theorists now propagate the need to rely on indigenous knowledge systems to bring forth sustainable and equitable development (Studley, 1998). Neo-colonialism, a prominent ordering system of the global economy, continues to couch its logic onto development projects in the developing and underdeveloped world (Spivak as cited in Dutta, 2018, pp. 284). Derived from dominant western knowledge, these development projects shoehorn their ideologies in varied geo-political spaces, which have seldom been beneficial. To counter this problem, theorists have articulated development projects to be contingent on local environments.

In this vein, Studley (1998) attests, "not only is indigenous knowledge ignored or dismissed, but the nature of the problem of underdevelopment and its solution are defined by reference to this world-ordering of knowledge." Indigenous knowledge can aid the empowerment of people in the developing world, and at the same

time, can leverage the appropriate methods for development projects. A great example of the integration between indigenous knowledge and modern technology is the Barefoot College founded by Bunker Roy. With the aim of interlinking modern technology to foster self-sufficiency and equitable growth, the first Barefoot College was found in Tilonia in Rajasthan. Of its many projects, a significant one remains empowering local women to build and install solar panels in their immediate surroundings. This project, furthermore, was later extended to parts of Afghanistan and Africa, as well.

However, the recognition and appreciation of indigenous knowledge need not be contingent only upon development projects or other large-scale frameworks, they prevail on multiple levels of everyday life. For instance, in some parts of Rajasthan, the tradition of zero wastage has been passed down from generations, and is still practised by many. Illuminated by the People's Archive of Rural India (PARI), this practice, though not explicitly termed "zero-wastage" or perhaps devised with the aim of protecting the environment, was a practice that emerged from viewing food as scare in the desert region, and valuing every part of it. Using peels, seeds, and other parts of vegetable and fruits, otherwise deemed unfit for consumption in many parts of India and the world, this Rajasthani practice upends the stark distinctions between purity and pollution within the gastronomical world. Likewise, the practice of storing plastic bags, and reusing them time and again, is a common practice in most Indian households. This is one way of reusing plastic, and eliminating waste derived from single-use plastics.

What both the aforementioned practices have in common are a lack of affiliation with environmental protection efforts. This is to say that both these are adopted as a way of living, without being touted as "extraordinary"; these are simple ways to reduce wastage. While an avalanche of efforts to save the environment have emerged from the West, these are more often than not, futile in non-western societies. Recognizing local idiosyncrasies and responding accordingly is best-suited forapposite environmental action.

Additionally, there exists a fine line between appreciating indigenous systems and fetishizing the same. The discovery of quinoa, as a superfluous food, by North America, caused a domestic shortfall in South America, and harmed the local environment. A handful of privileged individuals in non-western worlds, in the quest to emulate the west, likewise, demanded quinoa. This demand by health-conscious elites, further depleted the grain in South America. It was also a demand interlaced with the need to be "sustainable".

Local knowledge systems hold a mirror to our immediate worlds, but are often neglected in the quest for following mainstream knowledge. Local alternatives for quinoa like jowar, ragi, etc. are erased from mainstream discourse around food and nutrition. The vector of class also intersects this theme, as these foods comprise the staple diets of farmers, and other rural groups. However, to protect the local ecosystem and truly be "sustainable", relying on our immediate local environments and food systems is essential, which can be brought about by promoting indigenous knowledge and bringing it closer to the mainstream.

Comprising age-old traditions, intergenerational understanding, and creative solutions to several problems, local systems can promote sustainable livelihoods together with environmental and ecological empathy. These must be conceptualised in a broader sense, beyond overarching development frameworks that use indigenous knowledge partly to devise project plans, or a narrow understanding of indigenous knowledge, merely tethered to practices such as Ayurveda. Heterogeneity in terms of knowledge systems can be realised through preserving and disseminating local knowledge. Emerging from diverse socio-cultural and historical conditions, such knowledge systems articulate local peculiarities and enable sustainable and equitable growth. Indigenous knowledge though, "commonsensical", are a powerful tool in enriching us with ways to navigate our particular society, or unravel the contours of everyday practices, or perhaps, to adopt a novel lens to perceive the world.

In this Issue

In this issue of *Artha - Journal of Social Sciences*, we have four articles and a book review that touch upon various pertinent themes through different lenses. In the first article, Rana Sonia Tez Bahadur traces the shift in Bhutan from a traditional theocratic political system to a democratic system. In doing so, she takes into account the manner in which political ideologies take shape in relation to the socio-economic and cultural environment within which it manifests. She thus argues that democracy in Bhutan is relatively different from democracy elsewhere. Particularly, in Bhutan, democracy is intermeshed with the traditional power system, thus giving rise to a peculiarity that is obscured by other political concerns.

In the second article titled *Lipstick in the Time of Corona: Psychological Musings*, Ghoshal and Ann Job delves into a mundane cosmetic product such as the lipstick to illustrate ways in which its tangibility is seamlessly interwoven with symbolism. The authors trace the shift of lipstick as a symbol of social status and identity to one imbued with notions of self-esteem and power. This conversation, Ghoshal and Ann Job place squarely within the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, to further illuminate the significance this mere product holds in a shifting world, where daily life was once upended and 'dressing-up' or 'being presentable' were ostensibly secondary.

In the third article, Udita Bansal introduces the concept of nostalgia marketing and its impact on consumers. Arguing that endorsing an emotion such as nostalgia has a concomitant effect on consumers' attitudes and behaviours, Bansal goes on to bolster this claim through a series of hypotheses. Using primary research to test these hypotheses, the author relies on two beverage brands - Rasna and Tang, to seek out answers as to whether the consumption of certain products is higher during the festive season; if feeling a sense of nostalgia makes consumers purchase the same product again, and so on. This in turn reveals the psychology embedded within marketing strategies, and how selling an emotion is of primary significance, which in turn ensures the product associated with it is sold.

Further, using the Covid-19 pandemic as a frame of reference, Petrus et al in their article suggest an alternative to punitive approaches to deal with gang-related crimes. While these gang-related crimes are specific to the case of South Africa, the authors draw from the Latin context that first popularised the "iron-fist" approach in order to combat gang-related violence. After outlining the Latin case, the article goes on to underline why punitive action seldom works, instead exacerbating the issue. Likewise, the authors highlight how the stringent lockdown in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic, failed to cease gang violence. Using two cases of how this form of violence continued, the article suggests an alternative approach based on mediation and negotiation, which is more holistic and integrative rather than based on the polarisation of these groups.

Also, a part of this issue of *Artha - Journal of Social Sciences* is Shambhavi Datta's review of Shoshana Zuboff's book titled *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*. A pertinent read of today's time, Datta discusses the relevance of Zuboff's ideas. Calling present society, "the age of surveillance", Datta articulates, using quotes from the book, what this time period has come to signify. She further asserts that meta capitalism, the quest to predict and control human behaviour, and the surveillance mechanism, are all characteristic of today's world. Shrouded by website cookies, and privacy settings, rampant data breach and lack of privacy further reduce individuals to mere data points for capitalist giants, eventually signalling an information war.

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