

RECONCEPTUALIZING SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Abstract

Transformation in the discipline of Social Sciences is a global phenomenon but in the post-colonial societies it means two things. First, far reaching societal changes resulting into the emergence of new fields in Social Sciences fulfilling new conditions and requirements of society. Second, the growing need and relevance of Social Sciences research so as to address issues which cause serious societal changes. Marginalization of Social Sciences and social scientists in case of Pakistan is not a new phenomenon. There cannot be any time line which can be given for modernizing Social Sciences in Pakistan which can meet the criteria and standards of 21st century. Yet, those who teach and do research in different subjects of Social Sciences must come forward and play a leadership role in this regard. This would require a paradigm shift in the arena of admitting students and appointing faculty so that the best stuff both at the student and faculty level is motivated to join the subjects of Social Sciences in order to ensure quality control and standard which seem to have deteriorated in the last four decades is restored. By attracting the best talent in the subjects of Social Sciences one can expect positive transformation in the state and societal patterns of Pakistan.

Keywords: enlightenment, decolonization, analytical thinking, philanthropy, Treaty of Westphalia

Introduction

The need to reconceptualize Social Sciences in the context of Pakistan is the need of the hour because of three main reasons. First, the conventional and traditional paradigm in Social Sciences which remained on the scene for long is being transformed on scientific lines by focusing on ideas, theories, concepts and approaches dealing with matters and issues impacting on human beings. Issues which tend to augment instability and crisis in society cannot be addressed unless a scientific approach in the discipline of Social Sciences is pursued based on reasoning and logic. Second, the conceptual discourse in the field of Social Sciences which followed a traditional pattern is being revitalized in view of enormous growth in demographic landscape of Pakistan. The population of Pakistan in 1970 was around 55 million but in the year 2015 is projected to reach 190 million. Third, the issues and challenges encompassing the society of Pakistan cannot be addressed in an isolation and without exploring and contemplating on new ideas, concepts, approaches and theories in the field of Social Sciences.

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Marginalization of Social Sciences and social scientists in case of Pakistan is not a new phenomenon. Unlike the fields of natural sciences where better connectivity exists, the situation is different in Social Sciences. Therefore, it will not be wrong to argue that, “social scientists have always been seen as the power, less glamorous and more crisis ridden country cousins of the urbane natural scientists.” (Yadav, 2006: 3845).

Dr. Inayatullah, the founding President of Council of Social Sciences Pakistan in his edited book *Social Sciences in Pakistan: A Profile* (Islamabad: Council of Social Sciences, 2005) argues that, “In Pakistan the process of evaluation of Social Sciences, both at the level of separate disciplines or taken together, has remained underdeveloped. With few exceptions, the practitioners of different disciplines have not conducted systematic studies of their disciplines” (Inayatullah, 2005, p. 1). It is yet to be seen that in the last one decade, is there any qualitative change or a breakthrough in reconceptualizing the field of Social Sciences or still there is a long way to go in terms of modernizing the discipline of Social Sciences?

As compared to 2005 when the book *Social Sciences in Pakistan: A Profile* was published, till today, the field of Social Sciences has been broadened in Pakistan with the emergence of several universities and the faculties of Social Sciences established accordingly. Demographic, cultural, social, political, economic and societal transformation of Pakistan in the last ten years, however failed to revitalize the field of Social Sciences as no substantial breakthrough occurred in conducting research and introducing new teaching methods in covering subjects which seem to have transformed in Pakistan.

This paper will examine the whole gamut of reconceptualizing Social Sciences by responding to the following questions:

1. Why is there a *need* to reconceptualize Social Sciences?
2. What are the major *determinants* required to reconceptualize Social Sciences?
3. How can the Social Sciences’ community in Pakistan cope with the *challenges* and how such challenges could be met?
4. What are the major *gaps* in the Social Sciences’ discourse in the West and in Pakistan and how could such gaps be bridged?

Furthermore, the paper will also contemplate the relevance of “generational phenomenon” in Social Sciences in the developed and developing world and the reasons which tend to impede the process of a qualitative change in the field of Social Sciences in Pakistan.

Why and how to reconceptualize Social Sciences?

Transformation in the discipline of Social Sciences is a global phenomenon but in the post-colonial societies it means two things. First, far reaching societal changes resulting into the emergence of new fields in Social Sciences fulfilling new conditions and requirements of society. Second, the growing need and relevance of Social Sciences research so as to address issues which cause serious societal changes.

The 'generational phenomenon' in Social Sciences is worth some discussion. One can categorize conceptualization of Social Sciences in three generations. The first generation of social scientists studied and examined issues in the West and offered solution in the form of concepts, theories, ideas and approaches. The second generation of social scientists also in the West began to study and examine social, political and economic issues in the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa and also presented solutions. The third generation of social scientists emerging in the post-colonial states while borrowing conceptual and theoretical tools from the West, began to conduct research about societal issues in the Third World countries and also came up with the solutions. After seventy years of the Second World War and the unleashing of the process of decolonization in Asia and Africa, one can take note of established Social Sciences institutions and experts in the developing world. Yet, in view of enormous gap in terms of literature and research in the social sciences in the West and the developing world, one can term Social Sciences in global south still in its transitory phase.

Four major reasons could be given to reconceptualize Social Sciences in Pakistan. First, the enormous gap which exists in teaching and research methods of Social Sciences in Pakistan and the West. The gap is even obvious in terms of academic institutions of Pakistan where the subjects of Social Sciences and liberal arts are taught and researched. Second, there is a need to publish scientific literature which reflects societal contradictions in Pakistan and provide solutions in this regard. Scientific research is pivotal for finding solutions of issues which are intricate in nature and which need to be promoted in Pakistan.

Third, since no society can develop and transform without following modern trends, the need to reconceptualize Social Sciences in Pakistan cannot be undermined. Institutional framework, skills, expertise, resources and conducive environment to conduct and disseminate research in the field of Social Sciences is the need of the hour. Finally, the youth of Pakistan, who form the majority segment of population, cannot effectively deal with challenges emanating from societal problems, unless they have sound knowledge and understanding about Social Sciences. That how, instead of rhetoric and superficial explanation of social issues, scientific research is conducted so that one can expect a qualitative change in society. There may be other legitimate reasons to reconceptualize Social Sciences in Pakistan but one thing is certain: unless the field of Social Sciences is well established and those who study and do research contribute effectively in their respective subjects, one cannot expect a major breakthrough in the arena of human development.

The process to reconceptualize Social Sciences is an uphill task because of two main reasons. First, innovative and creative thinking to scientifically design Social Sciences' subjects would require change in the thinking of those who are involved in teaching and research in such subjects. Imparting knowledge in a scientific manner both in teaching and research requires emphasis on analytical and critical thinking which is still in its formative phase as far as Pakistan is concerned. Second, freedom to think and produce ideas which can challenge unscientific minds is the need of the hour.

The field of Social Sciences is known for its diversity and capability to open up the minds of people and promote critical and analytical thinking so as to effectively deal

with issues which are crucial and pivotal to society. Therefore, historically speaking, “enlightenment aspired to produce knowledge for social betterment. The mission of the Social Sciences, from its beginning, was to produce useful knowledge. The social scientists were born with the hope that they would enlighten public opinion and inform public policy. The Social Sciences produce ideas on the basis of logic or facts gathered to test hypothesis, like the natural sciences” (Yadav, 2006). But, it does not happen in all the societies because enlightenment *per se* requires a society which is not suppressed and where views are not imposed but respected and where ideas, concepts, approaches and theories challenge each other in a scientific manner instead of pursuing an intolerant approach. Unfortunately, the process of enlightenment which is essential for establishing strong liberal arts and social sciences was never unleashed in case of Pakistan and many Muslim societies.

For decades, Pakistan like many countries in global South remained under authoritarian suzerainty denying democratic way of life. As a result, despite ostensible democratic process in the country, freedom to challenge orthodox and backward societal values is still not possible. As a result, the subjects of Social Sciences, particularly political science, philosophy, history, economics, sociology, social work, mass communications and international relations are not designed and taught in many state owned universities of Pakistan in a scientific manner, which means majority of the students studying such subjects are denied literature and discourse which can help in opening their minds and evoke critical thinking. Elite centric universities in Pakistan like Lahore University of Management Sciences and Habib University in Karachi offer Social Sciences and liberal arts subjects by following modern and scientific tools but the vast majority of students studying Social Sciences in Pakistan do not have access to latest theories, concepts, ideas and approaches shaping the subjects of Social Sciences as taught in elite centric universities of Pakistan. Third, state policies in Pakistan are also not supporting the process of genuine social change and development. The failure of state to seriously promote the culture of Social Sciences research is considered as a major impediment to reconceptualize Social Sciences and enable it to meet the requirements of 21st century.

How to reconceptualize Social Sciences would also require the role of theoreticians who are able to come up with innovative ideas, approaches and concepts which can help fill the gap in the literature on Social Sciences in Pakistan and in the developed parts of the world. There is not much gap in the perception and reality as far as the field of Social Sciences in Pakistan is concerned. The perception that social issues and conflicts in Pakistan cannot be dealt in a professional manner unless there are experts in the field of Social Sciences who can provide plausible solutions to societal predicament is not far from the reality. In the absence of viable connectivity among social scientists in the state owned and private universities and research think tanks of Pakistan, it becomes an uphill task to search for a common ground in terms of pursuing path breaking research on resolving contentious issues which pose a cogent threat to both state and society of Pakistan.

On the critical side, one major question raised by Zaidi in his article, “Dismal State of Social Sciences in Pakistan” published in August 31, 2002 issue of *Economic and Political Weekly*, Mumbai was that: “Has any Pakistani social scientist, in any of their fields in the last three decades, developed, reconstructed, reformulated, expanded upon,

disputed or rejected, any theory or theoretical formulation, or even in the specific context of Pakistan?. The answer would probably be simply no. Or perhaps, one or two, or at best three names would be mentioned by some of them, almost always with many qualifications, from amongst the many thousands of social scientists produced by Pakistan across the diverse discipline” (Zaidi, 2002, p. 3644). He further asks that, “what would be contested thought is whether indeed, any of these handfuls have actually contributed anything original in order to be considered different from the other social scientists, or whether they too have merely restated a problem?” (Zaidi, 2002). Zaidi’s article quoted in this paper appeared in 2002 was followed by an edited book on *Social Sciences in Pakistan: A Profile* (2005) and in 2015 one can observe some betterment in terms of research and teaching in different subject of Social Sciences in Pakistan. Certainly, it will be illogical to go for perfection in an environment where decades of authoritarian rule, tribal, feudal practices and religious intolerance made it extremely difficult for social scientists to sustain their efforts for bringing a qualitative change in Pakistani society.

While one cannot disagree with the need to conceptualize Social Sciences in Pakistan, the dilemma is how to proceed in that direction? How old Social Sciences which is conservative could be replaced by new Social Sciences fulfilling the requirements of 21st century. Unlike natural sciences, where teaching or research is non-political and is not considered a threat to the centuries old societal traditions, such is not the case with Social Sciences. Lack of tolerance and better understanding for scientific research tends to impede the process of modernizing the discipline of Social Sciences. When dissent and critical thinking are discouraged at various levels and researchers aiming to challenge established dogmas are threatened or persecuted, it becomes difficult to carry out independent research on issues which tend to augment socio-economic predicament of Pakistan. That is the reason why most of research reflecting critical thinking about Pakistani state and society is not published in the country but outside. To a large extent, Pakistani student Diaspora (S. Akbar Zaidi, 2002 p.3648) and students doing research in different Western and non-Western Universities are engaged in research on topics which are related to different disciplines of Social Sciences. And when research on Pakistan which is non-traditional and challenge social dogmas is not translated in local languages one cannot expect to have a trickledown effect or impact of such research on common people.

Determinants and coping with challenges

There is no short cut to revitalize and reconceptualize Social Sciences in Pakistan and to deal with challenges which are present to conduct path-breaking research aiming to better socio-economic and political conditions of the country. One can figure out at least four determinants in the field of contemporary Social Sciences in Pakistan. These determinants also reflect ground realities in the societal structural contradictions and the failure of state to take note of deteriorating values and norms. First, the social environment prevailing in Pakistan which shapes and determines the role of academicians and practitioners in the field of Social Sciences. Second, the courses taught in different fields of Social Sciences and to what extent such courses are scientifically designed and taught. Third, the quality of research done by social scientists in Pakistan and to what extent such type of research contributes in dealing with issues

which exist in the country today. Fourth, scope and prospects of studying Social Sciences' subjects for the youth of Pakistan. Unlike developed and in some developing countries where the best students prefer to study political science, history, sociology, philosophy and international relations, to a large extent such is not the practice in Pakistan because the youth of the country somehow feel less interested in seeking admission in Social Sciences' departments in view of meager job prospects. Therefore, they prefer studying medicine, engineering, computer science and business administration which may yield more material benefits than having a degree in the subjects of Social Sciences. They feel better off by joining bureaucracy, military or the corporate sector. Furthermore, in established democracies those who contest elections and want to join the parliament, congress or assembly as law makers consider the subjects of Social Sciences useful as these help them in formulating laws, policies and provide them expertise in the mode of governance.

The challenges prevailing in the field of Social Sciences are enormous. These ranges from hostility to indifference, lack of proper resources, conducive environment for research, availability of sufficient funds and lack of proper research skills and expertise. One can ask how such challenges can be successfully met. Four strategies could be formulated to deal with challenges in a way for reconceptualizing Social Sciences. First, meeting resistance on the part of those who do not want to bring any qualitative change in the teaching and research methods in Social Sciences because of their fear that they will be marginalized if conventional and unscientific approach is replaced with scientific and innovative methods. Lack of opportunities, motivation and zeal to conduct path breaking research causing qualitative change in society tends to further degenerate not only institutions but also those who are working or running such institutions.

With proper planning and coordination one can expect to marginalize those who want to keep things as they are in the field of Social Sciences as they fear change will jeopardize their interests. Second, original ideas, theories, concepts and approaches in the field of Social Sciences can be presented provided there is conducive environment for genuine teaching and research in Universities and other centers of learning in Pakistan. Since research is not the recycling of ideas and teaching must be equipped with the transformation of information into knowledge, one cannot expect any breakthrough in channelizing things which can at least lead to the emergence of social scientists who are professional and skillful in their approach. Furthermore, one way to cope up with challenges in reconceptualizing Social Sciences is by promoting genuine teachers and researchers because people with superficial knowledge and skills in their subjects will only promote those having mediocre or below mediocre caliber. By compromising on competence and merit in the academic institutions of Pakistan one cannot expect any qualitative change in society. Third, promoting connectivity and sharing of research among the Social Scientists of Pakistan is the need of the hour. As rightly stated by Zaidi that,

One of the symptoms of the crisis of Pakistani Social Science is that there is too little collaboration between scholars at the same institutions, and between institutions, although interestingly, there are some exceptions to both these norms. Coming primarily from the non-public sector and donors. (Zaidi, 2002, p.3656)

Council of Social Sciences in Pakistan (COSS) which is now a well-established organization took the task of collecting data by publishing Directory of Pakistani Social Scientists which contains useful information about their work and activities. Yet, a lot is required to institutionalize Social Sciences in Pakistan so that teaching and research methods of social scientists can be shared and made useful for synthesizing ideas, concepts, theories and approaches in the field of Social Sciences. Finally, a major publication on the state of Social Sciences in Pakistan is needed. The last book entitled *Social Sciences in Pakistan: A Profile* was published in 2005 which was a follow-up of the earlier book entitled *The State of Social Sciences in Pakistan* edited by S.H. Hashmi and published by Council of Social Sciences, Islamabad in 2001. The proposed book will take the debate on conceptualizing and reconceptualizing Social Sciences further and will be a useful effort to examine in depth the conceptual paradigm of different subjects in the field of Social Sciences in Pakistan.

Bridging the gap?

When one talks about the gaps in Social Sciences' discourse in Pakistan and the West, five major areas could be identified which reflect the variations in this regard. First, the established culture of research in the West which got an impetus as a result of the process of geographical discoveries, scientific innovations, renaissance, age of enlightenment, separation of church and state as a result of the movement of reformation leading to the treaty of Westphalia in 1648, industrial revolution and the ideologies of democracy socialism, communism, fascism, nazism and capitalism. Furthermore, colonization and imperialism of various European empires in Asia, Africa and Americas also promoted lust for wealth and power which required focus on research to invest in inventing technologies which can ensure Western tutelage in the non-Western world. The culture of research in the West resulting into landmark discoveries and scientific innovation is still in process to the extent that since the age of enlightenment more than 90% of discoveries have taken place in the West. Whereas, the bulk of Asia, Africa and Latin America remained colonies of European imperialist powers for centuries which suppressed indigenous talent and skills? The demand for raw materials from European colonies of Asia and Africa for the industries in the West further widened the gap.

Consequently, gap in research, innovation, science and technology widened when new military weapons were invented which totally changed the art of war making it more lethal and destructive. Second, when universities and other centers of learning were established in the West following Renaissance and the age of enlightenment, such a process was almost non-existent in the non-Western world. Pakistan, which emerged as a new state following its independence from Britain on August 14, 1947 had only two universities which were established during the British days. One was the University of Punjab in Lahore established in 1882 and the other was Dhaka University established in East Bengal in 1921. Muslim students who went to Western universities for their studies during the colonial era were amazed to observe established universities of Europe which were centers of learning, innovation and research. Presently, there are more than 125 Universities in Pakistan, both state owned and in the private sector, but are unable to bridge the gap in knowledge and research because of a variety of reasons discussed earlier.

The absence of proper culture of research made these universities and research institutes incapable to compete with their counterparts in the developed parts of the world. In most cases, lack of professionalism and proper work ethics contradicted with the basic requirements on the part of teachers and researchers to significantly contribute in the presentation of innovative ideas, approaches, concepts and theories in their respective fields. Third, gap in the academic discourse widened as the great deal of scientific literature continued to be produced in the West. Social scientists in Pakistan are still grappling with basic issues ranging from freedom to express their ideas and thoughts, absence of motivation and challenge in the field of research, lack of proper training in research and the patronization of mediocre or below mediocre academicians who managed to get positions and recognition as a result of their ability to either toe the official line on critical social, economic, political and foreign policy issues or by utilizing their contacts. As a result, many genuine teachers and researchers were forced to leave the country thus creating an enormous void in the field of Social Sciences in Pakistan. The brain drain of noted Social Scientists who could have changed the dynamics of Pakistani society had they been able to serve their country further widened the gap between the West and Pakistan in the field of Social Sciences. Although, Higher Education Commission (HEC) during the tenure of Dr. Attaur Rehman as its Chairman tried to reverse the process of brain drain by offering lucrative monetary benefits to Pakistani Diaspora, both in social and natural sciences, such a strategy failed to yield positive results because local environment in most of the Pakistani universities remain hostile to creative and path breaking research.

Fourth, gap in terms of productivity with proper substance and originality in the field of Social Sciences in Pakistan and their counterparts in developed and developing countries also widened because of lack of competitive approach. While the incentives offered by the HEC for doing PhD and post-PhD research were provided, quantity superseded quality. Pakistani social scientists began to enroll themselves in M. Phil and Ph.D. programs in a big way and also started publishing their research yet by producing research papers in large number, the impact of such research in society remained insignificant. Finally, the culture of philanthropy which is well established in the West and helps the process of research is almost non-existent in Pakistan. Philanthropy means the contributions made by rich people for a noble cause and for the betterment of humanity. Research & Development in the West got a boost as a result of grants given by various foundations which got money from philanthropists thus helping research in both social and natural sciences. When billions of dollars of money is provided by philanthropists every year to various grant making foundations and research think tanks for the purpose of conducting path breaking research for establishing peace, resolving armed conflicts, empowerment of women and dealing with the threat of climatic change, one can expect betterment in societal conditions in such countries. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, lack of the culture of philanthropy in Pakistan is a major impediment in promoting Social Sciences research. It is a major gap between Pakistan and the rest of the world as resources are not contributed by private citizens for researchers in Social Sciences for their research on issues which are a cause of violence, crisis, social stratification and instability in society.

How the gap can be bridged as far as Social Sciences discourse in Pakistan and the developed world is concerned requires four major efforts at the governmental and non-

governmental levels. First, transforming the academic environment in the Universities of Pakistan from conventional way of teaching and research to scientific. Not only the state but also the private sector needs to play a meaningful role in unleashing the process of purposeful research which can effectively address issues which are a cause of backwardness and instability in society. Proper academic environment means when there is focus on the part of teachers and researchers on the work which they are supposed to do and not on matters which promote politicization, nepotism and corruption. For that matter the leadership in Pakistani universities must be professional and strive to seek excellence in the world of knowledge. With a conducive environment for creative teaching and research, one can expect Pakistani universities to bridge the gap provided there is will and determination on the part of those who matter. Second, promotion of reading culture, training in writing and research skills in the universities of Pakistan will also go a long way in inculcating critical and creative thinking among students. If better students are produced from Pakistani schools in that case one can also expect better teachers thus filling the void which one can observe in the academic institutions of Pakistan. Students must also be exposed to latest research done in foreign universities so that they are able to get the required knowledge in their respective fields. But, this would also require total restructuring of educational system of Pakistan at the grassroots' level so that free, compulsory and quality education is provided to all the school going children of Pakistan regardless of their place or origin and social background. By producing school students who have expertise in proper reading and writing skills, have command on their subjects and are groomed according to their aptitude, one can expect a qualitative change in Pakistani society within one generation.

Third, by giving priority to Social Sciences in terms of promoting the culture of research and innovation, one can expect a major breakthrough to take place in changing the landscape of Pakistani society. The reason why most of the social issues ranging from poverty, social backwardness, economic under-development, domestic chaos, disorder, instability, intolerance, extremism, radicalization and terrorism remain unresolved is because the field of Social Sciences is still not advanced and professional in nature. But as long as state and those forces who feel insecure vis-à-vis Social Sciences subjects as these are considered to be a threat to their interest, one cannot expect any fundamental change in the conceptual paradigm of Social Sciences. Finally, the most talented and intelligent students must opt for Social Sciences' subjects because their involvement and education in such subjects will help improve the system of governance, politics, economy and social conditions of society. And if they want to become law makers by joining politics they can change the course and dynamics of Pakistani politics if they study politics in the real sense.

Be as it may, the conceptualization of Social Sciences is primarily the domain of the West as the bulk of theoretical and conceptual discourse primarily was done by scholars and theoreticians in the first world. The process of reconceptualization of Social Sciences was also unleashed in the West where traditional concepts, approaches and theories were replaced by the new ones. For instance, "the history of social sciences in India dates back to the European encounters with the world of Indian knowledge. Though the British started three universities in 1854, the basic content of courses taught in the universities was not changed for a long while. The universities remained as examination bodies for a long time. Therefore, social science teaching in India did not

get the backing of a reformation movement which the Europeans had. In fact, it was the teaching of social sciences and liberal arts and science courses during the early part of 20th century that resulted into the emergence of social reform movements in India.” (K. S. Chalam, 2002, p.921). Pakistan as a new state drew initial support from the Indian discourse on social sciences but as the ideological variation and conflicts between the two states deepened, contacts and exchange of ideas between the social scientists of the two countries almost diminished. However, in the recent past technological connectivity helped the two sides exchange research done in their respective subjects of social sciences.

How the mindset of those who wield power in Pakistan can be transformed in the sense that instead of viewing things in a parochial manner they pursue a pragmatic approach based on reason. As long as there occurs a fundamental change in the perceptions of Pakistani elites it will be difficult to conceptualize or re-conceptualize social sciences on realistic lines. Commitment, dedication, clarity of thought and approach on issues which are viewed as major threats to Pakistani society must be the priority of Social Scientists so that they can compel elites to change their approach on fundamental societal issues in order to promote original thinking in the field of social sciences.

There cannot be any time line which can be given for modernizing Social Sciences in Pakistan which can meet the criteria and standards of 21st century. Yet, those who teach and conduct research in different subjects of social scientists must come forward and play a leadership role in this regard. This would require a paradigm shift in the arena of admitting students and appointing faculty so that the best at both the student and faculty level are motivated to join Social Sciences subjects in order to restore quality control and standard which seem to have deteriorated in the last four decades. By attracting the best talent in the subjects of Social Sciences one can expect positive transformation in the state and societal patterns of Pakistan.

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