

DECOLONIZING KNOWLEDGE: EPISTEMIC JUSTICE AND THE RECLAMATION OF INTELLECTUAL SOVEREIGNTY

Bisman Singh Anand

3rd year

Sri Guru Gobind Singh College of
Commerce

University of Delhi

bisman.linkedin@gmail.com.

Shreshth Khatri

3rd year

Sri Guru Nanak Dev Khalsa
College

University of Delhi

Shreshthkhatri7@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The paper questions the fact that colonial modernity created enduring patterns of hierarchical knowledge, which made European thought a universal one to be judged as the marginalized one. It exposes the way epistemic domination was inculcated into the postcolonial institutions and imaginaries through historical examination of colonial curricula, administrative practices, missionary education and linguistic policies. The paper follows the modern reactions of the Global South, such as intellectual movements, social movements and policy campaigns reclaiming indigenous philosophies, oral traditions and ecological knowledge. It proposes decolonial pedagogies, language repossession and plural pedagogies that decentralize western canons and facilitate horizontal flows of ideas. The paper constructs epistemic justice as an ethical requirement and a feasible initiative by suggesting viable ways through which the curricular reform can be implemented to achieve institutional humility and ethical research activities.

It eventually demands cognitive emancipation that would re-invent repressed voices and develop a truly plural global knowledge order.

INTRODUCTION

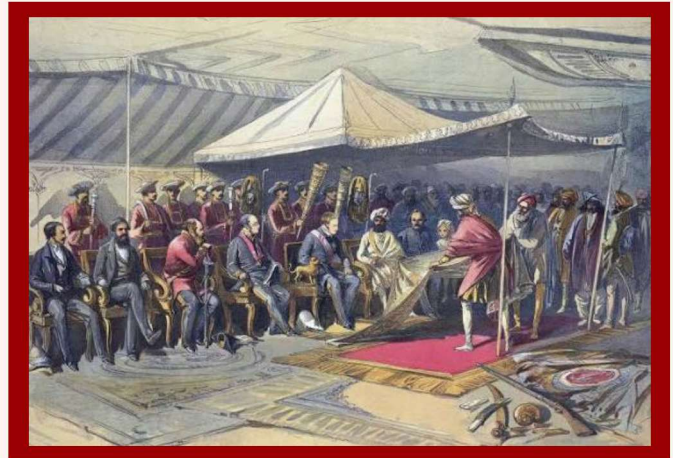
All empires not only conquer territory, but conquer mentality. The Western powers had drawn boundaries around what could be known, said, or thought long before the powers of civilization began to make boundaries between continents.



The liberal order of the West, dressed in the language of progress and universal reason, came up with an international division of knowledge, one that accorded Europe the leading role in terms of intellect and morale, and pushed the rest of the world to the periphery of ignorance. The leftover of this epistemic domination is still felt centuries after, which has influenced the ways in which societies understand development, rationality, and even truth itself.

In the current day world of intense globalization, the colonial mentality lives on in its other disguised forms, in the textbooks where the European philosophers are the only creators of thought, in the international institutions where the science paradigm of progress dictates the real thing, and in the intellectual reliance of the postcolonial state that identifies Western validation with authenticity. Coloniality of knowledge, thus, is not a memory of the past but occurs in the present in universities, media and in governance and is duplicated every day.

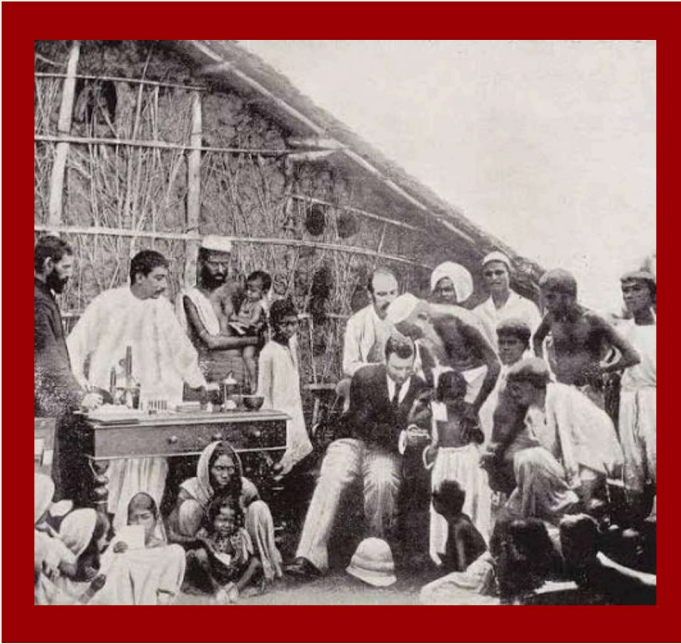
It is to work toward decoloniality to initiate a process of radical unlearning, a gesture of epistemic disobedience against the unspoken forms of hierarchy, which shape the consciousness of the world. It is not a demand of this unlearning that we reject Western thought, but that we put it back into its place: we cease to regard it as the sole way of knowing, and recognize it as a possible among a myriad of possible ways of knowing. In this way epistemic justice turns into the ethical and intellectual necessity of our era, to give dignity once again to suppressed knowledge systems, to regain the voices of those who are under centuries of Eurocentric confidence, to make the world a place where wisdom is no longer assessed according to how close it is to the



The paper, thus, discusses the politics of knowledge in a decolonized manner. It follows the historical process of the Western epistemic order construction, how it naturalized unequal relations, and how the Global South has been resisting it. Widely discussed as a criticism, it also tries to imagine a time when multiplicity will substitute monopoly, a plurality of knowledge in which humankind learns not to dominate, but to coexist in thought.

THE COLONIAL CONSTRUCTION OF KNOWLEDGE

The project of colonization was not only a source of wealth extraction, but meaning as well. The takeover of territories was escorted by the takeover of stories, a less noticeable and much more lasting domination. Knowledge turned out to be a tool with the help of which the West could position itself as the universal hub of civilization, rationality, and enlightenment. The other world, through this prism, was merely the periphery, which needed to be discovered, studied, categorized and fixed.



In the period of European expansion, colonial universities, missionary schools, administrative academies, and others turned into factories of consent creation. Education, that might have been a way of liberation, came to be shaped into a machine of control. The colonist was conditioned to accept the system rather than to criticize it but to perceive the world as his master does. One type of knowledge was the sole legitimate one: that which is empirical, linear, and which is very Eurocentric. Any languages existing in the colonized were labeled as primitive, their philosophies as folklore, and their cosmologies as superstition.

Colonial production of knowledge was therefore based on a two-fold logic, it was a way of making Europe the seat of universal knowledge and at the same time it undermined the intellectual cultures of other people. By doing so, this had made the concept of modernity itself synonymous with westernization. This legacy still influenced the perspective on progress and education even in postcolonial countries. Foreign degrees were viewed as the symbol of superiority and the native form of knowledge was easily termed as unscientific.

The strength of this system was that it was invisible. Epistemic domination differs with political domination since the former penetrates the minds of societies unlike the latter which can be challenged using revolution as a tool. It determines their hopes, their feeling of value and even their concept of knowing. Accordingly, the colonial knowledge building did not only produce subjects but also believers -people who believed that there is only one geography of truth.

In order to perceive decoloniality, then, it has to face this inheritance, the long shadow of a world that has confused Western logic with human logic itself. The process of leading to epistemic justice does not start with the establishment of new knowledge but the understanding of how the old knowledge was made to serve power.

THE MYTH OF UNIVERSALITY AND THE POLITICS OF KNOWLEDGE

The single biggest illusion of modernity was that knowledge can be neutral. In its quest to be universal, the Western liberal order itself posed its own philosophical and scientific perspectives as being true, independent of culture and history and power. This universalism had never been universal, it was the politics of particularity, which disguised itself as neutrality. Beneath enlightenment, beneath progress, was an implied order, Europe thinks, the rest of the world thought about.

This generalist myth enabled the colonial bodies of knowledge to permeate moral and intellectual societies of peoples worldwide.

REBELLIOUS MARGINS OF THE WORLD, SOUTH AND EPISTEMIC REBELLION

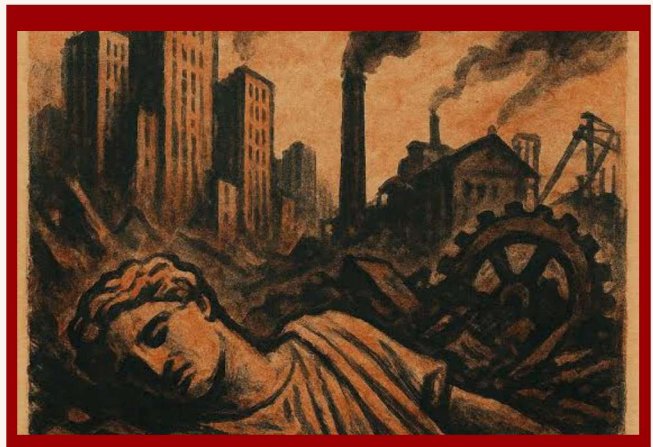
The Western epistemology with its focus on individualism, rational empiricism, and secular modernity became a standard in the context of which every other worldview was evaluated. The Asian spiritual philosophies, the African people's wisdom, the Native ecology, the Indian spirituality, all that were redefined in the light of Western logic, deprived of the context and rearranged as novelties.

The West in this process would not only profess to define the world but also speak on behalf of the world. It proclaimed what was progressive, who was civilized and what histories should be remembered. This dominance over meaning muted thousands of traditions of epistemology, substituting variety with supremacy. What has come into existence is not a marketplace of ideas, but a pyramid, with European thought at the top and all other systems of knowledge awaiting validation beneath it.

This scientific knowledge politics was also justified by the global institutions, the university, the media, and the modern state. Even the concept of education was understood as assimilation into Western standards of way of thinking. Education means to uneducate oneself and to re-educate oneself in some other world. It was a sort of courteous intellectual conquest, which was not maintained by violence but by admiration. In its desire to be recognised, the colonised mind tended to play along in reinforcing this order.

But, in this order, there is a contradiction. The argument of universality breaks down because of its exclusions. What imagines itself global is all too mono-accented; what professes objectivity is a champion or defender of privilege. The decolonial critique, then, does not imply the denial of Western knowledge but the denial to allow it to exist on its own.

Any silence finds its way back to speaking. The same areas that were formerly referred to as the periphery of knowledge have started to find their voice back again, changing their status as objects of study into objects of theory. The intellectual uprising, which has cropped up throughout the Global South, is a challenge to the established order of epistemic dependency left by colonial modernity.



Thinkers, writers, and educators in Latin America, Africa, and Asia have initiated the expression of visions of the world that are not in the grammar of the West. Since the period of decolonization in philosophy in Latin America to the current revival of indigenous ecology, the margins are no longer requesting that they be included in the conversation, they are demanding equal participation. They are not nostalgic movements, rather reclamation movements: an attempt to recover histories, cosmologies and modes of doing things that were discredited by colonial education.

Rebellion of the margins is not just an academic one but a lived and political one. Global South Social movements have started to confront the legacies of Western forms of development, be that extractive capitalism, cultural homogenization or the dependency on epistemological resources. Countries are developing alliances that would not extend the paternalism of international governance. Competing forums such as BRICS, African Union, and South-South cooperation projects represent not only a change in geopolitics, but also in the epistemology of desiring to think and act at the centre, not at its periphery.

However, this opposition is not aimed at turning domination into domination. It is not aimed at substituting the Western canon with another hegemonic discourse, but instead, establishing spaces in which more than one type of knowledge can exist. It is a demand that wisdom be produced communal, territorial, linguistic, experientially and not just produced at laboratories and lecture rooms. It is this epistemic pluralism, which was formerly dismissed as fragmentation, which is now the most radical form of unity, unity constructed, not on sameness, but on mutual recognition.



Nevertheless, the way to epistemic emancipation is not smooth. Societies in the postcolonial period end up in a dilemma of having to be modernized and at the same time be true to themselves. Colonial education still haunts, influencing both the future and the government. It is not merely to write new theories in order to rebel intellectually, but to think otherwise of thinking itself. The question is who is right to tell the truth, and why.

The revolt of the margins thereby becomes a courageous one, a declaration which sets up that knowledge, as well as freedom, is not the possession of a single civilization. It is a warning that the world is not one story, the variant of translation, but a chorus of voices, which were meant always to be sounded in unison.

UNLEARNING THE COLONIAL MIND: EPISODIC TRAILS TO EPISTEMIC JUSTICE

The decolonial process is not simply the destruction of the external regimes of control; it is the struggle with the empire built in the mind. Colonialism was a pedagogy, rather than a political order, it indoctrinated generations in what to admire, what to doubt and what to forget. Its teachings lived above its leaders. The concept of progress, to this day, still has a faint echo of the colonial acclaim of approval as though the road to modernity still has to go through the gates of the West. To be able to attain epistemic justice, societies would have to unlearn this consumption reverence first the ingrained assumption that legitimacy is found elsewhere.

Unlearning is, however, not erasure. It is a repositioning, a deliberate act to perceive the world through personal prism, to appreciate the native thinking outside the pack of folklore but philosophy. In politics, it implies challenging the systems of development, which are gauged on foreign models. In research, it is an acceptance that naked data is domination in the guise of science.

The reclaimed language is one of the most excellent dimensions of epistemic justice. Colonial languages as they evolved into communication tools also became containment tools. They defined the way in which people expressed their world and more significantly, what they were not able to do so. To speak in the native language is not only a cultural preservation, but a form of intellectual rebellion one can think of in its own time. To decolonize knowledge is, therefore, based on reasserting linguistic diversity.

Education is leading in this change. The universities and schools should transform into learning community centres instead of learning factories. Decolonized curriculum is not a question of substituting one body of books with another, but rather a question of altering the question that we pose, the examples that we refer to and voices that we prioritize. When a student in Delhi learns Latin American philosophy, Or a student in Nairobi learns African feminist thought, knowledge starts circulating horizontally not vertically, not a hierarchy, but an equality.

There is also epistemic justice that requires the West to be humble to recognize that it has no vocabulary of reason or monopoly of truth. Since ancient times, the idea of progress has been conceived as a unidirectional movement, North-South, developed-developing, rational-mystical. This is the opposite of the trend of the decolonial project. It serves as the wake-up call to the world that wisdom is not the property of the land but a common work of humankind.

To unlearn the colonial mind is, then, not to reject but restore the equilibrium, a reconciliation. It enables the societies to rediscover their intellectual sovereignty without shutting off the world

discourse. It instructs that being modern does not imply being Western, and being traditional does not imply being backward. It is not to substitute one worldview with another, but to create a space in which they can coexist, a kind of harmony of differences where no knowledge should bow down before another.



CONCLUSION

Epistemic justice is not just an intellectual endeavor, it is a moral recovery of the human right to think in its own voice. As a pretext of universality, the Western liberal order, through its hierarchy, placed reason in Europe and condemned the other parts of the world to its intellectual periphery. The heritage of colonialism persists centuries later in its institutions, systems of knowledge and even imaginations. The reversal of it is to struggle with the oldest tradition of the empire, the illusion of a unique geography of enlightenment. To move in a way of decoloniality, it is not enough to critique the West, but the society will have to learn anew to see, speak, and know. It requires an undoing of the colonial mind, a cognitive liberation process, as a result of which oppressed epistemologies resume their rightful place.

Indigenous philosophies and ecological ethics, oral traditions, and community wisdom tell us that the world is subjected to subversion by the dominant ideologies of a single civilization.

Epistemic justice creates a vision of a world where coexistence is more valued than conquest, dialogue is more appreciated than dominance and plurality more appreciated than hierarchy. It is the challenge to re-think the world in the form of a global dialogue and not a predetermined monologue. The decolonial project, then, is not about rejecting the West, but about restoring the balance to the world of ideas so that knowledge can eventually become what it was always intended to be, the common property of all humankind.