

Teaching Social Sciences through Open and Distance Learning A Twenty First Century Perspective

Editors

Debnarayan Modak
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NETAJI SUBHAS OPEN UNIVERSITY
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FOREWORD

Netaji Subhas Open University (NSOU), since its inception in 1997, has crossed a number of important milestones in making breakthroughs in the fields of *Open and Distance Learning* (ODL) in the eastern region of the country. In the field of Social Sciences too, it has been contributing both in teaching and research in a very big way. Apart from imparting instructions to the thousands of learners covering different branches of social science disciplines through its network of comprehensive Student Support Services, the *School of Social Sciences (SoSS)*, which emanated from the erstwhile *School of Humanities & Social Sciences* in 2015, has been engaged in organising seminars, symposia, workshops etc. both in the core areas of the respective disciplines as well as in the applied aspects of ODL. It also undertakes several research projects with particular emphasis to carry forward the fruits of research to extend the border of ODL. The publications of the members of the School in different aspects of Social Science are also noteworthy.

The present publication entitled *Teaching Social Sciences through ODL: A 21st Century Perspective* is the outcome of a National Seminar organised by the *School of Social Science*, NSOU, on 03 March, 2017 and attended by scholars all around and graced by some doyens in the disciplines of Social Sciences as well as the policy-makers of the ODL at different levels. The publication and the Seminar represents one of the functional aspects of a research project entitled *Teaching Political Science through Open and Distance Learning: A Comparative Study of Student Support Services in Indian Universities* undertaken by Dr Debnarayan Modak, Professor of Political Science, SoSS. It may be regarded as one of the pioneering attempts to assess the very status of the

teaching-learning process in social science disciplines under ODL. It may help one to understand the gaps, if any, between the promises and performances and to take fresh initiatives to make social science teaching through ODL more effective and fruitful. I congratulate Professor Chandan Basu, Director, SoSS and Professor Debnarayan Modak, the Principal Investigator of the Project and former Director of the School, for their initiatives and efforts to bring the contributions made in the Seminar under two covers. I am also very grateful to Professor Radharaman Chakraborti, the First Vice Chancellor of NSOU for contributing a thought-provoking lead article for the volume. I take this opportunity to convey our heartfelt thanks to the *Distance Education Bureau* of the *University Grants Commission* for making available to us the necessary financial assistance in this regard.

I do hope that the publication, will help all concerned to understand the specificities of the problems in this regard and enlighten us the scope of using the fruits of modern technology in commensurate with the potentialities of the 21st century and encourage us to initiate further steps towards the quality assurance in teaching social science disciplines through ODL.



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STUDYING HISTORY: THE FRONTIERS OF IDEOLOGY, IDENTITY AND ODL*

Chandan Basu

Abstract

The aim of the present paper is to understand the study of history as knowledge formation as well as teaching-learning process. Evidently, knowledge formation is a social-cultural process while teaching-learning process is more associated with institution and institutional mechanism. In other words, the institution is responsible for generating and imparting knowledge systematically in a modern society. In recent days, there has been a qualitative expansion of the educational institutes especially in the realm of higher education with the expansion of the ODL system in India and elsewhere. The study of history is concerned with past in general and multiple negotiations with consciousness, identity and ideology in particular. The institutional approach is also very important in raising new questions, and developing historiographical schools. In India, while the leading conventional universities are trying to focus on the key historiographical issues, often based on distinct ideology and identity, the ODL institutes in most cases are busy with technocratic hybridization instead of viewing history as a discursive practice. In this context, the ODL system needs to create open forum for debates and discussion within the system itself.

Key Words: *Historical Approaches, Conventional Education System, ODL System, Ideology, Identity, Discursive Practice*

I

Recently there have been deep-rooted changes in the understanding of social sciences in general and history in particular. The basic contour of the change is related to the analyses and interpretations, objectives and approaches, framework and modalities of selection, arrangement and use of

* I express my sincere gratitude to all of my colleagues for their support to me, and especially to Professor Debnarayan Modak without whose insistence this paper could not have been possibly written. I am solely responsible for any error.

data, articulation of research questions and pattern of knowledge formation. A closer look in the long-term evolution of the research question in history reveals that four major different approaches have emerged in the academic world: these are 'Power Centric Approach', 'Social-Historical Approach', 'Total History Approach' and 'Subaltern Studies approach'.¹ The articulation these different contested approaches in the study of history have contributed to the expansion of the field of study in two specific ways. Firstly, the discipline of history starts appropriating the results of the researches of the other disciplines of social sciences in greater ways;² secondly, the canvas of history became critically wider as emphasis was increasingly given on the writing people's history, history of margins and genealogy of power.

This expansion of history as a discursive practice, as a moment of understanding both specially and temporarily, has already opened up the possibility of using the concepts and ideas from the other fields too. Three core ideas of Amartya Sen could be borrowed in this regard: these are (i) conceptualization of the idea of inequality, (ii) theory of social choice and (iii) formation of identity.³ At the very outset, with the risk of simplification, we may postulate that the existence of inequality in the varied levels of society and in heterogeneous forms could restrict the option of social choice in a given social formation. In other words, the efficiency of market does not work at all in a society primarily dominated by the matrix of inequality. The open option of choice based on rationality becomes oblivion, and even a myth in such cases. In turn, it could give birth to the conditions for the development of specific social, political and cultural identity; more importantly, this identity formation in the context of inequality and within the milieu of decreasing social choice would be of narrowing in nature. In other words, a self-image of identity would draw imaginary line of boundary of its own to obstruct others from interaction and negotiation, conversation and dialogue, discussion and debates. The formation of economically produced, socially articulated and culturally conditioned discrete historical layers, relatively autonomous in nature was result



Dr Debnarayan Modak (b. 1956) is presently Professor of Political Science at *Netaji Subhas Open University* (NSOU). He was the Director of the unified *School of Humanities & Social Sciences* and subsequently of the *School of Social Sciences* for about six years. Earlier, he served *Vidyasagar University*, Midnapore, for eighteen years and *Nabadwip Vidyasagar College*, Nadia, for nearly a decade. Besides teaching and administration, Dr Modak has always been very active in multifarious research activities and his numerous publications bear the fruits of those. Apart from those published from the *School of Social Sciences*, NSOU, his major publications include *Politics of National Question in India : The Communist Approach (1942-64)*; *Pratiya Samaj O Rajniti : Jatiyata. Sampradayikata Ebang Dalit Prasanga* (in Bengali) and *Sahitya O Samaj Pragati :Banga Manisha-r Alope* (in Bengali). Added to these are some edited volumes like *Terrorism : Concepts and Problems*; *Open and Distance Learning : Future Perspectives* (Co-editor : Anirban Ghosh); *Women in Contemporary India : Aspects of Participation and Empowerment* (Co-editor : Anis Khan); *Parasmonir Pradip Tomar* (A Bi-lingual Tribute to Rabindranath Tagore on his 150th Birth Anniversary) [Co-editor : Manan Kumar Mandal]



Dr Chandan Basu (b.1971) is Professor of History and Director, School of Social Sciences, Netaji Subhas Open University. He did his Ph. D. in the Department of History Jadavpur University on the development of left ideology and politics in West Bengal during the post-colonial era. He is currently working on the social history of left politics in West Bengal. He has a very good number of publications to his credit. Besides those published by the School of Social Sciences, NSOU, his other publications include *The Making of the Left Ideology in West Bengal: Culture, Political Economy, Revolution 1947-1970* (Delhi: 2009) and *Radical Ideology and Controlled Politics: CPI and the History of West Bengal, 1947-1964* (Kolkata: 2015). He is also co-editor of 'Gender Discrimination, Women Empowerment and Distance Education: History, Society and Culture' (Kolkata: 2014) and *Women, Violence and Law: An Intimate Interrogation - Volume I & II* (Kolkata: 2015 & 2016). Dr Basu has also published a number of papers in reputed journals.

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