

De-westernization and Reorientation in Communication: An Appraisal

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Abstract: This article presents an appraisal on de-westernization and reorientation in the context of communication discipline by employing the message- or artifact-oriented research approach. In this course, de-westernization has been observed as a critical response to Western or Eurocentric discursive paradigm that has been dominant in the academia since the institutionalization of the discipline. This article acknowledges the instrumental role of de-westernization for opening avenues to explore communication from diverse perspectives, and assesses the concept of Asiaticity as an academic endeavor to bring Asian perspective to the center while theorizing Asian communication practices. The final section of the article presents an appraisal to Adhikary's Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (SMC) as an example of reorientation in communication theorization.

Keywords: Asiaticity, Communication theory, De-

This article is divided into three sections. Firstly, an appraisal to de-westernization has been presented. Secondly, the concept of Asiacentricity is assessed as an academic endeavor to bring Asian perspective to the center while theorizing Asian communication practices. Finally, the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication is appraised as an example of reorientation in communication theorization. The message- or artifact-oriented research approach has been employed while conducting this qualitative research.

De-westernization as a Critical Juncture in Theorizing Communication

Curran and Park (2000) used the term “De-westernization” in the title of a book in 2000. According to Glück (2015),

The primary purpose of De-Westernisation as a concept is to provoke an analysis of how global knowledge is generated. It suggests an *epistemic shift* away from ideas of parochialism or Eurocentrism, which have long defined world-wide research, and an integration of ideas stemming from historical and current intellectual debates within countries of the global South. (p. 1)

It is “an ongoing process and intellectual shift” (p. 3).

Waisbord and Mellado (2014) have outlined four dimensions of the concept of de-westernization. “First, de-westernization means reassessing and expanding the ontological horizons of communication studies by analyzing issues that are either understudied or absent in the West or go beyond conventional geographical boundaries” (p. 363). Then, it “refers to the expansion of the body of evidence in communication scholarship” (p. 364). It also “refers to foregrounding theoretical perspectives original to the global South that are absent

in communication research in the West” (p. 365). In the fourth dimension, de-westernization involves the academic culture. According to them,

Although de-westernization has become emblematic of the recent internationalization of communication studies, it is a complex notion that refers to the diversification of epistemologies, body of evidence, theoretical perspectives, and academic cultures. This is necessary to revisit fundamental assumptions about the field, such as the subject of study, the validity and generalizability of findings, the epistemological premises of arguments and theories, and the standards of scholarly excellence. (p. 370)

Debates on the nature of communication discipline in general, and communication theory in particular, began right from the early days of its academic institutionalization (Craig, 1999, Pooley, 2016). Lasswell (1958) observed communication as an emerging discipline whereas Craig (1999) critically examined the disciplinarity of communication. Craig (1999) proposed communication theory as a dialogical-dialectical field of communication with two principles which were the constitutive model of communication as a meta-model and theory as meta-discursive practice where he recognized tentative seven traditions of the field as rhetorical, semiotic, phenomenological, cybernetic, socio-psychological, socio-cultural, and critical traditions of communication theory (p. 119).

Another dimension of discussion was concerned to the dominance of Eurocentric or Western discursive paradigm in the communication discipline (Adhikary, 2014, p. 5). The western dominance on communication theories, especially the Eurocentric universalism, has been questioned by communication scholars from the East as well as the West. De-westernization can be viewed as an outcome of such academic critique.

Craig and Xiong (2022) viewed that while the impulse to de-westernize calls for a diversification of communication theory, giving greater prominence to concepts and assumptions informed by non-Western cultures, the emergence of a global communication culture in diverse manifestations (p. 1). Asante (1998), a prominent scholar in Afrocentricity as well as of de-westernization, put forward the idea of meta-theory or paradigm as a conception that includes multiplicity of theories which allows communication researchers to develop better interpretations, fuller understandings, and more effective articulations of the meaning of human goals and interactions.

The main debates surrounding de-westernization, which addresses global imbalances in the creation and distribution of academic knowledge as it concerns all stages of the research process; across professional academic cultures, theoretical and methodological perspectives and the choice of research subjects. (Downing, 1996; Glück, 2015; Thussu, 2009; Waisbord and Mellado, 2014) In this context, Waisbord (2022) this power struggle to define positionality in knowledge production and scholars silence regarding important question as he says:

De-westernization has demanded acknowledging the power struggle between west and rest on defining knowledge tradition and its control. There are concerns about the positionality in power imbalance between the West and rest in academia. It depicts the raising of rarely asked yet publicly dismissed questions like where do ideas come from? From what position do we produce knowledge? What are the biases of my work? What are the strengths and limitations of research and intellectual traditions? (p. 1).

Almost a decade and a half ago, three books with explicit

aim in exploring the Asian perspectives in communication research - Dissanayake (1988), Kincaid (1987), and Nordstrom (1983) - have been published as critical and central to the emergence and evolution of the Asiacentric project of communication theory (Miike, 2016; Wang, 2009). The academicians from Asia, Latin America and Africa started to contribute in research and academic journals claiming communication discipline as multicultural, multidisciplinary and multi-paradigmatic. They started to bring voices related to the power imbalance in knowledge production. These attempts reclaim non-western presence in academic power spectrum.

This increased need to de-Westernize and decolonize communication and media studies is based on criticisms of a dominant elitist Western axiology and epistemology of universal validity, leaving aside indigenous and localized philosophical traditions originating in non-Western settings (Glück, 2015). De-westernization of communication studies as a diffused, multi-pronged intellectual movement that has produced vibrant literature in recent years from around the world. (Demeter, 2020, as cited in Waisbord, 2022, p. 26). That is why de-westernization is considered as an essential reading because it drew upon the experience of countries throughout the world instead of generalizing from the experiences of a few rich nations in the West (Curran and Park, 2000). The main debates surrounding de-westernization, which addresses global imbalances in the creation and distribution of academic knowledge as it concerns all stages of the research process; across professional academic cultures, theoretical and methodological perspectives and the choice of research subjects (Downing, 1996; Glück, 2015; Thusu, 2009; Waisbord and Mellado, 2014).

There is prominent requirement to remain consistent with its original impulse without falling into the traps of essentialism and reification but it limits the set of questions related to what is to be

theorized leading to the progressive perfecting of existing theory which is criticized assuming to be because of academic affinity to western institutional framework (Ray, 2012, p. 238).

Asiacentricity: Re-centering Asia

Asiacentricity was propounded by Yoshitaka Miike in 2004 through his doctoral dissertation from University of New Mexico, USA. Earlier, the concept of Afrocentricity was propounded by Ashante (1998). The rise of postmodern and postcolonial theories and pluralist thinking also paved the way to studying media and communication with multiculturalism's approach, which by nature runs to critically view European universalism. The paradigm of Asian communication is emerging due to the efforts of Asian communication scholars over the years, thus, it is a critical moment for Asian communication scholars to move a step forward through the process of self-examination (Chen, 2006; Wang, 2009).

According to Miike (2022), Asia-centricity is

- an assertion of Asian as subjects and agents,
- the centrality of the collective and humanistic interest in Asia and Asians in the process of knowledge reconstruction about the Asian world,
- the placement of Asian cultural values and ideals at the center of inquiry into Asian thought and action,
- the groundedness in Asian historical experiences,
- an Asian theoretical orientation to data and an Asian ethical critique of and corrective of the dislocation and displacement of Asian People and Phenomena.

Inquiry originated in Asian about communication can be more meaningful. For this communication study should be connected with indigenous intellectual roots, situated knowledge and local modes of thinking. It shows the evolving development of truly "Human" centric approach in constructing theories and practices. It

is not an exception in the case of communication discipline which has been shown with the introduction of the Sadharanikaran. Model of Communication (Adhikary, 2003, 2009, 2010, 2014, 2016; Dissanayake, 1988; Gordon, 2007)

Cushman and Kincaid (1987) explored the Eastern and Western culture discovering fundamental principles underlying different cultural orientation (p. 9). Gunaratne (2005) presented his own approach to communication outlets and free expression, using both Asian and Western philosophy. He suggests complex dynamical systems theory, cybernetics and complexity science as a ‘natural arena of axial Asian philosophies’, highly consistent with the system thinking of Eastern worldviews. (Gunaratne, 2009a, 2010) These attempt shows the construction of ‘Asian’ communication theories was an attempt to rediscover the terrain, to challenge and enrich the communication theories. To develop “more pertinent and heuristically useful” theories and models of communication that reflect the cultural ethos of Asia, Asian communication scholars must replace the Aristotelian model which is linear and rhetorical model of communication, and admittedly, serves the west but does not fit in with the cultural characteristics of Asian societies (Dissanayake, 1988). Similarly, the paradigm of Asian communication is emerging due to the efforts of Asian communication scholars over the years, thus, it is a critical moment for Asian communication scholars to move a step forward through the process of self-examination (Chen, 2006; Wang, 2009).

According to Miike (2003),

To theorize about Asia is not the same as to theorize from the Asian perspective. One can address and appraise Asian people and phenomena without reference to Asian languages, religions/philosophies, and histories. Such an intellectual orientation is, however, fundamentally unsound if one wishes to see

the Asian world through Asian eyes because Asians think and speak in Asian languages, believe in Asian religions/philosophies, and struggle to live in Asian historical experiences. (p. 39)

Miike (2017) has traced seventeen theories of communication based on non-Western perspective among which six theories are of Asian ontological world views, four theories from African and Asian epistemological perspective and seven by African and Asian Axiological parameters (p. 67). These non-western theory building attempts are proliferated after the Gudykunst (2005) comments that there is the lack of theories of intercultural communication from outside the United States. He further claimed that Asian ‘theories’ contained in Kincaid (1987) and Dissanayake (1988) are not theories rather, they tend to be perspectives or philosophical in nature which may, however, form the foundations for developing indigenous theories (p. 25). Miike (2006) argues that Gudykunst’s comment is arrogant (p. 84). Asiacentric communication studies relation between audiences needs to be studied before sending messages considering multicultural society. (Miike, 1988, 2010a, 2019b; Dissanayake, 2003)

Critics of Asiacentricity doubted about the nature, content, and goal of the Asia-centric project discrediting on the grounds that the word Asia is not of Asian origin, falsely projecting it as an Asian version of Eurocentrism (Miike, 2019b, p. 49). Still prominent scholar of Asiacentricity, Miike (2024) posed question as ‘Can Asian communicators think independently of west?’ (p. 11).

Moving Beyond De-westernization: Reorientation in Theory and Research

Reorientation of the communication discipline demands moving beyond de-westernization thereby exploring more indigenous resources (Adhikary, 2014b, 2017, 2018). The next

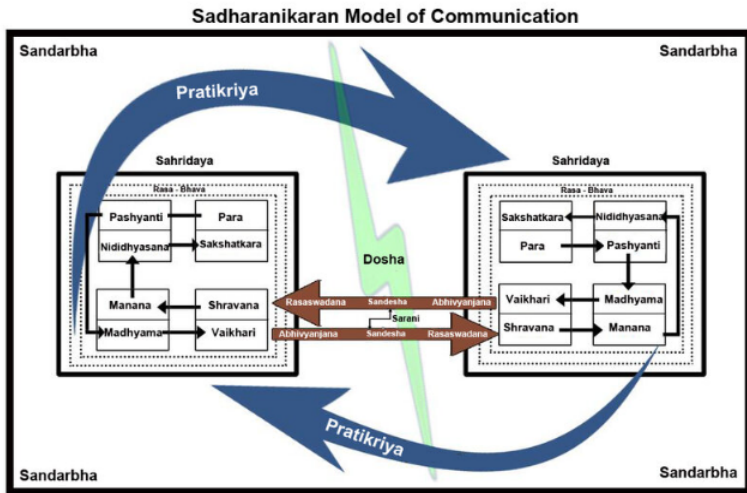
paradigm shift in the discipline of communication seems advancing beyond de-westernization, and to employ the reorientation approach while theorizing communication. Reorientation is needed for re-centering indigenous perspectives in any discipline. Here, pertinence to observe and promote the re-orientation initiatives is felt in the communication discipline. Although, there is no universal consensus on one grand theory but promoting dialogue and debate across the diverse traditions of communication theory can help to reach on intellectual coherence. There is an urgency and vacant space for innovating theories and models from different cultural locations based on knowledge repository of its philosophical traditions (Adhikary, 2014b, 2016, 2018; Craig, 2009).

The nurturing environment for indigenous theorization of communication is needed. Exploring philosophical traditions open themselves to each other's differences and similarities. This recognition and internalization among cultures creates better chances for understanding both of the East and the West. The communication discipline and the field of communication theory can offer tremendous opportunities for such endeavors. The study of comparative communication theory should be encouraged and promoted as it paves way for reconciliation among different perspectives (Adhikary, 2016, 2018).

This signifies the emergence of time to put communication discipline beyond de-Westernization from limited to de-center the Western discursive paradigm only and relocating themselves to different cultural centers. In fact, an increasing emphasis to reorient communication scholarship in order to embrace ancient communication tradition is based on old civilization with a known history of thousands of years and having a distinct and rich cultural identity rooted to Vedas. Here, Communication is not a new concept and so communication theorization is also not alien (Adhikary, 2014b).

For this, an emphasis should be given to re-orient communication discipline towards mainstreaming indigenous theories of communication. With the advent of the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication, popularly known as the SMC (Adhikary, 2003, 2009, 2010, 2012, 2014a, 2016), the reorientation approach has become a reality. The SMC draws primarily on two ancient Sanskrit texts – namely, *Natyashastra* and *Vakyapadiya* (for further discussion in this regard, see: Adhikary, 2014a). One of the significant contributions of the development of the SMC is that it shows the immense possibility of reorientation in communication discipline.

Figure 1: The Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (Source: Adhikary, 2024)



As it has been observed, the SMC has inspired many scholars and institutions. Currently, the SMC is included in the curricula and taught at several universities across the world. And, scholars

from different universities and different disciplines have been conducting further research based on this communication model. It also contributes to advancing the discourse on de-westernization and reorientation in the communication discipline. Many scholars have praised the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication as an epitome of indigenous, non-Western, Asiacentric theorization of communication. (Dahal, Kafle, and Poudyal, 2024, p. 2)

A study by Pulkit Sharma and Ankit Katyayan has assessed various research publications that employ the SMC as their theoretical framework (Dahal, Kafle, and Poudyal, 2024, p. 48) thereby showing an ever increasing popularity of Adhikary's communication model. For instance, future prospect of the SMC is well articulated by LamaYolmo (2024) who has studied about Human-AI symbiosis to unveil the inherent limitation of AI using the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication which shows model's relevance and potential utility in the era of modern technological advancement (p. 67). Various papers presented at the International Seminar on Two Decades of the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (Dahal, Kafle, and Poudyal, 2024) clearly show how the SMC has already paved a highway for reorientation of communication theory. To add significance to this context, the President of South Asian University, Prof. K. K. Aggarwal emphasizes that the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication developed by Dr. Adhikary should be extended beyond Nepal and India aiming to benefit the entire world (Dahal, Kafle, and Poudyal, 2024, p. 16).

There is urgency for innovating theories and models from different cultural locations and philosophical traditions. Exploring philosophical traditions open themselves to each other's differences and if each examines itself in the light of that recognition, there would be better chances for understanding both of the East and the

West. The communication discipline and the field of communication theory can offer tremendous opportunities for such endeavors. The study of comparative communication theory should be encouraged and promoted as it paves way for reconciliation among different perspectives. (Adhikary, 2017, 2018)

Theory and Practice of communication – Bharata Muni, a seminal book by Nirmala Mani Adhikary (2014a), presents a significant example of the reorientation in communication (Adhikary, 2014a). It has opened up the wider avenues for the scholars to conduct intensive research to introduce indigenous theories. Besides the Sadharanikaran Model of Communication (SMC), it presents a unique media analysis technique – namely, Sadharanikaran Media Analysis Technique (SMAT). Furthermore, Adhikary emphasizes on the need to explore indigenous research methodologies too:

Now, various fundamental research and studies on various aspects of research methodology itself should be conducted. Emphasis should be not only on application of western research paradigm but also to enrich the discourse on indigenous research methodologies. Communication/media scholars from Bharatavarsha should move further, and explore and employ indigenous research methodology in order to theorize the practice and to practice the theories. (p. 372)

Adhikary (2013) presents an example of indigenous research and theorization by exploring another Sanskrit text *Charaka Samhita*. Such discussions highlight that reorientation is not only about theorization, but it needs substantiation through research methodologies and methods – both basic and applied.

Concluding Remarks

De-westernization is a response to the dominance of western/Eurocentric discursive paradigm. It critiques Eurocentrism and opens

avenues for multicultural, multidisciplinary and multi-paradigmatic theorization as the power balance in knowledge production and dissemination. To make the communication theorization multi-dimensional, philosophies and practices of different civilizations, societies and continents have to be studied pertinently. Asiaticity is an important initiatives in re-centering Asia while theorizing in Asian context and from Asian perspectives. It is not Asian ethnocentrism as Eurocentrism was.

Efforts of de-westernization has brought an intrinsic turn for communication scholars – both from the East and the West. Scholars working on de-westernizing communication theories, recognizing its insufficiency, because this intrinsic turn is not happening in vacuum but rooted in philosophical foundation of ancient wisdom. In fact, theorization of communication is moving towards reorientation as evident from Adhikary's Sadharanikaran Model of Communication.

Theorization is not rigid but a fluid which is influenced by multiple factors. It can be historical, contextual, institutional and biographical. From western dominance to recognition of the multiplicity of communication theories, it has come across many phases embracing growth, recognizing immense potentialities and discarding the rigid tendencies of denying the rest of the world. This evolution has recognized the significance of reorientation.

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