GLOBALIZATION, SOCIAL SCIENCES AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT*

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Abstract

This paper addresses social aspects of sustainable development in the age of globalization. The argument is based on the premise that in many ways the human society has stepped into The Brave New World. However, this new paradigm may not be underscored by the strategic behavior promising the sustainability of recently observed rapid progression of human society on the evolutionary scale. In this perspective, the social sciences essentially face a formidable challenge and it remains to be seen how the lofty intellectual tradition of the Homo Sapiens Sapiens emerges out of it. The issue is all the more relevant in countries like Pakistan where the society is evolving in an asymmetric and nonlinear fashion. Moreover, globalization in many ways appears to be responsible for promoting colonial legacy of acculturation rather than enculturation of developing countries' societies. In the contemporary intellectual tradition of the world, social sciences are assigned the task of providing diagnostic, prescriptive and curative frameworks for ensuring progressive transformation of the society. That said, in developing countries like Pakistan the social sciences, unfortunately, have never evolved in the local perspective. Therefore, most of the inferences drawn from positive analyses fail to reflect real life experiences of these countries, hence the normative interventions very often fall short of desired aims and end up compromising social benefits. The author concludes by suggesting that it is high time for the scholars in developing countries to design social science paradigms consistent with the indigenous traits and aiming at weaving progressively sustainable social fabric.

The study sets out to visit the challenge of sustainable development with the backdrop of sociological aspects of globalization. The argument is build around the premise that human society happens to share the universal paradox since sustainable existence of individuals and communities requires both tangible and intangible resources, defined as physical and social capital respectively. The major aims of the study is to determine relationship of the resolution of paradox in human society with contemporary globalization processes, in order to assess viability of the former for sustainable development of countries like Pakistan. The paper contains three distinct parts. Part I attempts to highlight contemporary

* This paper was presented in the International Social Sciences Conference, University of Karachi in November 2007.
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globalization processes fast multiplying production and consumption of physical capital even in developing countries like Pakistan. Part II borrows from the history of sociological evolution to put up a convincing case for constructing intangible systems that need to be in place for ensuring sufficient creation of social capital which underscores internal dynamics of a society to help absorb and resist positive and negative external influences respectively. Finally, Part III recounts the aspects of globalization which are seriously threatening the sustainable development of countries like Pakistan.

In the social sciences encyclopedia of the modern world, globalization is a relatively new concept owing its existence to reinvigorated world capitalism that began a new lease on life in late 1970s. Since ever the dismemberment of former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in early 1990s, globalization has become a buzzword hotly debated in all corners of the planet. The nature, extent and significance of the changes associated with the process appear to have strategic implications for countries of GEMS (Globally Embracing Modern South). Although the observers and theorists have variously argued that globalization is civilizing, destructive, or feeble (Hirschman, 1982), the process continues to be marked by increasing cross-border flows of goods, services, money, people, information, and culture (Held, McGrew, Goldblatt & Perraton, 1999, p. 16). The informational aspect is reflected in an economy with the capacity to work as a unit in real time on a planetary scale (Castells, 1996, p. 92). While global commodity chains are

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coordinating production on a global scale (Gereffi, 1994) increasing technological capabilities/acquisitions and information flows are further increasing interdependence of national economies in trade, finance, and macroeconomic policy (Kobrin, 1997 & Gilpin, 1987). These processes together may therefore be considered behind apparent intensification of global consciousness (Robertson, 1992) as observed in greater interdependence and mutual awareness among economic, political, and social units in the world, and among agents in general (Guilfoyle, 2001; Held et al., 1999; Petrillo, 1996 & Waters, 1995).

Theoretical perspectives of globalization appear to be associated with neoliberalism and with technocratic solutions to economic development and reform (Cox, 1996; Evans, 1997 & McMichael, 1996). That said, international humanitarian networks and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have also made plenty of currency by selling the slogan of responsible global citizenship (Guilfoyle, Kennedy & Zald, 1999 & Keek & Sikkink, 1999). Some of the authors credit globalization even for the resurgence of religious and Marxist movements (Mazlish, 1993 & Robertson, 1992). Since the available theoretical and empirical literature scarcely renders globalization as a uniform, irreversible and inexorable trend, the phenomenon may therefore be associated with multiple frames of reference (Hisch & Fiss, 2000). Indeed, some of the authors go as far as identifying globalization with fragmented, incomplete, discontinuous, contingent and, in many ways, contradictory processes (Giddens, 2000; Gilpin, 2000; Guilfoyle et al., 1999 & Held et al., 1999).

Finally, most distinct feature of the contemporary phase of globalization is commodification or marketization of social life worldwide, spurred by information and communication technologies. The accumulation of physical capital has surpassed, by alarmingly wide margins, the creation of social capital. The former may be defined in terms of material means of human sustenance owing their existence to positive laws of technology, while the latter refers to positive laws of sociology for regulating interpersonal relations with formal and informal institutional networking of a society. The history of civilization is underscored with the making of positive laws, both in technology and sociology. Therefore, the poverty of social capital in a country is no less important than that of the physical capital. The former, however, continued to be grossly overlooked for the better part of last century, a period characterized with ‘one size fits all’ mantra of modernity, especially since after World War II. In what follows the author will attempt to argue that systems owing their life to positive
laws of sociology determine size of the stock of social capital in a society which, unlike the physical capital, seldom includes globally purchasable or tradable products.

II

The evolutionary process remains undocumented for the initial societies of H. S. Sapiens, one of the species of global biodiversity, popularly known as humankind. That is, the origins of the positive laws of contemporary societies ought to be traced back to the complex systems of tradition and custom which regulated early Neolithic era. Interestingly, on the modern world map, lands belonging to GEMS are designated as “cradles of civilization.” However, civilization identified with a group of people does not happen to be a monolithic phenomenon evolved from a single origin.

On the contrary, civilization is a process involving successive cultural graduations sustained by strong internal dynamics of a people having necessary resources to welcome and successfully absorb progressive external influences while simultaneously deferring regressive impacts from both within and without.

Social hierarchies universally happen to be about appearances which, in view of the reality of natural law, are more warranted than they are desirable. The rule of natural law in sociology is predominantly underscored by the conflict of interest and fundamentally all social hierarchies are supposed to have the underlying objective of conflict resolution while variously applying assimilative, differentialist and even annihilationist strategies. All social hierarchies have a functional aspect and a conflict aspect. In author’s opinion, the former essentially accords merit to assimilative strategies compared to differentialist and annihilationist methods of conflict resolution. Unfortunately, owing to the inevitability of the rule of natural law, the conflict aspect of hierarchies frequently invites and also have a resort to differentialist and annihilationist strategies.

1 Sociological evolution and technological breakthroughs universally happen to have a positive and bidirectional functional relationship. The latter, however, happen to be beyond the scope of this study.

2 Homo Sapiens Sapiens (thinking thinking human beings) is so called because it is the most advanced and early surviving subspecies of the species Homo Sapiens (thinking human beings) and the genus Homo.

3 The best known are the river valleys of the Middle East about 3500 B.C., where the earliest known civilizations arose, those of northern India and northern China about a thousand year later; and the plains, forests and mountain valleys of Central America and the Andes toward 500 B.C. (see Greer & Lewis 2005, p.16).

4 The upshot is that hierarchies in a society are synonymous to the artifacts of manufacturing and engineering in the universe of tangibles owing their existence to human ingenuity. Indeed, the arts of manufacturing and engineering in the intangible universe of sociology have come a long way from caves dwelling to the power corridors of administrative and political establishments of the modern world societies.

In its Palaeolithic existence, the humankind had next to nothing access to both physical and social capital. It all practically began with the advent of Neolithic era, about 8000 B.C., which increasingly provided material security for applying human ingenuity to the artifacts of technology and sociology respectively. The early exhibits of social capital owed their existence to the manufacturers who largely had to rely on divinity for marketing social product. While household universally remains the basic unit for creation of social capital, priest was the first manufacturer of positive laws of sociology after the household head. The power of priests originally came from their status as servants of the gods and goddesses, the personified forces of nature having their origins in highly fearful, ignorant and insecure Palaeolithic existence of humankind. The divine institution of priesthood met its first worldly rival in the guise of military chieftains, arising as defenders of their communities in warfare among the early cities and with foreign people over rival land claims and water rights. By 2500 B.C., these military leaders had swollen in their grandeur and had come to be called kings, with increasingly extending systems of governance according them the power and privilege both during the war and in the peace time. Like the priests, the kings also claimed the divine right of rule and, under the authority ordained to them by gods, they also manufactured

5 Obedience to divinity has been a common feature above and beyond the size and degree of complexity of human groups representing distinct societies. In many ways this feature has managed to survive through all time tests and remains so widespread and persistent that it amounts to a worldwide traditional pattern of civilization in general.

6 The early priests were not confined to the matters of rituals and beliefs alone, rather they were responsible for supervising all communal activities including the construction of temples to provide housing to gods and goddesses commensurate with their relative status in the hierarchy, mostly owing to the degree of social popularity of the respective deity. The priests also had the divine responsibility of furnishing the temples with costly and beautiful works of arts while utilizing a public pool of funds. Moreover, they managed vast public properties and introduced technological innovations. However, the landmark achievement of the institution of priesthood is the invention of writing which allowed the introduction of widely enforceable and long enduring informal and formal positive laws of sociology. In short, the institution ought to be credited for leading the process of social, technical and cultural innovations out of which the past and present civilizations emerged (see Greer & Lewis 2005, pp. 7-157).
and enforced positive laws of sociology including taxes on the people to accumulate the surplus value for building impressive royal palaces and temples. Since the early Neolithic era, palace and temple have continued to be major designers of the formal positive laws of sociology in virtually every civilization and, historically, they have survived together in a relationship of both partnership and competition (Greer & Lewis, 2005, p.18). The growth rates of stocks of social capital in pre-modern societies have therefore largely determined by the level of enlightenment of their priests and kings. Invention of printing machine, however, opened up the doors to opportunities for the masses to philosophize and challenge the positive laws of sociology not allowing egalitarianism. Successive improvements in communication and transportation technologies and increasing urban settlements also helped people mobilize for democratizing the processes of making the positive laws of sociology. Scholarly institutions of higher learning for deliberating on spatial and temporal dynamics of social issues began to be established even before the first millennium was out. The documented world history is witness that philosophizing on colossal social questions and enlightened democratization of positive law making to resolve interpersonal conflicts gave a formidable edge to the Arab and Turkish empires over the medieval Europe. That said, as soon as the Arab and Turkish empires lost zeal to...

The relationship of partnership between palace and temple received a serious blow after the French Revolution and its spillover effects in the Western world which, however promptly, concluded in 1917 Russia with the Bolshevik Royal command and a complete severing of the relationship with the temple. The palace in the Western world dealt with the looming threat of socialist tide by leaning up with the temple in GEMS while simultaneously appeasing their enlightened populations and palace in GEMS with existing, in terms of benefits and foreign aid packages respectively. A close analysis of the history of cold war and the ongoing war in Afghanistan suggests that temple in GEMS has also continued to receive covert perks from the palace in the West.

12 Al-Azhar (in Arabic: the most illuminated and shining) University in Cairo, Egypt, is the second oldest operating university of the contemporary world after the University of Al Karacine in Fez, Morocco. The University began its school of social sciences in October 975 AD, when the incumbent Chief Justice, Abul Hassan Ali ibn Al-No’man started teaching the book “Al-Musriq o positive law making to interpersonal affairs while keeping in perspective space and time dynamics.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Azhar%20University, accessed on August 12, 2007 16:42 hours).

11 Indeed, even the earliest steps toward higher education were taken in Southern Europe, where access to Muslim learning was easiest through the Byzantine route. Late in the 12th century, learning in law began in the northern Italian town of Bologna, not far from Ravenna, which had a long Byzantine tradition (see Greer & Lewis, 2005, p. 266). Of special interest to European scholars were the original writings and commentaries of Muslim scholars. Chief among the latter was the 12th century philosopher Averroes (Ibn-Rashid), a Spanish born Arab. Interestingly, many of the Christians in Europe were...

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keep pace with space and time, their decline began with the parallel rise of Europe which was fast awakening from a long and deep slumber spanning over the so-called dark ages.

Europe’s foremost institution of higher learning was established in Paris during the 13th century. Paris was the first University to offer the four major curricula that have become identified in the modern world with the idea of a university: medicine, law, theology, and liberal arts. The Paris model encouraged the spread of universities in England, Germany and the rest of Western Europe. By 1300, eighteen universities had been founded and the total number of universities, many of which are still operational, had swelled to eighty by the middle of second millennium. The liberal art curriculum of the university was normally a prerequisite to professional courses and it began with the trivium including grammar, rhetoric and logic. However, the “trivium” went beyond the mechanics of language as it included study of works of philosophy, literature and history (Greer & Lewis, 2005, pp. 266-258). It may therefore be inferred that along with the positive laws of technology, the positive laws of society were also increasingly shifting to the public domain as the universities in Europe continued to produce an ever larger number of graduates with degrees in liberal arts. The new class of intellectuals thus secured an environment which fast multiplied the social capital of European societies since there was increasingly more room for dissent and less emphasis on conformity, two of the most important conditions required for realizing individual potentials and capabilities which essentially are the prerequisites for accumulation of both physical and social capital.

The reawakening of Europe was followed by the transformation and expansion of the continent ranging from the birth of modern capitalism to the impulse to overseas expansion. The European colonization of the world helped them build a sustainable base to accumulate physical capital, but it seriously compromised the stocks of social capital in the colonized societies and the legacy continues even in the 21st century. Perhaps the most damaging impact came through the educational system, both in terms of educational licensing and curricula transplanted into the effigies of GEMS with a futurist covert hegemonic strategy aiming at social engineering of colonies to ensure their eternal indirect control by the disturbed by his doctrine, drawn from Aristotle that the universe had always existed and was therefore not created. He also denied the immortality of the human soul (p. 269). Today, the subjects of the trivium are referred as humanistic studies.
colonial masters. For example, the curricula of social sciences scarcely allow the learner to take pride in local contexts. The indigenous issues and problems which ought to be locale specific are frequently provided an umbrella cover of Third World characteristics. Rather than inviting the students to brainstorm and suggest indigenous solutions to indigenous problems, there are readymade alien solutions found in the social sciences’ literature prescribed to all by the gurus in the West. What makes the situation all the more worse is the social milieu widely prevalent in GEMS favoring conformity over dissent, especially conformity to what is written in the book.

Therefore, curricula of social sciences in GEMS scarcely allows the students anything more than parrot learning for many interrelated reasons, some of which are outlined in the following:

- Social sciences are essentially contextual, but the curricula offered in GEMS do not have sufficient grounding in respective space and time;
- While comparing vertical and horizontal organization of various disciplines, consistency, continuity and cohesion are found conspicuous by virtue of their absence both within and across the offshoots of social sciences respectively;
- Structural components of social sciences, such as economic, political, social, or cultural, are subject to the same basic set of mechanisms and involve synchronization of a co-evolutionary character. Unfortunately, the social sciences in GEMS are scarcely on talking terms with each other, leave alone frequent meeting on family luncheons.

Social sciences are more experiential than they are experimental, while the age of modernity favors scientific approach over intuition. Consequently, the standard bearers of social sciences in GEMS have increasingly become more and more interested in wearing ostentatious emperor clothing due to the worldly hue and apparent level of difficulty involved in achieving academic par excellence which is very often shallow in terms of its relevance with the ground reality. The age of globalization is

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13 The strategy appears to have a mutually reinforcing umbrella cover at all levels of learning and across all academic disciplines. However, the scope of this study is essentially limited to teaching and learning of social sciences at higher degree level.

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further aggravating the situation as many of the highly accomplished scholars in GEMS prefer to identify themselves with the international league of a certain discipline rather than grounding their person and work to local contexts.

The worst scenario, however, is the situation of the reference material accessible to the vast majority of students and utilized and recommended by most of the instructors. Below the Masters degree level, most of the students and teachers rely on standard text books for learning and teaching respectively. Almost all of these text books contain the plagiarized material from Western sources poorly translated in national languages which widely happen to be the medium of instruction and evaluation. Not only these sources scarcely have relevance with the local contexts, they also fail to help students internalize universal social phenomena. On the other hand, there is a small group of students mostly coming from privileged background which allows them to opt for English medium. Their situation is also hardly enviable as they either rely on poorly plagiarized local versions of text books written in English language or the text books published in the West with a Western context.

Finally, in countries like Pakistan, the educational curriculum is designed in a manner that beyond early years of schooling, social sciences and natural sciences are divided by a Berlin Wall. On the west of the Wall are natural sciences widely considered to be engaging the most capable, competitive, hardworking and forward looking students, while on the east are the social sciences frequently looked down by the privileged and liberal west. It will be argued in the following that unless supported by the infrastructure of viable social systems, superstructure of natural sciences, reflected in technological capability or acquisition, is nothing more than a house of cards.

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14 Unfortunately, the situation very often continues even at the Masters Degree level. For example, in most of the social science disciplines private candidature happens to be prevalent system in Pakistan. A vast majority appears as private candidates each year, almost all relying on photocopied notes, available in the market, and comfortably assailing through the examination. The system therefor is responsible for producing the degrees which are worth less than the paper they are written on.
Northern Hemisphere. However, for GEMS countries like Pakistan the commensurate stage of development itself happens to be a long way away and the way these societies are going seriously threatens their mere survival leave alone sustainable development.

Owing to their colonial heritage, the GEMS countries fast adapted the educational culture of the West without paying any heed to the local context. Therefore, it was as poor an adaptation as it was shortsighted since not only the contexts were alien, particularly in the social sciences, the countries neither had the resources nor the capacity for successfully replicating the systems of the colonial masters. The age of globalization is further complicating the situation and seriously threatens the sustainability of GEMS’s societies. The argument in this context is build around two diverse theses put forward by Rostow (1961) and Huxley (1945).

Rostow’s theory (1961), of stages of growth is one of the most famous development paradigms. According to him, each society goes through five distinct linear stages of growth: including traditional society; prerequisites for development; takeoff to self-sustained growth; drive to maturity; and, finally, the age of mass consumption. In many ways, GEMS’s countries still continue to have countless features associated with traditional societies. On the other hand, prerequisites for development essentially mean the quality and quantity of social capital in a society measured in terms of its institutional development which, particularly in the modern world, is the outcome of the state of development of social sciences in terms of the degree of their contextual relevance. Unfortunately, most of the developing countries conspicuously failed to make that highly warranted transition. Therefore, takeoff to self-sustained growth has been a dream largely unrealized by GEMS, as majority of the countries still remain dependent on foreign aid and many have to accept severe conditionality imposed by the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to avoid default and have access to the foreign savings for keeping their economies running. Similarly, majority of the developing countries including Pakistan, did not takeoff to self-sustained growth, hence no drive to maturity. Comes the age of globalization and it lands the GEMS in the age of mass consumption, the last stage of growth without having left the global economy. 

It therefore appears that humanities have failed in GEMS to perform their function as social technologies since in forward looking societies new developments invite new institutional frameworks which change the ways in which problems are defined and solutions are suggested (Weimer, 1955). Currently, under the mounting pressures of globalization, GEMS countries are going through a process that Huxley (1945, p.16) calls a race in progress between disintegration and reintegration. If disintegration wins, the result will be chaos. Given the existing quality and quantity of social capital in GEMS, it is much harder to avert the inevitable unless social sciences in these countries are reformed and promoted to a functional status.

Conclusion

Change is the eternal universal truth and it ought to be the central issue for sociological studies. Change in the universe of tangibles, products of technology, happens to be in a by-directional relationship with that of the universe of intangible which represents many of the demographic characteristics of individuals, their behavioral responses and cognitive conditioning. The contemporary era of globalization is identified with an unprecedented change in the universe of tangibles. The consumption patterns appear to exhibit convergence between the nations and also between social groups within a nation owing to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) revolution. The societies of GEMS are ill prepared to absorb the change accompanying the tidal wave of globalization. Sustainable development essentially requires progressive social transformation. The latter is like climbing a ladder and it is risky to skip the lower rungs and climb higher. Although the rhetoric of aiming high is important for human psyche, societies ought to take the road escorted by reality. However hard and trying the road of reality may be, but in the end it will reward the travelers with the promise of sustainable development. Finally, it remains with the social sciences to formulate a framework providing warranted apportioning of rhetoric and reality in GEMS.

It has been increasingly recognized that developing countries are facing serious issues of environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, social sustainability and also cultural sustainability (see Estes, 1993; Reed 1996; Hempel 1996 & Khan, 2002).
References


