

**Working
Paper
Series I**

**WP 1 ✍
February
2016**

Reflections on the Use, Overuse and (Possible) Misuse of Critical Thinking

Habibul Haque Khondker



Bangladesh Institute of Social Research (BISR) Trust

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Habibul Haque Khondker

Professor

Zayed University

Abu Dhabi, UAE



Bangladesh Institute of Social Research (BISR) Trust

Hasina De Palace, House # 6/14, Block # A,
Lalmatia, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh

Tel: +88-02-8100658, Fax: +88-02-8100636, Cell: 01711-071053

E-mail: bisr@agnionline.com; Website: www.bisrbd.org

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Foreword

Bangladesh Institute of Social Research (BISR) Trust organized a seminar on the importance of critical thinking in Bangladesh. Along with other speakers, Dr. Habibul Haque Khondker, Professor at Zayed University, Abu Dhabi, UAE was the keynote speaker of that seminar. Professor Habib presented his reflection on the discourse of critical thinking in culture and the academia, especially in Social Science.



We are very glad to publish his valuable observation and opinion regarding critical thinking in this working paper. “Reflections on the Use, Overuse and (Possible) Misuse of Critical Thinking” is both a historical evidence of importance of critical thinking in knowledge generation and the systematic indication about failure in and misuse of critical thinking. He clearly demarcates the boundary of critical thinking, the allowed nature (organized and constructive) of Skepticism and the dangerous zone of Cynicism. Most of the cases, critiques are mere attacks without thinking critically; blind rejection of ideas not compatible to presumptions and intention to criticize everything with a destructive attitudes has become the culture, ‘culture of too much criticism’. But, thinking critically is the sign of dynamism in intellectual arena; challenge to the dominant discourse is the indicators of development of knowledge.

To think critically, we need to liberate our minds; to do criticism, we need to have constructive arguments well-supported by evidence; to develop knowledge we need to be tolerant to others’ opinion, and make the room for critical thinking. So, it was an enlightening presentation, and I hope this paper will be of use to the thinkers.

Thank you.

Dr. M. Khurshed Alam

Chairman

Bangladesh Institute of Social Research
Trust

About Author

Dr. Habibul Haque Khondker is a professor of Humanities and Social Sciences at Zayed University, Abu Dhabi, UAE. Before joining Zayed University in 2006 he was as an Associate Professor at National University of Singapore. He completed his PhD in Sociology from University of Pittsburgh, USA and did his masters from Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada), and Bachelor and masters from University of Dhaka..



Abbreviations

DSE	Delhi School of Economics
IIT	Indian Institute of Technology
JNU	Jawaharlal Nehru University
LSE	London School of Economics
QS	Quacquarelli Symonds
THES	Times Higher Education Supplement
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

Abstract

What is ‘critical thinking’, especially, in the academic setting? From different European languages, the etymological root suggests that, criticism means ‘judgment’. Do we really judge when we criticize? We simply take a side. An ideal criticism, which means ‘Somoalochona’ in Bengali, should have the spirit to say some positive, along with negative, about someone or something. Marx was regarded as one of the proponents of critical thinking. He criticized not only capitalist society but also capitalist or bourgeois knowledge. Philosophers have interpreted the world; the point is we have to change it. So, critique has a purpose, critique would lead you to some improvements, some change. It is not simply denunciation, not destruction.

This aspect of Marxist idea inherently inspired ‘Frankfurt School’, also known as Critical School as a philosophical and social scientific tradition. They were using Marx in a critical way. It was a critique of critique. They were not accepting Marx at face value, accepted Marx but accepted him critically. Sociology as a discipline was more about 19th century response to radicalism and was a turn to conservatism, which held that one must value social order and respect institutions, and respect traditions. That was the standard August Comte’s vision of social science: progress should be orderly. Some progressive country sociology was treated as a bourgeoisie discipline and as a conservative discipline. These images of sociology changed in the late 1960s, early 1970s. This was the time when critical sociology became very popular. Even in American sociology, interestingly, there was a long-standing tradition of critical sociology; though people did not take into account. There were some extremely interesting and critical ideas but these ideas were not taken seriously. Critical thinkers were tolerated there and the critiques like Gouldner criticized Talcott Parsons, yet wrote a fine obituary following the death of Parsons.

The role of criticism in knowledge is immense. The idea that knowledge as ‘organized skepticism’ comes from Robert Merton; the important point of critical thinking is ‘to think’ first. Thinking should not start with the presumptions; one should not be preoccupied by the fame of the writer; we should look at a text as a text. Merton’s norms of Science include Universalism, Communalism, Disinterestedness, and Organized skepticism. We live in an academic world where we hold on to some “dominant interpretative discourse”, which sets limits to what we can and cannot do; yet, we need to question. The criticism should be sensible so that you can defend it by evidence and reason.

Keywords: *Critique, Critical Thinking, Knowledge, Skepticism, Social Science, Frankfurt School*

Reflections on the Use, Overuse and (Possible) Misuse of Critical Thinking

Professor Habibul Haque Khondker

1. Background

It is in response to your suggestion, I have ventured to take up the topic ‘critical thinking’ for this afternoon’s discussion. This is not a fully developed lecture; rather some comments and reflections that I would like to share with you. Hopefully, this will initiate a serious conversation and more scholarly interventions. Sometimes I get tired of hearing the refrain ‘critical thinking’, in the academic setting. The overuse of this phrase sometimes leads me to reflect critically: “what is critical in critical thinking?” I have observed that as a national pastime in Bangladesh, everyone wants to be critical. If you are not critical, then you are an agent of something like the World Bank, government, opposition, or some foreign countries! So you have to be critical of something. So, it is a good opportunity for me to reflect on the idea of critical thinking and, bring this discussion into public and share with you some of my thoughts on the idea of critical thinking. First thing to consider is the popularity of critique. If you are not critical, people will look at you with suspicion, ‘what are you!’ In principle, popularity of critique is a good thing. It is the overuse that I am worried about.

2. Critical Thinking in Academia and Culture

So, what is ‘critical thinking’, especially, in the academic setting? Let me begin with an example. I read an ‘interesting’ op-ed earlier this year (2015) with which I mostly disagreed with. It was published in the *Daily Star* in early 2015. The article simply tried to demystify the myth that ‘Dhaka University is the Oxford of the East’. First of all, the writer said it is a myth. No one I know says that and there is an official basis of the claim that Dhaka University was or is the “Oxford of the East”. It was a myth. If somebody tries to criticize a myth or a metaphor, I would say it is not a serious intellectual exercise. Myths and metaphors are generally beyond criticism. As a critical thinker one cannot take a myth seriously to prove oneself a critical thinker.

The author says that Dhaka University is ranked between 3000 and 4000; whereas even the Sub-Saharan universities are ranked in the 1000. The implication is: Dhaka University is behind the Sub-Saharan universities. Why should we use Sub-Saharan universities as the lowest denominators, as if they are the worst universities of the world? There is a trace of implicit racism here. It would make more sense to me to look at universities in the

resource-poor countries in the context of their difficult economic circumstances. The critical question for me is: how useful or sensible is this whole business of university ranking? One armed with a critical mind would not accept the ranking of the universities at face value. Let us come to the point of ranking. When I was a student of Dhaka University (in the early and mid-1970s) universities were not ranked. From common sense, in England Oxford, Cambridge, London School of Economics (LSE) etc., were considered famous universities because of their well-known professors and their top students. I remember, I looked with awe Professor such as Abdur Razzaque, Rehman Sobhan or A.K. Nazmul Karim. They were alumni of LSE and Cambridge. In America, there are Ivy League universities decked with top professors and students. In the students' circle we knew who studied where but were not overly preoccupied with the rankings as such. So, why suddenly in the recent years there has been a rush to ranking universities? This raises questions: what is the rationale of ranking, what is the basis of ranking and who is doing the ranking? The rankings done by QS and Times Higher Education Supplement (now, Times Higher Education) are popular. For me, both these rankings are somewhat inadequate. These are private (hence, profit-making) organizations. One of the criteria THES used was salary of the faculty members. Financial resources are important but why use it as a basis of ranking? This would exclude most of the universities in the developing world. They ignored the graduates of the universities many of whom became distinguished and work in top places of professional world. Senior economist with the World Bank, Kaushik Basu, for example, was a faculty member of Delhi University. Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) in India has also produced graduates who have earned international fame. Why JNU is not ranked highly? Graduates of JNU not only fill the top positions in the World Bank, they are also the leading professors in the "highly ranked" universities in the West. IIT graduates are in important positions of Google and Facebook; then how come Nanyang Technological University of Singapore is ranked as one of the leading universities way ahead of IITs? It all depends on the criteria used and the credibility of the rankers. For me, rankings made by Jiao Tong University or Leiden University (Holland) seem more credible. Both are non-profit, academic institutions. A critical inquiry would reduce the value of all the rankings. My question is who ranks the ranker? Still we can use some of the ranking, provided we take these rankings not as the last words. *The Economist*, one of the leading magazines of the world, often uses the Jiao Tong ranking. Serious people will look at all those rankings and make up their own mind. As far as I can recall, the author of the op-ed did not clearly mention which ranking he was using. There are so many rankers including QS, THES, etc. and except for the top ten or twenty, there are often great divergences. In short, no ranking is final. The business of ranking itself indicates a recent development of the higher educational institutions, namely, the corporatization of the universities worldwide. A critical thinker has reasons to be worried about this trend of corporatization of the universities, which may shrink the space for freedom and difference.

When you look at public discussions in Bangladesh, of course you have to be critical, and surely, critique has a very important role to play. I find the Bengali word ‘Somalochona’ is more accurate rendition of the word criticism. Since I am not a linguist, I don’t know the root of this Bengali word. But it appears to me that it could be ‘Somo+Alochona’. So, it requires that I have to say something in favor, when I am saying something against; in other words, I need to be balanced in my opinion. This is not a rule. In a critical reflection of Dhaka University, for example, I would mention that Dhaka University is the place where once physicist Professor Satyen Bose taught? While at Dhaka University, Professor Bose communicated with Albert Einstein and developed their famous Bose-Einstein Condensate. Some of the leading historians also taught at the History Department of Dhaka University. One could preface the discussion with the glorious past of this institution and then proceed to examine the forces that led to the decline. We have to be critical and analytical in our thinking and not accept the rankings as final words. I would say that Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) is a leading university in the region no matter what its ranking is. Delhi School of Economics (DSE) at University of Delhi may also be considered an excellent institution because economists such as Amartya Sen, Jagdish Bhagwati and Kaushik Basu were on the faculty of Delhi School of Economics. Why should I accept the QS ranking unquestioningly, which does not include DSE or JNU?

3. Meaning and Sources of Critique

All those thoughts made me think about the whole idea of critique. What do we mean by critique and criticism? Skepticism is a related word but it does not exactly mean criticism. Skepticism, to me, means that you are not sure and you always have doubts about a proposition. Skepticism means, I have some healthy doubt about the proposition unless you provide convincing evidence to the contrary. Cynicism indicates a position that there is no truth and, worse, there cannot be any truth.

Skepticism plays a very important role in the theory of knowledge or epistemology; because, most of the epistemological arguments are based on skepticism. Empiricism is a position when you prove something with observable data. I have some doubt about empirical method as the sole method of gaining knowledge. Some – not all – knowledge may come from observable data, events, and findings. This is the position of skepticism. It does not foreclose the discussion. Knowledge is skepticism, but organized Skepticism. Skepticism cannot be baseless; that becomes cynicism, a personal (negative) opinion. Skepticism is healthy, constructive, and based on strong evidence. Or a position of skepticism forces us to look for alternative or counter evidence. It this becomes very useful for the growth of knowledge. You cannot reject one’s ideas or position completely. One may not know many things, but one knows, at least, something. So we cannot say, ‘S/He does not know anything’. From my experience, once a Dhaka University Professor dismissed Ahmed Sofa completely. As an undergrad, I remember having a conversation with Mr. Sofa

and found him to be a thinking person. So I did not agree with my professor but did not debate with him. Even, when I quoted Badruddin Umar, it was not viewed kindly by one of the professors. I was not a disciple of him but I found his analysis of class structure of Bangladesh very useful. You may have disagreement with Umar but I found his arguments quite logical and convincing. But my professor had strong views against them, mainly because Badruddin Umar was not a sociologist.

When I went to Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada for higher studies, I found that the professors usually said positive things about each other. I was little surprised, because I grew up in a highly skeptical society, where skepticism often bordered on cynicism and people were not used to praising each other. We easily dismiss people by saying: 'he or she does not know anything'. No, everyone knows something. I have to value what is in them and what I can learn rather than dismissing that person's ideas or views out of hand. Taking a cynical view does not help the cause of knowledge.

The context of my discussion is not skepticism and cynicism in academia. Universities around the world now have 'mission statements' and 'vision statements', which are quite elaborate and full of catch phrases. But, as far as I know, at Harvard University there is one word 'VERITAS' that captures the main objective of the university. The Latin word "VERITAS" means 'truth', indicating the fact that the main goal of the university is to seek the truth. And for Harvard that is the mission statement, vision statement or the rationale of the university. Universities around the world these days include critical thinking as one of the missions, which became a talking point in the first decades of the 21st Century in the National University of Singapore. I remember taking part in many of the conversations with promoters of critical thinking and to make my point, I gave a talk on reflective thinking. Where I argued that there are limits to critical thinking; you cannot teach all the students to think critically without considering the context and the consequences. For example, a business class is not a place for serious critical thinking that would question capitalism, whereas sociology classes begin with a critique of capitalism. Big corporations want innovative, creative graduates but they do not want someone who would be a critic of corporate capitalism. In my presentation at NUS, I argued that in good conscience I would not teach business students to take critical thinking seriously but with some discretion. So criticism has its limits. It is not a good idea to criticize everything and everywhere. You have to belittle diplomatic in order to criticize things in everyday life. Thus reflective thinking may be a better option.

The first time, perhaps, I saw the word critique in the title of a book was a book by Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* was published in 1781 in response of rationalism as a dominant intellectual and philosophical tradition in the West. Kant argued that there is limit to pure reason thus in some circles Immanuel Kant is considered as the founder of Idealism. It argues, there are human values that we have to

accept as given and by implication, are above criticisms. Limit to criticism and reason is one of Kant's contributions. From different European languages, the etymological root suggests that, criticism means 'judgment'. Do we really judge when we criticize? We simply take a side. An ideal criticism, which means 'Somo-alochona' that would probably hold that Dhaka University is not a world class institution; on the other hand, some students of this institution can compete with top students in the leading universities of the world. With some indulgence I would say many of the graduates of Dhaka University are the living examples of that. I may not be the best specimen, but we have the likes of Selim Jahan, who is regarded as one of the important economists in the United Nations circles; he is the writer of the UNDP Report 2015. So, why should I dismiss an institution that produces fine economists? Why can't we put some positive, along with negative, statements in the spirit of 'Somo-alochona'?

4. From Marx to the Critical School

As a student of sociology, not as sort of amateur reader of philosophy, I look at the whole discourse of critiques in social science. As undergraduate students at Dhaka University, we studied Marx with great care. 'Communist Manifesto' was the book that we all had to study alongside other Marxist works. Why did we read those books? Because, Marx was regarded as one of the proponents of critical thinking. He criticized not only capitalist society but also capitalist or bourgeois knowledge. And, remember his famous 'Eleventh Thesis'. Philosophers have interpreted the world; the point is we have to change it. So, critique has a purpose, critique would lead you to some improvements, some change. It is not simply denunciation, not destruction. This aspect of Marxist idea inherently inspired 'Frankfurt School', also known as Critical School as a philosophical and social scientific tradition. And, it all started in Germany. Interestingly, all these famous ideas are from Kant, Hegel, Heidegger; they are either German or Austrian! It is in the Germanic part of the Europe. And, when this institute was set up in 1923, they were using Marx in a critical way. It was a critique of critique. They were not accepting Marx at face value.

Sometimes, I am shocked when I see, unfortunately, a political science professor (he must be unnamed here) on a TV channel said, "oh no! But this is not based on theory. By theory, it turned out, he meant Marxist theory. This was a discussion of politics in Bangladesh ..." I said, "Come on! Marx is dead; say something new and interesting; why do you say Bangladesh has no capitalism or no ruling class, etc. according to Marx?" Why should we care only about Marx? What about other theorists? Neo-Marxists, who criticized and elaborated Marx may have more relevant ideas for the present day analysis. Frankly, this is an example of stagnation.

Those people involved with the Institute for Social Science, also known as Frankfurt School or Critical School, accepted Marx but accepted him critically. They criticized capitalism,

Stalinist socialism and incorporated Freudian psychoanalysis. And, a happy coincidence was, that it coincided with the discovery of 'early Marx'. It means youthful writings of Marx those were unknown and were discovered only in 1930s, I think; in 1930s, when they discovered the huge writings of Karl Marx known as early political and philosophic manuscripts. 'German Ideology' is one of the early manuscripts that remained hidden, remained buried, un-translated, unknown to intellectual community until 1930s. So that was the context, they used that. So, it was, kind of young Marx criticizing the economic Marx. That was one of the staples of the critical school.

5. Critical Thinking in Social Sciences

Then, sociology as a discipline emerged with the writings of Saint-Simon and August Comte. Later on, people looked at sociology as a conservative response. Why conservative? Because, the 18th Century was quite a radical period in history. And what happened, not only in Europe, I mean 18th Century was marked by two major revolutions (American Revolution in 1776 and the French revolution of 1789). The French supported the Americans and they, in turn, supported French revolution, ironically. So, French revolution, it can be said with hindsight, gave birth to radical, critical or progressive thinking. Sociology was more about 19th century response to radicalism and was a turn to conservatism, which held that one must value social order and respect institutions, and respect traditions. That was the standard August Comte's vision of social science. Progress should be orderly. The writings of Marx came as an anti-thesis. Many found in Marx's writings a critic of the taken-for-granted image of society. The message was, so to speak, do not accept society as is and let us see how we can change society for better through revolution; how we can change the structures." This left a very strong influence in sociology; but as sociology developed in the US it was seen as a conservative discipline. That is why, after the socialist revolution in China in 1949, the leaders of China banned sociology. At that time, one of the most important sociologists was Fei Xiaotong, who later became a demographer. The other sociologists simply left China. Many years ago, I wrote something on this subject (sociology in Asia, sociology outside in West, etc.) where I discussed it. It was a very happy coincidence that, I was a student at the University of Pittsburgh; it played a leading role in reopening sociology in China following Deng Xiao Ping's reforms. Because one of the sociologists, younger one, who ran away from China, ended up in Pittsburgh, C. K. Yang, he and his friends, the other sociologists went back to China to restart sociology. The point is, in a progressive country sociology was prohibited, why? Because they considered sociology as a bourgeoisie discipline and as a conservative discipline. These images of sociology changed in the late 1960s, early 1970s. This was the time when critical sociology became very popular. In American sociology, interestingly, there was a long-standing tradition of critical sociology; which people did not take into account. It was in USA there were some extremely interesting and critical ideas but these

ideas were not taken seriously. American sociology since Talcott Parsons and his students heavily dominated 1940s. Parsonian sociology was the dominant discourse in American sociology. So, all the critique, all the critical sociology remained buried, remained hidden. In 1939, Robert Lynd, wrote a book titled *Knowledge for What?* And, that was exactly the Marxist idea of 'Eleventh Thesis' that scientists have interpreted the world, the point is how to change it. This was the subtext of 'Knowledge for what?' Is it for keeping the society as it is? It was a critique. Robert Lynd raised critical questions. It is very interesting that he earned his PhD from Columbia University. The next critical sociologist I found in American sociology was C Wright Mills who was a faculty member at Columbia University. He wrote several books and those were (super) critical about American political system. 'Military Industrial Complex' was a phrase of President Eisenhower, perhaps, derived from C. Wright Mills. Surprisingly, Columbia University archive did not hold the writings of Mills (I went to look for C Wright Mills papers but could not find them). They accepted C Wright Mills, they tolerated him, but they did not value him to the point to have his writings in their archive. C Wright Mills was never made a full professor (A retired Columbia University professor told me). Columbia University is a kind of pro-establishment, mainstream American University, but yet that university has produced Robert Lynd and hosted C Wright Mills, Edward Said and Gayatri Spivak. So, if you are a critic that does not mean that people would completely neglect you. You can have a position in a respectable university like Columbia University provided your critiques are critique, not destroying somebody or attacking someone at a personal level. C Wright Mills criticized Parsons. And another famous sociologist Alvin Gouldner criticized Talcott Parsons, yet Gouldner wrote a fine obituary following the death of Parsons. This is what the spirit of criticism means. Criticism does not mean that you attack someone saying he does not know anything. That is not the attitude of a critic. If we look at American sociology, certainly we find there a huge influence of historical sociology. The point of critique is that you accept a theory or idea provisionally and you criticize it (not demolish) that leads to the change of paradigm, the change of dominant view. So, Parsonian sociology gave a way to kind of neo-Marxist critical historical and empirical sociology from the 1970s onwards.

6. Knowledge as 'Organized Skepticism'

The role of criticism in knowledge is immense. The idea that knowledge as 'organized skepticism' comes from Robert Merton, a professor of sociology at Columbia University, and a student of Talcott Parsons at Harvard. Merton came up with so many interesting ideas; one of which was the definition of knowledge as 'organized skepticism'. The important point of critical thinking is 'to think' first. Thinking should not start with the presumptions; one should not be preoccupied by the fame of the writer; we should look at a text as a text. We should not look at who is behind the text. And, we make our judgment and conclusions based on what the writer knows not based on his/her identity or

reputation. Before we get into critical thinking we have to think (Martin Heidegger has a book 'What is Called Thinking', he is probably the most difficult philosopher to understand.) Hanna Ardent, a student of Heidegger, emphasizes the 'importance of thinking' in all her writings. The American magazine The New Yorker sent her to Israel to cover the story of Eichmann's trial. She was a political philosopher of Jewish background and was thus expected to write everything against Eichmann. She thought and tried to understand Eichmann. And they (the Jewish community in and outside of Israel) did not see anything good that warrants an understanding of Eichmann and criticized her for not denouncing Eichmann. She was not a 'self-hating Jew', all she tried to do was to think and understand. Obviously the holocaust against Jewish people (with 6 million deaths) was considered a great tragedy, but one really needs to think before s/he jumps into a conclusion as an intellectual. She was not a Judge (a Judge has other imperatives). As an intellectual, she had different perspectives. And she did not denounce the Israeli court either. She simply was trying to understand Eichmann. She wanted to understand the context of the evil. And that became a huge controversy. However, the point about thinking is important. For example, within feminism, there are varieties (i.e. Sheryl Sandberg (2013) type feminism, critical feminism etc.) of positions. Chandra Talpade Mohanty wrote a great article titled "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourse" (1984); then, after nearly 20 years, she wrote an auto-critique, a self-reflective essay suggesting that maybe she was pushing her point too far in her earlier essay and that she could be misread. In the 2003 article she wrote, "... it is time for me to move explicitly from critique to reconstruction..." I have seen the same type of rethinking in some other important writers as well; sometimes they revisit their positions. They say, "I have to reflect on what I have said before. Maybe my position was too hostile, too critical; maybe I did not take everything into account." So, the point is we really need to look at the context. The critique of critique is very important. What we need is reflective thinking. Reflection is you criticize and then you counter-criticize to discover the weakness of a criticism. You read it from different points of view. Do not fall in the trap of a "single story". When you look at political speakers and leaders, we can understand why they talk the way they do, because there is no other way he or she can. But, when an academic is writing, it should be different. Due to my association with various professional journals as a reader or as a reviewer, I have to read many different things. And I often say to myself, "This essay is fine, sometimes it contains a lot of empirical data; but the author is not thinking!" The author does not show any imaginative interpretation of the data. I reviewed a manuscript for a publisher recently; the writer used quotations after quotations, from Habermas to Benhabib on civil society. However other than only putting a series of quotes, s/he did not engage with the quotes. It was not clear what was he or she getting out of the quotes. How is the quotation of so and so relevant to Indian society? It was not clear whether anything new was being said about India. And, there are examples when some writers claim with authority that

‘Marx said Bangladesh is not a capitalist society’. As if, Marx came and studied Bangladesh; he did not!

7. Norms of Science

Back to Robert Merton, in sociology of knowledge one of his contributions is the phrase ‘knowledge is organized skepticism’. But we need more than ‘organized skepticism’. What we need is to check whether the knowledge has an element of universalism. That means, what I am saying here would be of some value to students, intellectuals or people who like to think about the same issue elsewhere i.e. in China, in Australia, etc.. Would they find any value to this discussion? If they do not then I cannot make any serious claim to knowledge since it misses out on universalism, which is one of the components of knowledge. Another important element for Merton is ‘disinterestedness’ meaning that I really need to distance myself from the subject I studying. (If I write a book saying Khondker family is the most respectable family, I am not ‘disinterested’. I am a partisan.) In reviewing a book by an author who is known to me, I should not be celebrating our friendship but give my views honestly and openly (some may call it objectivity, but I have some doubts about pure objectivity in human sciences). The second important point is ‘communalism’ which actually means some consensus among the scholars. This point creates some problems, which I will skip here. Finally, organized skepticism is that my criticism or skepticism must be organized. It should not be haphazard, should not be denunciation or destruction of a proposition. I need to understand the issue well so that I can develop a plausible argument. One of the books I found very interesting is a book by Alain Touraine, one of the leading sociologists of the world today. He wrote a book titled, *Thinking Differently* in which he used the phrase ‘dominant interpretative discourse’. When I was a student of Dhaka University the ‘dominant interpretative discourse’ was Marxism. It was only when I went to Canada I found out about other scholars who were never mentioned in Dhaka University. Its fine, each university has its limits and boundaries that we call context. Dominant interpretative discourse in Dhaka University was Marxism. We were required to write an honors thesis, and I chose a topic on Mahatma Gandhi (after reading a fascinating writing on him in the Reader’s Digest). So, I told my professor that I want to write my Honors monograph (thesis) on the ideas of non-violence of Mahatma Gandhi. And, the professor became very angry with me. Why did he object to my proposal? Perhaps, as I found out later, he was a Marxist. He was a member of the Communist Party in those days. He completely rejected that idea, “It cannot be a topic,” he declared with boundless authority. He failed to distance himself from his ideological commitment. Interestingly for me, many years later, I was invited to a conference on ‘Globalization and Gandhi’ at JNU. Not that the organizers (Professor Anand Kumar and his colleagues) knew of my unfulfilled interest in Gandhian ideas of non-violence but they probably saw some of things I wrote on

globalization. So, I was fated to return to the theme that I wanted to deal with in my Honors thesis many years ago at the JNU conference in 2007.

8. Limitations and Conclusion

We live in an academic world where we hold on to some “dominant interpretative discourse”, which sets limits to what we can and cannot do. One understands the mainstream discourse, and consciously remains within the discourse not just to secure a job or tenure, but because of one’s commitment. We are intellectually socialized into the dominant interpretative discourses. Yet, we need to question the dominant interpretative discourse within the bounds of that discourse. My point is that the criticism should be sensible so that you can defend it by evidence and reason. If not, it will be criticism for the sake of criticism, which may lead to cynicism.

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