

2016-09-01

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Center for Pedagogy (CP) Established under the Sub-project Titled “Pedagogical Development at Undergraduate and Master’s Level” (CP3357), Independent Univeristy, Bangladesh (IUB)

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Interrogating Pedagogy in International Relations: The Bangladeshi Perspectives

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Is 'International Relations' really 'international'? How is 'International Relations' taught in Bangladesh? Does it represent the contexts of Bangladesh? Or do we just imitate the West? The paper investigates these questions. The aim of the paper is to interrogate pedagogy of International Relations in the context of Bangladesh. The paper argues that International Relations as a discipline is basically about the studies of the 'big powers' or the 'powerful'. The Global South including Bangladesh follows the Global North in case of pedagogy design which needs to be problematized and a pluralistic approach to teaching needs to be developed.

Keywords: Pedagogy, international relations, Bangladesh, global south, teaching IR.

Introduction

International Relations (IR), frequently shortened to IR is basically the study of 'international relations' (Brown and Ainley 2005). In the early twentieth century, the field of International Relations emerged with the objective of 'understanding, analysing, and explaining relations between states', the 'causes of war' and the 'conditions of peace'. Departments, schools or centers have been established in universities around the world to study International Relations. The very first was established in 1919 at the University of Wales in the seaside town of Aberystwyth. The London School of Economics and the University of Oxford followed shortly after with the establishment of International Relations Chairs in 1923 and 1930 respectively. In the post Second World War era, the expansion of teaching and studying International Relations started in the leading American Universities rapidly. IR teaching in the Global South started in the 1970s and 1980s in general. IR teaching in South Asia started in 1947 through the University of Dhaka. So, International Relations at the University of Dhaka, known as DUIR, enjoy the distinction to be the pioneer of its kind in the entire South Asian region. No more than half a dozen universities in each country offer Undergraduate and/or Masters Programs in International Relations (Behera 2008).

The post-Cold War period can be termed as the renaissance of studying International Relations in Bangladesh. For instance, though in South Asia, IR started its journey in Bangladesh in 1947, till 1997 the discipline was not developed in any other public University in Bangladesh. Later in 1998, IR studies were introduced in Jahangirnagar University and in 2004 in Chittagong University, two other leading Universities in Bangladesh. Subsequently, the year 2014 and 2015 witnessed the introduction of IR studies in two leading public Universities in Bangladesh i.e., University of Rajshahi and Bangabandhu University of Science and Technology. In addition, IR teaching also started in Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP) in 2015. Besides, leading private Universities in Bangladesh including North South University is in the process to introduce IR teaching. Against such backdrop, the paper attempts to investigate a number of questions: Is 'International Relations' really 'international'? How is 'International Relations' taught in Bangladesh? Does it represent the contexts of Bangladesh? Or do we just imitate the

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West? The paper investigates these questions. The aim of the paper is to interrogate pedagogy of International Relations in the context of Bangladesh. The paper argues that International Relations as a discipline is basically about the studies of the 'big powers' or the 'powerful'. The Global South including Bangladesh follows the Global North in case of pedagogy design which needs to be problematized and a pluralistic approach to teaching needs to be developed.

Teaching practices are examined based on a qualitative analysis of the mandatory readings prescribed in the core IR theory and Security Studies classes of graduate IR programs in Bangladesh. In this purpose, the University of Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi are covered to look at the teaching practices in International Relations.

Interrogating Pedagogy in International Relations

Why pedagogy matters? In fact, the work of an academic, what s/he teaches, how the course is structured or taught is not a 'neutral pursuit' (Smith, 1999). In addition, teaching plays a key role to inform the behaviour of the individuals.' 'In fact, the analytical horizons not only of civil servants, but also of IR scholars, are, at least in their early years of career, significantly determined by the perspectives taught in IR courses' (Hagmann and Biersteker 2014:292).

Before going to look at the pedagogy of International Relations in details, it is pertinent to problematize the word 'International' in International Relations. In this regard, Siddharth Mallavarapu who teaches at South Asian University, New Delhi contends the word 'International' in International Relations. According to him, 'IR has been too closely linked to the fortunes of the major powers, and this has been to our detriment, because it has impoverished our sense of international' (Mallavarapu 2014). In fact, International Relations is a parochial, Anglo-American discipline to a larger extent.

The scholarly work of Stanley Hoffmann, titled 'An American Social Science: International Relations' published in 1977 underscores the dominance of the United States in the discipline of International Relations (Hoffman 1977). The pre-dominant role of the United States is notable in case of defining the inclusions and exclusions of the discipline of International Relations (Mallavarapu 2003). The authoritative work of Steve Smith titled 'The United States and the Discipline of International Relations: Hegemonic Country, Hegemonic Discipline' demonstrates the US hegemony in International Relations. Smith notes that, '...mainstream U.S. IR defines the appropriate methods of how to study international relations in such a narrow way as to restrict understanding of other cultures and rationalities. By relying on culturally and historically specific distinctions between politics and economics, between private and public, and between domestic and foreign policies, U.S. IR explains a narrow range of world political events and does so from a U.S. perspective' (Smith 2002:67).

From the quotation of Steve Smith it is crystal clear that International Relations is taught in the United States from American perspective which is quite ironic for a global discipline like International Relations. It is also pertinent to note that this US approach is exported throughout the world through using US power and position in academic world through the knowledge production as Michel Foucault argues 'it is power, which produces knowledge'.

It is found that, in IR training, students are exposed to 'distinct theories and approaches to international affairs. It is argued that 'Whether balance-of-power theory, hegemonic stability theory, democratic peace theory, liberal institutionalism, unipolarity, materialist conceptions of power, feminist theory, or military ideas of security, the perspectives taught necessarily contribute to constructing the world they purport to describe' (cited in Hagmann and Biersteker 2014:297). The implications of these theories implicitly or

explicitly serves the interests of the United States who has the dominance in the inclusions or exclusions that define the discipline of International Relations (Mallavarapu 2003). More specifically, Isabelle Grunberg states that 'the theory of hegemonic stability is of American origin and is quite strongly biased in favour of the United States' (Grunberg 1990: 444). Democratic peace theory for instance, provides rationales for the United States to intervene in the internal political systems for the sake of her security (Mallavarapu 2003). US invasion of Iraq in 2003 was legitimated by a narrow understanding of the democratic peace hypothesis (Biersteker 2009).

In addition, Hagmann and Biersteker in their study find that how specific theoretical models are linked to the foreign policy programs and concerns of distinct governments. For example, balance of power conceptions have been linked to the Congress system while classical realism to the post 1945 role of the United States, and hegemonic stability theory to distinctly US concerns with a decline of American power (Hagmann and Biersteker 2014: 295).

And since 'theory is always for someone, for some purposes' (Cox, 1981) these mainstream theories of International Relations have been derived from the context of the West and serves the interests of the West. These mainstream theories of International Relations are also taught in IR teaching in Global South. But for Global South, what we need is People's perspectives of International Relations, what is missing in Anglo-American IR.

In a study of 23 prominent IR graduate programs in Europe and North America, it is found that none of the 23 schools surveyed draws on non-Western scholarship to explain world politics. 'World politics as it is explained to students is exclusively a kind of world politics that has been conceptualized and analysed by Western scholars' (Hagmann and Biersteker 2014:303). It is also found that the US programs surveyed in the study, 'overwhelmingly assign only works developed within the intellectual and socio-political context of the United States and ignores foreign conceptualizations of world politics. While at LSE, at Aberystwyth, and at MGIMO, students are still mainly instructed in national (British or Russian) scholarship...' (Hagmann and Biersteker 2014:303). Thus a narrowly defined world politics or reality is represented to the North American students excluding the realities of the entire Global South. Thus such International Relations cannot be 'International'. the problem arise when the same theoretical models are entirely followed in teaching International Relations in the Global South including Bangladesh which do not represent the realities of the country. Thus interrogating current pedagogy practices in International Relations becomes crucial.

How IR is Taught in Bangladesh?

Teaching matters as the socialization of students happens through teaching. In addition, students are also exposed to a particular theory or method through teaching. And the choice of selecting reading lists depends on the course teachers who play the role of agency here in the students' socialization process. And hence, it becomes important to look at how IR is taught in Bangladesh.

In fact, how the Bangladeshi academicians are trained up in North America or Europe, they just replicate it in the classrooms. How IR is taught in Bangladesh do not represent the contexts and realities of the country to a larger extent. For instance, if one takes the dominant theory of IR, Political Realism, premising on anarchy and fear do not work for the tens of thousands of people in the world. As Ken Booth contends, 'Political realism has operated as an 'iron cage' in world politics. It has created a prison of categoris and assumptions that have worked to create a world that does not work for most of its inhabitants. To this extent, political realism has not been in the global human interest' (Booth 2005:4). Or if one looks at the teaching of Security Studies, one of the major sub-fields of International Relations

isdominated by national or military security followed by neo-realist paradigm of security do not match with the realities of the country. As the security challenges that Bangladesh faces, i.e. food, health, political violence is internal rather than external. In fact, state centric security deprived millions from their human securities as 'the vast majority of the world's population are rendered chronically insecure' due to the state centric approach of security (Jones 1999, p.102).

It is also important to look at how security has been traditionally studied. It has been found that security has traditionally been studied from positivist approach applying 'scientific principles of objectivity, verification and generalisation...' (Peoples and Vaughan-Williams 2010: 4). Here, Richard Wyn Jones makes it easier while he simply explains the positivist approach which separates 'fact' and 'value'. Stephen M. Walt (1991) emphasizes on the positivist approach to study security based on neutrality, observation, and empirical verification. But 'security is never a neutral intellectual pursuit...there is no such thing as an objective theory...to achieve complete objectivity is impossible and to claim to have achieved it is deliberately misleading' (Sheehan 2005: 155-157).

In traditional security studies (TSS) states, anarchy, and the military threat are taken for granted. TSS proponents also take the world as it is. It raises question that the way Walt or other TSS scholars define the meaning, nature and scope of security studies as state's security from the military threat, how much they are empirical or objective? Does the military security means the security of hungry people in Bangladesh or in Sub Saharan Africa? The answer goes in the negative. But how security studies is studied and taught in Bangladesh following mainly positivist approach that needs to be problematized and need to follow post-positivist approach.

In International Relations teaching in Bangladesh, security has been defined primarily from military security perspective, protecting sovereignty and territorial integration from external threats. Here the potential threat is imagined arising from India. In addition, security scholarship in Bangladesh is mostly dominated by the neo-realist paradigm which overlooks the security of the individuals. But in the context of Bangladesh, major security threats are from non-military aspects: from environmental to food to health insecurity. For instance, 'between 1991 and 2000, 93 major disasters were recorded in Bangladesh, resulting in nearly 200,000 deaths and causing US\$ 5.9 billion in damages with high losses in agriculture and infrastructure' (cited in Islam 2011, p.42). Furthermore, high level of poverty, malnutrition, political insecurity is evident in the country. Hence, the question comes in the critical discussion that is there any military solution to environmental insecurity or other non-military security threats? The answer is in negative. But in the teaching of International Relations, national security, and hard security issues like war always gets importance which needs to be problematized.

Traditional security studies is originated mainly in the context of the North, and hence, it does hardly address the insecurities of the global South (Ayoob 1997, Bilgin 2012). So, Pinar Bilgin (2012, p.166) identifies the relevance of Critical Security Studies in addressing insecurities in the non-western world. She writes, 'Non-western insecurities cannot be reduced to Hobbesian fear alone. CSS presents a theory of security that better explains and offers a way out of insecurities encountered in/by the Global South'. After analysing the reading lists of IR theory classes of Dhaka University, it is found that the pre-dominance of realist school is notable. And the entire reading list is primarily selected from Western writers' write-up which basically represents the contexts of the West. Readings in Security Studies course for instance, hardly touches on the scholarship of South Asian authors on South Asian security issues, though there are a number of scholarly publications on the South Asian security issues.

Instead of state, the primary referent object of security needs to be the individuals in the security studies of Bangladesh. And therefore, Bangladesh needs to prioritize Critical Security Studies in terms of Security Studies teaching in Bangladesh. In the context of security mapping for Bangladesh, it is argued that it is pertinent to redesign curricula and redefine the role of academics in Bangladesh (Islam 2015).

Conclusion: What is to Be Done?

Knowledge transfers from generation to generation in classrooms. And hence how International Relations is taught matters as teaching is a powerful mean to mold the thinking line of the students. In addition, how the world politics is explained to the students of International Relations in their everyday schooling matters. As Jonas Hagmann and Thomas J. Biersteker contend that 'In their specialized training, IR schools worldwide instruct great numbers of students to adopt particular modes of thinking and approaches concerning world politics. In doing so, IR teaching plays a central role in pre-structuring foreign policy practices, as students will likely reproduce the syllogisms acquired in their training when taking up professional positions' (Hagmann and Biersteker 2014:293). Hagmann and Biersteker (2014:293) further notes that 'IR courses speak more directly to larger, an eventually also more policy-proximate, audiences, while in terms of substance, they are more directly dependent on the instructors' choice of topics and approaches'. Here the instructors play the role of agency regarding how the students will be exposed, what approaches they will be exposed and so forth.

There are limitations of such analysis based on the prescribed readings. first, there might be possibility that readings are taught differently in different Universities based on their respective style of delivery, expertise, enthusiasm and indifference. second, the inquiry is unable to represent the totality of classroom socialization practices. despite such limitations, such an analysis provide substantial clues about pedagogical choices at the graduate level, which is fundamental to the production of future IR scholars and practitioners

Scholarship on International Relations has become increasingly reflexive in the last two decades. 'At least since the late 1990s, a critical literature on the discipline has emerged focusing on the historical origins, roots and organization of the discipline and the political dimension associated with the pedagogy and scholarship' (Hagmann and Biersteker 2014). And thus Bangladesh needs to adopt reflexive scholarship and needs to redefine pedagogy practices and curricula design in International Relations teaching. People's perspective of International Relations is missing which needs to be incorporated.

Finally, a more self-reflexive understanding of International Relations teaching is needed in Bangladesh. as 'a focus on IR teaching contributes a different perspective on the politics of transmitting worldviews and analytical perspectives inside the field' (Hagmann and Biersteker 2014:297).

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