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EPISTEMOLOGÍA DE LA COMUNICACIÓN EN INDIA: UNA APROXIMACIÓN HISTÓRICA MÁS ALLÁ DEL "DESARROLLO"

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Abstract

This paper attempts to outline various recent contributions that can illustrate in developing an epistemological understanding of Communication in India, which is a country that could be considered as a continent due to its demography and territorial extension; but more importantly, due to its multi-culturality, multilingualism, and strong cultural roots that transcend beyond colonising and neocolonising processes. It is assumed that conventional contemporary understanding of Communication is oriented toward the conquest of modernity and Western development from principles of Eurocentric rationality. Certain divergences and contradictions are observed here by drawing evidences from the indigenous cultures of the Indian society. The recent writings and contributions provide enormous intellectual resources to formulate a knowledge perspective that emerges from the critique of the conventional utilitarian understanding of communication and helps to formulate a critical epistemological perspective of communication in India.

In this paper, we describe various contributions to the communication research in India, and the influence that development as an economic concept had on culture, resulting from the influence exerted by communication. Additionally, this article documents participatory approaches that are also original in the search for holistic and endogenous solutions in communication in India, and that follow a critical cultural perspective of their own.

Resumen

En este trabajo se intentan esbozar diversas contribuciones recientes que pueden ilustrar en el desarrollo de una comprensión epistemológica de la Comunicación en India, un país que en sí mismo es un continente por demografía y extensión territorial, pero sobre todo por su multiculturalidad, multilingüismo y sus fuertes raíces culturales que trascienden más allá de los procesos colonizadores y neocolonizadores. Entendiendo que la comprensión convencional contemporánea de la comunicación está orientada a la conquista de la modernidad y el desarrollo occidental desde principios de racionalidad eurocéntrica, observamos divergencias y contradicciones evidenciadas desde la cultura autóctona de la sociedad india. Los escritos y contribuciones recientes proporcionan enormes recursos intelectuales para formular una perspectiva del conocimiento desde la crítica de la comprensión utilitarista de la comunicación y a formular una perspectiva crítica epistemológica de la Comunicación en India.

En este artículo se describen las contribuciones de la investigación en comunicación en India y la influencia que el desarrollo como concepto económico tuvo en la cultura desde la influencia ejercida por la comunicación. A partir de ahí se documentan enfoques participativos originales en la búsqueda de soluciones holísticas y endógenas en la comunicación en India desde una perspectiva cultural crítica y propia.

Keywords

Communication theories, epistemologies, otherness, of the South, development.

Keywords

Teorías de la comunicación, epistemologías, otredad, del Sur, desarrollo.

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1. Introduction

This paper attempts to develop an epistemological understanding of communication in India with the help of recent contributions in the field. Besides, it analyses the questions raised regarding conventional notions of communication that were built from Western colonial interests imposed by modernity and development.

In India, the current contributions elaborated from a critical perspective can help to problematise Communication and Cultural Studies, and confront the Eurocentric rationality and Western epistemologies, thus challenging its "universality" and pointing out its weaknesses, being in line with the idea about negative universalism suggested by Boaventura de Sousa Santos (Santos, 2011). The idea that critical approaches questioning classical perspectives of diffusionism and modernity have enriched the plurality of voices in communication research acts as a counter-balance to the domination of theories of the Global North self-constituted as hegemonic references.

The questions this paper tries to answer are:

What are the epistemological sources that call into question the dominant Eurocentric theories and development perspectives in communication in India?

What are the trends of research in participatory communication in India?

And the emerging concepts based on indigenous and popular knowledge? And finally, what different research traditions are grounded in this knowledge?

In summary, this article seeks to contribute to the need of making more visible the "Epistemologies of the South". This includes epistemological concepts that can go beyond the search for North-South confrontation. It is about recognising other cultural forms in the generation of knowledges that are essential to the

ecosystemic survival in any territory. This is crucial in the current debate in order to avoid seeing the world from only a Western perspective; also in order to claim and foster a plurality of knowledge societies that do not necessarily need to express themselves in the global scale neither to be validated globally.

In line with the path proposed by Connell (2008) towards the democratic role that social science has to play, this article tries to follow a process to rethink, beyond what is presented as 'universal knowledge' that emerges from what Connell refers to as 'the global metropole', by including other intellectual traditions and epistemologies, or a Southern Theory that challenges the economic and cultural dependence.

Therefore, the epistemological approach intends to identify knowledge from original sources and experiences of culture in India. In addition, it examines the harmful limitations of 'developmentalism', the effects of 'modernisation' in the Indian context and the rejections expressed by the majority of the marginalised, which they foster with their alternative experiences of survival.

2. Epistemology or epistemologies: a conceptual problematique

The concept of Epistemologies of the South stems from the Critical Theory and it is used by Boaventura de Sousa Santos to emphasise the urgent need of addressing indigenous knowledge as an alternative to the Western-centric development paradigm. The author borrows this concept from the debates on decoloniality that have intensified since the beginning of the century.

1. All quotes in Spanish have been translated to English by the coauthor of this article, Amaia Landaburu.

These new epistemological directions follow two premises: First, "the understanding of the world is much broader than that of the Western understanding of the world"; second, "the diversity of the world is infinite" (Santos, 2011:35)[1]. This look of recognition of the otherness implies ruptures of epistemological conventions and also the need to construct a decolonial thought. To paraphrase Mignolo, the arrival of the European "conquerors" to other territories represented the subordination and even the elimination of histories and worldviews of peoples under occupation (2005). The rhetoric of modernity arose in the XVI century and began to nurture the language of salvation: "hence, it is not with modernity that coloniality will be overcome, because it is precisely modernity that needs and produces coloniality" (Mignolo, 2005:37).

The epistemologies are built from below, and beyond the colonial hegemonies, from the otherness, from the margins, from the ancestral, from the pre-capitalist societies, from the anti-systemic, and ultimately, from the need for finding people's own responses to the problems posed by modernity. There is an epistemology of resistance, of otherness, of dissent, of the margins, which is reviled by the stale academic rationalism, whereas it should be put into value.

The *Epistemologies of the South* are based on the *ecology of knowledges* and the *intercultural translation* (Santos, 2011). On the basis of these premises it is assumed that not only relationships between human beings but also between human beings and nature involve knowledge as well as ignorance. Thus, non-scientific knowledges can be used to counter the hegemony of the scientific knowledge, not to discredit it but rather to promote interdependence between both and explore their internal and external limits within an *ecology of knowledges* (Santos, 2011). As Santos (2011) states, an epistemological dialogue between the scientific and the non-scientific knowledge would help to overcome ignorance, taking into account that: "social injustice is based on cognitive injustice" (Santos, 2011:36). The *ecology of knowledges* is made possible thanks to the process of *intercultural translation* that "enables creating reciprocal intelligibility among the different experiences of the world (...) The translation between knowledges assumes the form of a diatopical hermeneutics" (Santos, 2011:37). As an exercise of diatopical hermeneutics, Santos (2011) proposed the following exercise:

2. Translated as "Good Living" in English and "Buen Vivir" in Spanish, Sumak Kawsay is a Quechua expression of the indigenous Andean and Amazonian people that refers to the idea of living in harmony with nature, namely using its resources without damaging the ecosystems, since human beings are considered as part of it.

The translation between different conceptions of productive life, between the conceptions of capitalist development and, for example, Gandhi's *swadeshi* concept or the conception of *Sumak Kawsay*[2] of the indigenous peoples (...). The conceptions of capitalist development have been reproduced by conventional economics science. These conceptions are based on the idea of infinite growth obtained from the progressive subjection of the practices and knowledge to the commercial logic. In turn, the *Swadeshi* and *Sumak Kawsay* are based on the idea of sustainability and reciprocity. (p.37)

The Quechua expression is also similar to the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* in Hindi (it is translated as "the earth family" in English) used by the Indian philosopher and environmentalist, Vandana Shiva (2008) to explain the following knowledge that most non-Western cultures have assumed: that human beings are part of the earth family, therefore also take part in the *democracy of all life*. Within this understanding of the world, "human evolution was measured in terms of the human capacity to interact in harmony with her [nature's] rhythms and patterns, intellectually and emotionally" (Shiva, 2008, p.218). The progress brought by colonisation consisted of depriving local communities of their resources and rights, as "a denial of the rights of nature and nature-based societies was essential in order to facilitate an uncontrolled right to exploitation and profits" (Shiva, 2008:219).

These concepts, together with Santos' *ecology of knowledges*, point out the limitations of scientific knowledge and the ignorance created by it. All this, further highlights the need for an epistemological dialogue with the non-scientific knowledges, especially in the generation of knowledges that are essential to the ecosystemic survival in any territory. As Shiva (2008) argues, "To question the omnipotence of science and technology's ability to solve ecological problems is an important step in the decolonization of the North" (Shiva, 2008:223).

These various experiences show the need for alternatives to the development model of capitalist modernisation that forced other cultures and societies to adapt to Western innovations, models and habits, especially in the sixties and seventies. According to Martín-Barbero (2007), the Western-centric development model "did neither know nor want to perceive, and even less so did it value the diversity of cultures from which these [non-Western] countries sought to be modern" (Martín-Barbero, 2007:45).

However, from the seventies to nowadays, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund are major political drivers of the market-oriented development that is focused on capital growth; promoting it with messages by the World Bank such as: "growth will solve the problems of poverty and the environmental crisis it has given rise to in the first place" (Shiva, 2008:220). While, as stated by Shiva: "what goes unperceived is the destruction in nature and in people's subsistence economy that this growth creates" (*Ibid.*, :219).

By linking the notions of development and communication, these fields of research and science addressed and emerged from "the need to create favourable dynamics for economic growth, with the aim of contributing to progress" (Chaparro Escudero, 2013:2). Even though, it has been discussed that it is a "pretentious and dangerous presumption" (*Ibid*.) to think that progress is a patent of Western cultures. The progress becomes a chimera when it ceases to be a universally shareable pattern, without benefits for the social whole and for the ecosystem that guarantees life. The progress is merely a consequence of life; the accumulation of useful knowledge provided by experience, but it is not an aim of life; when the goal is none other than living in a healthy environmental and spiritual plenitude.

Modernity holds the trap of a non-existent progress, in terms of quality of life and respect for the ecosystems of which all living beings are part of and are necessarily essential for maintaining the equilibrium of a fractal structure. The evolution vis-à-vis the progress, can only be understood in harmony with the nature. The adaptation to each ecosystem must find its own solutions. As Gray (2013) says, human progress is just an obvious fact when one accepts it. The idea of progress created by modernity is nothing but a myth in which we are educated to participate. "Humankind is going nowhere. Humankind is a fiction composed of billions of individuals for whom life is unique and definitive" (Gray, 2013:15). In fact, the myth of progress is nothing but the myth of economic growth as the solution to the problems of humanity without thinking that this idea is precisely the cause of the current disasters.

Development as an economic concept, and as an expression of modernity and progress, has subjected most peoples to a dystopia that extends around the globe and becomes the first problem that sustains an economic crisis of existential, ethical and moral backgrounds. The development perspective proposes the permanent and infinite growth in a finite world as a solution. In this sense, pretending that communication should be at the service of development implies using it as a tool for the propaganda of this utilitarian imaginary that creates asymmetries and inequalities. The Communication for Development is an oxymoron. The development is vertical and imposed, while communication is horizontal and fosters empowerment from holistic processes (Chaparro Escudero, 2015a). The Communication for development has built theories and has used tools and technologies to make invisible other epistemologies and other ways of understanding life. Simplistic dichotomies like development/ underdevelopment, First World/Third World, North/South, are created to confuse by disqualifying other knowledges.

The 'modernisation' of countries that were considered 'backward' for development had disastrous consequences, such as an exacerbation of inequalities caused by agricultural, health, nutrition, or educational extension programmes that despite being successful, their "main beneficiaries were the better-off sections of society" (Kumar, 1994:87). The main emphasis was put on creating markets and expanding consumption, the other benefits were collateral.

Indeed, 'development' would mean the maintenance of colonial thought and power as countries were achieving independence; these happened to be under the tutelage of local elites that, at the same time, were controlled by world powers and their international organisations where insurgency was not tolerated.

In the light of all this, research works grounded in indigenous and popular knowledge are reflected later in this article. These sources and practices are considered as wise contributions of the other epistemologies, and yet they collide with certain modern scientific knowledge of capitalist development. Most are related to land management, forestry, natural medicine and education in manual skills.

Sen (2007) sheds light on the limitations of the term 'modernity' by arguing that it is a disconcerting concept and questions its role as an indicator to assess contemporary priorities; while also points out that in the study of the contrast between East and West, or between Europe and India, there is the important concern of the enormous variety within each of them underlying.

3. Pedagogy as a political act

On the one hand, externally, a Western view of the world left forgotten reflections of thinkers and humanists of the colonised world such as Sri Aurobindo or Rabindranath Tagore, their views and ideas, like their claim for *a complex unity based on diversity* in the world to confront domination of economic or military alliances, were not sufficiently valued (Mattelart, 2006). The assumptions of a universal rationality neglected "the crucial mediating role that historicity of cultures and social structures played" (Das, 2009:13). From an internal

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perspective, on the other hand, the formation of the modern Indian nation-State under colonial rule had tragic consequences; preventing the country to emerge out of its internal dynamics, not only entailed a "break up of the pre-colonial politico-economic and socio-cultural structures of indigenous society" (Narayan Singh, 2003, p.17), but also facilitated an alliance between the colonial rulers with the native elites allowing to "establish 'ethico-political' and 'intellectual-moral' leadership over other social groups of the indigenous society" (*Ibid*.:27).

Mahatma Gandhi as a leader of the Indian national movement played a prominent role in the struggle for freedom, against the external oppression of the colonial rule. However, in terms of the internal oppression that the caste system represented, Gandhi entered a theoretical debate with the scholar Ambedkar who certainly dealt with the issue of Caste. The conceptual debate between both of them articulates the contradictions that arose from their two different currents of thought that tried to counter oppression, one internally and the other externally.

The writings of Mahatma Gandhi in favour of self-reliant models of development are valuable examples of other epistemologies. Rajni Kothari advocated this approach by claiming the need for an autonomous development based in local needs and resources (Nair & White, 1994).

As explained by Roy (2014), "Gandhi was prescient enough to recognise the seed of cataclysm that was implanted in the project of Western modernity" (Roy, 2014:49). Notwithstanding, his original thinking *Hind Swaraj* while being "a radical critique of Western modernity" (*Ibid*.), it has also been criticised for presenting "the Homeland as unmistakably Hindu" (*Ibid*. :82).

In regards to the internal oppression, as Roy (2014) claims, "the colonisation of knowledge was a central tenet of the caste system" (Roy, 2014:96). The author further explains:

> The practice of untouchability, cruel as it was –the broom tied to the waist, the pot hung around the neck- was the performative, ritualistic end of the practice of caste. The real violence of caste was the denial of *entitlement*: to land, to wealth, to knowledge, to equal opportunity (...) In order to detach caste from the political economy, from conditions of enslavement in which most Dalits lived and worked, in order to elide the questions of entitlement, land reforms and the redistribution of wealth, Hindu reformers cleverly narrowed the questions of caste to the issue of untouchability. (p.98,100-101).

Nonetheless, there were also significant efforts in India to fight against the elitist and hierarchical system and, above all, the caste discrimination. Although it has lasted until this last century, as cause and symptom in the Indian society (Jeffrey, 2001).

While Gandhi opposed untouchability, Ambedkar fought for the abolition of caste, being the most prominent figure of this movement.

Babasaheb Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was the main architect of the Indian Constitution, and the first dalit[3] doctorate of India. He obtained his PhD from the University of Columbia in 1927, where John Dewey was his intellectual mentor (Pániker, 2014). Ambedkar's thinking represented the popular culture and society, and was influenced by Dewey's idea of *democracy as associated life*. As explained by Mukherjee: "for both Ambedkar and Dewey, this idea encapsulated their understanding of humans as both products of their social environment and as agents who continuously changed their social environment through communication and education" (Mukherjee, 2009:345).

3. B.R. Ambedkar used the term dalit to refer to people or communities affected by caste discrimination, formerly known as "Untouchables". The official term "Scheduled Castes" is also used in India. For more information on the terminology: http://idsn.org/terminology/

The caste system was theorised by Ambedkar with speeches like the *Annihilation of Caste*, composed for a conference for which he was appointed as president by the Hindu reformist group Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal. However, the committee for the conference did not approve the views reflected in Ambedkar's manuscript and his speech was not delivered in the end as the conference was cancelled. In this text, Ambedkar not only claimed the need to abolish caste and the need

for a social reform, but also, as Roy (2014) explains, "Ambedkar was going to launch an intellectual assault on the Vedas and shastras, on Hinduism itself" (p.52). Ambedkar exposed that the reason for the lack of social revolutions in India was "that the lower classes of Hindus have been completely disabled for direct action on account of this wretched Caste System" (Ambedkar, 1944, s.p). Thereupon, Ambedkar used Dewey's thought to investigate Indian society and "to critique the caste-based Hindu society, to fight for the rights of untouchables, and to envision an Indian democracy based on the ideals of equality, liberty and fraternity" (Mukherjee, 2009:345).

Dewey's pragmatic philosophy and pedagogy of action was in line with Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970), a work that "had a profound influence on the direction of popular communication strategies" (Mattelart & Mattelart, 2004:85). Both humanists thought of education as a political act and as a transformative process to foster a critical and active citizenry, either through participation or praxis.

In Freire's model of educommunication, education is understood as a process of exchange between equals in which communication is a tool that facilitates the transversality and appropriation, hence the empowerment of people.

Freire's ideas notably influenced the Communicology of Liberation perspective worked by Luis Ramiro Beltrán, who also formulated the horizontal communication model (Beltrán Salmón, 1981) based on his ideas. Beltrán's participative, egalitarian and dialogic model also influenced the International Commission for the Study of Communication Problems, led by Sean MacBride, whose work was reflected in the famous UNESCO's document *Many Voices One World* of 1980 (MacBride, 1980). Beltrán vigorously defended the discourse of media democratisation that "it is based in the fundamental recognition of citizens and community media as the only possible actors of true communication. (...) Conversely, most of the mass media do inform but do not communicate as they lack two-way communication and their business structure is vertical" (Chaparro Escudero, 2015b:146); also, these media are associated to the interests of the First and Second sector, serving the agenda from particular principles and interests of information.

The Indian journalist B.G. Verghese was also part of the MacBride Commission representing India and helped to highlight the potential of radio as a tool for empowerment of citizens (UNDP & Voices, 2004).

At that time, UNESCO became an epicentre of the debate and a forum for expression about the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO or NWIO) proposed by the MacBride Commission (Mattelart & Mattelart, 2004), as well as the concept of the right to communicate. Awareness was raised about the imbalances in the flow of information and communication worldwide; especially among postcolonial countries like India that were also established as testing grounds of media development strategies (Mattelart, 2006).

4. Communication research in India: beyond communication for development

The academic work that has analysed trends and directions of Communication Research in India sheds light on the evolution of the field since its beginnings. An historical perspective of communication studies in India is inexorably linked to its colonial past and struggle for Independence. During the colonial period communication was shaped as an ideology and this was followed by a second stage, with the arrival of development theories (Das, 2014).

In the colonial context, traditional modes of communication like the beating of a drum or the blowing of a horn, or symbolic actions like the passing of a lotus flower amongst soldiers during the Revolt of 1857, played a role in the political movement for emancipation (Das, 2009). While enabling awareness, communication became "an ideology of revolutionary social and political movement for emancipation from foreign rule" (Das, 2014:161). During the second half of the nineteenth century, visual discourses used by nationalists leaders like Gandhi, or pamphlets and the nationalist press that was gaining importance, were used to mobilise and disseminate nationalist ideas and so, as a form of political participation (Das, 2009).

During the 50s and 60s, various international agencies set "the agenda of communication research in societies freed from the yoke of colonialism and struggling for a path of development (...) [that] followed the logic of early modernization theorists" (Das, 2014:160).

In this context, India after Independence was influenced by the diffusionist approaches to communication studies originated in the US after the IIWW, "Communication research was now perceived as an essential part of planning for development" (Das, 2009, p.9). This paradigm was led by the State in a centralised and static way with the "realization of communication as a category to be measured, enumerated, and nurtured for the state-led development planning" (Das, 2014:159).

While the application of these ideas started out from the recognition of the political decolonisation process, it also maintained principles of the colonisers. Modernity and development were defined according to principles and paradigms of the former colonies and, mainly, of the U.S hegemony. Therefore, communication and information became an essential tool of domination through the use of mass media.

Hence, among the theses written in this period in India, many inquired about the adoption process model of development communication and the assessment of its effects, in the benefit of issues like higher agricultural production or to change people's behaviour for the adoption of family planning methods (Agrawal, 2000). Most researches used the model of diffusionism "to analyse the effect of communication in the acceptance of technological innovations and changes in society" (Das, 2009:10.); being the most urgent concerns "in the areas of rural development and agricultural modernization to overcome the acute problem of food scarcity" (*Ibid*,:21).

In this way, the tradition of logical positivism and rationalism borrowed from the West "became the edifice for communication researchers as it suited policy makers and developmentalists engaged in the national reconstruction project" (Das, Parthasarathi, & Poitevin, 2005:67). Since it was used to legitimise development projects promoted by the State, communication research served as means to justify "technocratic solutions for social change" (Das, 2014:167).

Agrawal (2000) states that the concept of development in the Indian context must be understood regarding rural development, and adds: "Rural development has been viewed as an economic planned change to achieve desirable social goals in the independent India through successive Five

Years Plans" (p.297). The author identifies four phases in development communication research in India: the Radio phase, period of 1967-73; Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE) phase, period of 1973-76; the Doordarshan or governmental television phase, period 1977-82; and the satellite, video, transactional television and multimedia phase, from 1982 onwards (Agrawal, 2000).

Jean Drèze (2015) explains the conception of "development" in India and the policies adopted in the early years of Independence with the first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, as well as the criticism received from Doctor B.R. Ambedkar and the high price that India is still paying for neglecting these warnings:

> Once upon a time, around the end of the Second World War, there was a naive view in development economics that growth was mainly a matter of capital investment — building dams, roads, railways and so on. Further, since the private sector was not equal to the task, the state had to take the lead. So, India's first Five Year plans were largely about state investment in infrastructure. (...) Another dissident, from a very different point of view, was Dr. Ambedkar, who saw mass education as essential for the liberation of the oppressed. The critics, however, were sidelined and India is still paying a heavy price for it today. (s.p)

4. For more information on Indian water and food scarcity: 1) Indian Drought: "330 million people affected." (2016, April 20). BBC News. India. Retrieved from bbc.co.uk; 2) India tops world hunger list with 194 million people. (2015, May 28). The Hindu. Retrieved from www.thehindu.com.

Similarly as it happened in Latin America, among the dire consequences that the country is still paying is the rural exodus of millions of farmers to the cities, in response to the impoverishment of their economies and lack of expectations. These consequences are today reflected in paradoxical facts such as India being the second top net virtual blue water exporter, while 97% of the population suffers from severe water scarcity at least one month a year (WaterFootprintNetwork, na); in other words, India is using large quantities of its scarce internal water resources to produce goods and commodities that are then exported to be consumed outside the country. More than 330 million people, around a quarter of the Indian population have suffered from this year's drought. Moreover, this scarcity of an indispensable natural resource makes food production difficult in this country that, according to FAO data, tops the world hunger list with 194 million undernourished people[4].

5. The 'qualitative turn' in Participatory Communication Research in India

After the new social movements of the eighties in India, during the nineties "a number of media 'networks'-professional and issue-based-at the national level were established. These two thrusts contributed in creating a fertile ground for seeding community media projects in India" (Das, 2014:192). Since then, studies in communication tried to transcend the development paradigm and the diffusionist approach with qualitative, ethnographic, interpretative or historical researches (Das, 2014). Participatory Communication approaches were from then on underpinned by Communication researchers.

The perspective of the *decolonial thinking* or *decoloniality* asserts that modernity contains coloniality; it is then "an episteme that acquires political sense in its purpose of dismantling the universalists pretensions of the "Western" cognitive parameters" (Torrico Villanueva, 2010). The contributions of Luis Ramiro Beltrán to the decolonial thinking within the field of communication are considered as a main reference source for this approach, especially his Communicology of Liberation (*Ibid.*), his most revolutionary contribution in the quest for empowerment and autonomy of decisions. His thought and work were relevant to mark a turning-point to the diffusionist theories from the US. However, they were utilised to being incorporated into the new strategies of development cooperation. Beltrán's critique of development was founded on the imposition of exogenous strategies against the need of appropriation, endogenously. But he did not take into account that the failure also lied in the proposed economic model (Chaparro Escudero, 2015b).

Erick Torrico also questions the concept of Communication for Development: "Today it is necessary to depart from this notion and replace communication for development with communication to leave development" (Torrico Villanueva, 2013:263).

In our research, we identify theoretical models in India that have used horizontal communication approaches in line with the Communicology of Liberation proposed by Beltrán. In his critique of the concept of Communication for Development (C4D), Beltrán said that communication requires participation in order to bring about endogenous processes.

In India, the limitations of the communication model borrowed from the positivistic approach were pointed out by Ambekar who also highlighted the relevance of the anthropological approach. He asserted that the communication models of Aristotle, Laswell, Osgood and Schramm, among others "may over simplify or over generalize the reality. In other words, the main purpose of the researchers study should go beyond the study of transmission of the message" (Ambekar, 2009, s.p).

The 'qualitative turn' took place during the 1990s in India, in an attempt to transcend the diffusionist approach, "Qualitative studies emerged as a conscious initiative to impart the critical function of historical investigation and sociological understanding of communication" (Das et al., 2005, p.69). However, already during the eighties in the context of India, "A number of development communication projects have tried participatory communication at the village and community levels" (Agrawal, 2000:309).

Early examples of Participatory Communication projects in India were the experimental research experiences of the farm radio forums, firstly held in Poona (now Pune, in the state of Maharastra) in 1956 (Beltrán Salmón, 1971). These experiences can be considered as antecedents of the community radios, in the postcolonial India. In 1963 there were ten thousand forums registered (Beltrán Salmón, 1971), reaching up to 22.500 in 1977 (Lewis & Booth, 1992). They were "based on the Canadian model and designed to establish two-way communication between village audiences and the programmers of the radio station" (Chatterji, 1987).

According to Kumar (cited in PTI, 2016), Gandhian ideals of autonomy and self-reliance are being implemented in India through participatory community media projects such as Video SEWA (Self-Employed Women's Association). With this initiative, a group of rural dalit women formed a community media trust while also taking part in participatory video production workshops working together towards sustaining biodiversity. Video SEWA project was one of the fifty case studies collected in the well-known compilation Making waves: *Stories of Participatory Communication for Social Change* (Gumucio Dagron, 2001). Although it must be considered that the concept of social change in Dagron's perspective has been constructed, linked to the theories of development and it is, therefore, extremely controversial. The proposal of Social Change driven

by the Rockefeller Foundation states that social changes must be aimed at creating economic conditions that allow the generation of capital and economic growth; then, are we talking about paradigm shifts or only semantic changes to maintain the same developmental strategy?

The concept of *cultural renewal* was proposed by Nair and White (1994) as "a viable model for participatory development communication (...) [that] would generate knowledge for action through a process of dialogue and transactional communication among the oppressed people within a cultural system" (p.138). As described by them: "Cultural renewal is a dynamic process of goal-oriented cultural and structural change facilitated by pro-active indigenous communication transactions amongst local people within a specific cultural context" (*Ibid.*). This model was based in the principle of participation and "active involvement of the people who are likely to be benefited or affected by research outcomes" (*Ibid.*:167). Participatory communication was then proved as a driver for cultural transformation.

In the following years, qualitative research perspectives as Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) have found its place in Communication Research in India, and there are several initiatives in recent years, supported by both national and international institutions. Despite of being of Western origin, these methods take into account the knowledge from indigenous sources through participation in the communication process.

The Freirean concept of "conscientisation" has been reflected in practice in India through examples like the Bhoomi Sena Movement (Nair & White, 1994) or the Kheda Communication Project (Agrawal, 1994). In the case of the former, awareness about the oppressor and the oppressed was created through a dialogic communication amongst some adivasi[5] people that participated in the process that brought them "into a position to preserve their tribal heritage and assert their rights to community" (Silva et al. [1982] cited in Nair & White, 1994:167). While the Kheda Communication Project (1975-1990) of Satellite Television in India known as Pij TV was India's first rural television. It was an experiment in Participatory Communication that with a dialogic approach was "conceived to provide instruction and information to rural television viewers (…) communication was viewed as a means to mirror and focus on the oppression, bondage, and exploitation of the poor" (Agrawal, 2000:310).

5. *Adivasi* is a term used to design indigenous peoples or communities and tribal groups in India.

In another project, the pedagogical process of Paulo Freire's 'conscientisation' was followed by some local action groups named *Garib Dongari Sanghatna* (GDS: *Organization of the Poor of the Mountains*) and operating in Pune that count on 100 volunteers as "agents of social and cultural transformation" (Maid, Padalghare, & Poitevin, 2005, p.375). They were working in communities where popular oral traditions are relevant modes of democratic expression at a grassroots level. Their activities were studied by researchers that considered these groups' activities as "examples of strategies of socio-cultural action meant to initiate and restore elementary forms of democratic communication processes on the part of the marginalized" (Ibid:384).

Ethnographic Action Research (EAR) was employed in the *Finding a voice* research project mostly carried out in South Asia with the support of UNESCO and other international organisations (Tacchi, Foth, Hearn, & Et Al., 2009). This project has used a more holistic approach with a focus on community participation, dialogue (or the inclusion of voice) and alliances, and with 'communicative ecology' as a conceptual framework. The action research in Communication paradigm (Agrawal, 2000) was used in India among a tribe that lives in Sriharikota island, in the state of Andhra Pradesh, with the purpose of solving a problem of "continuous exploitation of the Yanadi by contractors, forest officials, farmers and later shopkeepers" (*Ibid*.:307). This experience identified the need of functional education.

A more recent example is the Communication Learning Programme (CLP) carried out in India by Maraa (a media and arts collective based in Bangalore). It follows an alternative approach to Communication for Development. The project combines participatory methods with tools and techniques to achieve specific objectives and outcomes. It was introduced in 2012 in India as a participatory learning methodology with transformative potential in various radio stations, aiming at:

> Encouraging women's participation and improve the efficiency of health communications at the grassroots. (...) The CLP experience in India has constructively and tangibly demonstrated the relevance of participatory communication in social change by: forging synergies between local communities and the community radio station based on local indigenous wisdom, participative health communication approaches, and design; demonstrating the transformative potential of co-learning by combing local knowledge and community stories/wisdom with "expert" information. (Sen, n.d. , p.4-6)

Comics have been used recently in India, as another medium of Popular and Participatory Communication, with the aim to foster a debate and dialogue based on people's reflections on locally grounded issues or topics, through the Grassroots Comics movement started in the late nineties with projects like World Comics India. This organisation organises a series of workshops to help common people to create their own stories by teaching them basic comic skills. Thanks to this initiative the comic becomes a communication tool of proximity with a purpose of opening local debates allowing people to raise their voice and express themselves (Sharma, n.d.). In many cases, these are stories that from their own particular experiences revolve around claims and criticism of development plans.

Another illustrative example is the comic book *Drawing the line: Indian women fight back* (Kuriyan, Bertonasco, & Bartscht, 2015), a collection of various stories created by women that participated in a week-long workshop as part of a project organised in support of a social movement to stop violence against women in India. Their visual works were elaborated from discussions among them, accomplishing a collective feminist work against gender and sexual violence in India.

Lastly, the next part of this article documents research works on indigenous and popular knowledge, with a particular emphasis in locally grounded experiences and its contribution to Communication Studies in India.

6. Indigenous and popular knowledge in Communication Research in India

In regards to the problems caused by development projects that mostly are suffered by indigenous communities in India, Roy (2014) explains: "Dalits and Adivasis make up the majority of the millions of people displaced by mines, dams and other major infrastructure projects" (p.35). For instance, that is the case of the Dange Dhanagars, a pastoral community living in forested hilly terrains in Radhanagry in the state of Maharashtra. They were forced to migrate on account of INDAL Company's Bauxite ore extraction projects and the construction of several dams, that "has directly hurt the Dange's subsistence forest based economy" (Ambekar, 2009:78). All this illustrates the conflict between development and environment, since, as a result of the rapid vanishing of the forest and tree cover, the Dange Dhanagars "were either displaced or placed in a deteriorating state of economy and forests" (*Ibid.* :79).

The indigenous knowledge has been viewed as an opposing system of knowledge to the rationality of the West. And it is also considered as a movement of resistance against the destruction of the environment (Mukherji, 2016). Meanwhile, the intellectuals of the Western rationality are "serving the rich and the powerful" (Mukherji, 2016:32). This system of knowledge represented by the US hegemony continues causing destruction of the environment across the world, acting "as a principal agent for the imminent extinction of the species" (Mukherji, 2016:31).

These claims have been widely documented by peasant and citizen movements organised around the intellectual and activist Vandana Shiva. The resistance movements of the populations allow documenting the existence of an ancestral knowledge on the management of the ecosystems. This requires a reflection on the consideration of progress as a practice of mere exploitation of resources.

Such is the case of the population living in the jungles surrounding the Niyamgiri hills in India, whose movement of resistance in order to protect its biodiversity rejected a project by the mining giant Vedanta to extract bauxite from their hills. Through the experience of this movement of resistance based on the local knowledge, it has been argued that "survival of the species now depends on incorporating marginalised indigenous systems of knowledge into the mainstream" (*Ibid*.:32). According to Mukherji (2016):

> What is missed in these universalist proclamations in favour of liberal education is that an entire range of indigenous knowledge systems have existed simultaneously, but in almost total isolation from the modernist liberal knowledge systems. These are not "primitive" or "infantile" systems of knowledge requiring further stages of development. These systems are current "adult" systems of knowledge with their own high culture that have been sustained in favourable environmental niches for thousands of years. If liberal education can claim its historical validity by referring back to the Vedas, Sutras, Euclid and Plato, so do the indigenous systems, except that their classical heritage has remained unnamed in the absence of global propaganda. (p.35)

COMMONS

A case studied by Dastider helps to show the contributions of minority cultural communities to the aforementioned *Ecology of knowledges* and their relevance to build on new epistemological directions that consider and value the plurality of indigenous knowledges in the world. In spite of being marginalised during the process of construction of the modern nation state, the "discourses from the margins have explored the possibility of a different modernity (...) [and] stand clearly in opposition to the modern scientific knowledge of developmentalism. (...) The Adivasi lifeworld practices (...) appear as a contrary and critical presence to capitalist modernity" (Dastider, 2016:48-50).

Dastidier (2016) documents examples of the traditional and popular knowledge in everyday life of the three indigenous ethnic communities of the Lepchas, Bhutias and Limbus in the state of Sikkim: "The cultural communities in east Himalayas, as the study suggests, are sites of non-modern knowledge in the form of oral traditions and has different thinking to offer" (p.53).

Taking into account that Sikkim is: the "(a) first fully organic state in India; (b) state with richest biodiversity in South Asia; and (c) greenest state in India" (Dastider, 2016:53), it can be understood that the oral narratives of this region contain knowledge on how to cultivate forested lands. But, the process of *jhum cultivation* (it implies slash and burn cultivation as part of the process) is used in this region, which is also a practice of cultivation banned by the government. "Notwithstanding the consistent proof of better reforestation in areas of traditional Lepcha "jhoom" cultivation, the forest department keeps up its effort to modernize the "primitive" by transforming them into settled cultivators of dry rice, millet and corn" (*Ibid*, :51-52). Moreover, this practice has been observed in Nagaland, another Indian State in the NorthEast region, during academic field studies (Sarkar & Sharma, n.d.), and has been described as a "knowledge system of the landscape that includes agricultures, homestead cultivation and forestry" that is able to provide food security throughout the year. Thus, it is then "incorrectly viewed by policy-makers and planners as a destructive way of farming" (Sarkar & Sharma, n.d.).

The everyday practices of indigenous communities in Sikkim and Nagaland are in contradiction with modern development projects and "may well point to the limitations of the project of a universal modernity (...) the task actually is to work towards making these alternate knowledge worlds cohabit with the world of modern science" (Dastider, 2016:52).

Oral narratives and community knowledge, are concepts used by researchers from the Centre for Community Knowledge in Ambedkar University, "to describe all kinds of niche knowledge that arise from communities, outside the context of Western science" (Sarkar & Sharma, n.d.). They also highlight a research project conducted at the Gujarat Agricultural University from 1990 to 2003 that aimed to validate with examples, predictions that farmers made based on their knowledge of popular weather and climate sayings in the region of Saurashtra in Western Gujarat: "In an agrarian setting, folk sayings and proverbs are the repositories of traditional knowledge and wisdom (...) By repeated observation, they [farmers] learnt to foretell the weather" (Sarkar & Sharma, n.d.). The researchers think of traditional knowledge as "central to the preservation of cultural diversity and the wealth of wisdom that has accumulated in indigenous societies over millennia, and vital to the preservation of a plural and diverse world, both from the ecological and the cultural perspective" (Sarkar & Sharma, n.d.). This research work also proved how "the resulting knowledge network has brought together the expertise of region (...) [and] helped to restore the confidence of the people in their traditional knowledge and skill" (Ibid.). The field studies of the centre have found evidences to "draw attention to the need for integrating traditional, community-based knowledge in the larger agricultural policy of this country" (Ibid.). In an attempt to "decolonize the University of Tomorrow", the Centre for Community Knowledge takes the challenge of "the decolonization of local knowledge, and the search for alternative knowledge and epistemologies" (Sarkar & Sharma, n.d.).

7. Conclusions

The observed researches have contributed to feed studies grounded in popular and indigenous knowledge and Participatory Communication practices in India. This praxis has demonstrated how *other epistemologies* generated from evolutionary responses in a certain territory are moving beyond development perspectives by enriching the plurality of voices in social science and communication, as well as fostering the empowerment of communities.

This work on the use of communication in India has tried to explain, in a first and unfinished approximation, the sources of reference knowledge applied to the communication and the context in which research takes place in this field.

From a critical perspective of modernity and Communication for Development and Social Change, and taking as a reference a new look at the Communicology of Liberation, but with more critical tenets with the model of development to those defined once by Beltrán, some alternatives have been identified, together with some critical approaches that emerged in the Indian context. Thus, it has been observed how the original epistemological sources are confronted with the dominant Western theories, while pointing out the limitations of the universal claim of modernity as an existential myth.

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