



Creating A Common Viewpoint in a Conflicting World

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ABSTRACT

Dialogue is a potent medium to allay major global concerns including geopolitical tensions, identity-based conflicts, terrorism and sustainability disputes etc. In this context it becomes crucial to consider the Fijian concept of “Talanoa”, the ancient Indian concept of “Tarka Shastra” and other similar processes that advocate the use of dialogue for avoidance of conflict. This paper will discuss these concepts and identify the barriers and blocks in the creation of a common viewpoint together despite the knowledge of these traditional practices, by drawing conceptual resources from the works of Jurgen Habermas, Dorothy Smith, Karl Mannheim, Michael Cernea and Bohm to provide a sound basis for more rigorous consideration of the place of ‘Dialogue’ in creation of common meaning in a highly fragmented world.

INTRODUCTION

Understanding Dialogue

The scholars who have studied dialogue define it either as an ideal form of conversation or as conversation in formal settings. The term dialogue is mainly used for purpose oriented formal and structured conversations. It can be understood as a kind of conversation in which the participants do not compete but cooperate in order to increase their understanding of the issue at hand and through this they endeavour to solve problems confronting them (Richard Sennett, 2012). The idea of dialogue is close to Charles Derber’s (2000) conception of an ideal conversation. In dialogue, participants focus more on

listening than on speaking and instead of constantly trying to grab the attention of others they give it to others (Derber, 2000). While early works of conversation analysts particularly dealt with casual, unplanned everyday conversation, subsequent studies paid attention to “talk in interaction”, i.e., institutional dialogues of many kinds as the need to understand the change in nature of conversation with the change in context or setting was felt. Paul Drew (2003), while talking about the difference between mundane conversation and institutional dialogue observed that unlike mundane conversation, dialogue involves proper structure, negotiation and compromises. Some conversation analysts also believed that the study of institutional dialogue will enhance the understanding of social institutions (Cuberes, 2014). The need for cooperation and purpose oriented conversations in society has been realized and advocated by sociologists like critical theorist Jurgen Habermas (1984). In ‘The theory of communicative Action vol.1’, Jurgen Habermas (1984) says that it is through conversations that people know about their common life world and learn to understand each other. He talks about consensus and reason based “communicatively achieved agreement.” Achievement of a coercion free mutual understanding in communication is central to his idea of rationality (McCarthy, 1984; p. xii). Dialogue happens when participants do not shy away from placing at risk their basic assumptions and beliefs and instead of trying to persuade others they allow one another to question and converse (Hans-Georg Gadamer, as cited in Escobar, 2012, p.26). In dialogue, mutual-interest, discovery of truth and knowledge, and equal participation of all the participants is given primacy over self-interest, disclosure of truth and domination (Anderson et al. 1994, p. 2).

However, such ideal conversations are not easy to initiate and sustain. Remaining disconnected, speaking at each other, not listening to each other, not paying attention, defense of viewpoints, monologue in the name of dialogue are some of the problems that can be associated with the conversation practices that we as individuals and groups come across in our daily lives (Bohm, 2004). Scott London (2018) defines dialogue as “a form of discussion aimed at fostering mutual insight and common purpose.” For him the process of dialogue involves “listening with empathy, searching for common ground, exploring new ideas and perspectives, and bringing unexamined assumptions into the open.”

METHODOLOGY

Data pertaining to different concepts and processes advocating dialogue for resolution of differences were collected from published Articles, journals, books, videos and relevant research papers. A thorough

analysis of the aforementioned concepts and processes was done to develop an understanding of the role of dialogue in creation of common meaning in a conflicting world and identify the barriers and blocks in the creation of a common viewpoint.

Analyzing some relevant concepts for a better understanding of the process of Dialogue:

The Pacific Concept of Talanoa

World leaders, including those from nuclear-armed and economically dominant nations, frequently emphasize dialogue as a key approach to resolving major global issues such as geopolitical tensions, wars, annexations, religious and ethnic conflicts, climate change, terrorism, border disputes, and migration. One process that has gained widespread attention in this context is the *Talanoa Dialogue*, a traditional Fijian approach to addressing collective challenges. Talanoa encourages open and inclusive conversations where participants focus on three key questions: “Where are we now? Where do we want to go? And how do we get there?” The essence of Talanoa lies in its collaborative nature, where rather than imposing solutions or viewpoints, participants work together to find a path forward that is acceptable to all. This form of dialogue does not aim to convince others of one's perspective but instead seeks to generate a shared understanding among all stakeholders (UNFCCC, 2018).

The Ancient Indian Concept of Tarka Shastra

The ancient Indian tradition of *Tarka Shastra* is grounded in the use of dialogue as a method of exchanging views and preventing conflict. Tarka, or logical reasoning, is a process of discerning the truth by comparing various competing ideas and gradually eliminating those that do not hold up under scrutiny. It embodies a form of dialectic—a dialogue between two individuals who hold different views but are united in their pursuit of truth through mutual agreement. Unlike debates, which often aim to prove one party right and the other wrong, Tarka Shastra fosters a cooperative search for knowledge, emphasizing the importance of understanding rather than winning an argument (Ganeri, 2001).

Dialogue and Standpoint Theory

Standpoint theory posits that knowledge is shaped by an individual's social position, supporting feminist scholar Sandra Harding's idea of "strong objectivity." This theory highlights that marginalized or oppressed groups are in a unique position to offer insights that those in dominant social positions may

overlook (Harding, 2004). The concept of the *outsider-within* underscores how those on the margins can identify patterns of behavior and societal dynamics that may be invisible to the privileged (Collins, 1986). Standpoint theory argues that any global solution must integrate the perspectives of all stakeholders, particularly those who have been historically excluded. Individuals from oppressed groups bring a different, often more insightful perspective, especially when compared to those who occupy positions of privilege and power. People at the top of social hierarchies tend to lose sight of the realities of human relations, while those at the bottom possess a standpoint that can serve as a stronger foundation for scholarly inquiry (Hartsock, 1983).

Free-Floating Intelligentsia

Karl Mannheim introduced the idea of the *free-floating intelligentsia*, not as a group of neutral, detached social scientists who mimic the methods of the natural sciences, but rather as intellectuals who can empathize with and understand the lives of different societal groups while maintaining a degree of independence from their own social positions (Mannheim, 1936). These intellectuals are free-floating in the sense that they are not bound by the constraints of a particular class or ideology, allowing them to mediate in social conflicts. Such intellectuals play a crucial role in fostering dialogue, addressing both local and global challenges through their ability to transcend their own biases while remaining deeply engaged with diverse viewpoints.

Conclusion

This paper has examined why dialogue processes sometimes fail to produce shared meanings, despite the effectiveness of traditional methods such as Talanoa and Tarka Shastra. It has also explored the role of intellectuals, particularly the free-floating intelligentsia, in making dialogue more productive. Drawing from sociological concepts such as Dorothy Smith's Standpoint Theory (Smith, 1987), Karl Mannheim's Free-Floating Intelligentsia (Mannheim, 1936), David Bohm's Dialogue (Bohm, 1996), John Rawls' Veil of Ignorance (Rawls, 1971), and Gramsci's ideas of Traditional and Organic Intellectuals (Gramsci, 1971), this chapter aims to offer a robust theoretical foundation for the use of dialogue in resolving conflicts and creating common viewpoints in a highly fragmented world. Concepts from Foucault, including the role of power in discourse (Foucault, 1980), as well as Michael Cernea's notion of social scientists as the "hearing system" of society (Cernea, 1991), are also utilized to further explore the barriers that hinder effective dialogue and cooperation in contemporary society.

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