

Making SIS Visible – (2008-2013): Curtains Down!!!

9 September 2013

Dear Colleagues:

As you are aware, an initiative for **SIS Monthly Faculty Meetings** was launched taken in **2008** (following the UGC Review Team's visit to SIS on 9 August 2008). It aimed to focus upon the best academic strength of SIS. I vividly recall pointed queries of Manoranjan Mohanty (DU) as to: "**How do you contribute to knowledge?**" and "**How are you relevant to the society?**". It is precisely these vital questions that led me to write a concept note on **Making SIS Visible and Socially Relevant** [see attached note for ready reference at <http://www.jnu.ac.in/SIS/MakingSISVisible/Purpose/Making%20SIS%20Visible.Concept%20Note%209%20September%202008.pdf>]. The rest is history.

To recapitulate, **within a span of full 5 years**, we have had **46 monthly faculty meetings** (held on first working day of every month during each academic session). The entire process was done meticulously: starting with concept note, designing of structure and process, obtaining an expression of interest as well as formation of four 'interest groups' (**Foreign Policy; Non-State Actors; Security and Non-Traditional Security**). Each of these groups, comprising some 20-25 members, was co-chaired by two colleagues (see above webpage under 'purpose'). The groups did have some initial churning. But the interest groups needed painstaking brick by brick effort to have vibrant thematic SIS wide activity. Alas! That was not to be even as one lakh rupee provided by the Rector for group workshops lapsed. Ironically, the four groups had to be dissolved due to lack of activity. It seems such groups, so natural for international studies elsewhere are alien to the idea of SIS in India.

We ran 46 regular monthly meetings, duly chaired by a colleague. Initially, it has had presentations by three colleagues in the three segments: '**Discussion**', '**Promising Scholar**' and '**My School, My Work**'. This was also brought down to just one monthly discussion by a colleague on an issue of contemporary concern. All the presentations given - and made available - have been uploaded on the SIS webpage. I got the feedback that **Google** has shown links with 'Making SIS Visible' for articles of many of the colleagues placed on the webpage. The initiative did face the issue of 'number' of faculty members at each monthly meeting in the midst of more troubling issue of less visibility in general of colleagues in the School itself. Still a diehard core group of colleagues did sustain the effort notwithstanding the predicament to stay course with the realization as regards dwindling sense of pride in SIS legacy, derision for contribution of the School/JNU in the growth of each of the colleagues as well as stark unevenness between academic freedom and accountability. Though SIS was and still remains a storehouse of expertise on IS in India, somehow it is not able to collectively rise as one to be taken seriously by the policy makers.

Personally, I have been touched by an overwhelming subterranean value and support for the initiative in the School as a whole. Still that tacit support, for inexplicable reasons, did not get translated into the monthly meetings being a hub to showcase the best academic potential of the faculty. Several colleagues were perplexed by my persistence with the effort for such a long period of five years and did caution me repeatedly not to 'waste' time in view of ground realities in the School. However, in view of my background, I just could not do it otherwise since it came entirely from a different Realm. It was just a modest 'pay back' effort and a learning experience even if one can discount a few nasty experiences.

A consultation process with a large number of colleagues has now made me to revisit the initiative after full five years. It has shown that doing something in good faith *per se* cannot break an invisible logjam in the School. It is rather disappointing to pull the curtain down on an initiative one sought to nurture with passion and hope that it will work wonders for the School, bring about greater collegiality among the colleagues and showcase SIS contribution to the society at large. A sincere effort is in your hand but not the outcome. We need to ponder if, like most academic institutions, we want SIS just manage to 'exist' or 'live' and play a very productive academic role. If this effort can be perceived as bringing about any intangible gain in terms of uplifting of spirits, showing what could be possible when one wants to see the change without holding any of the so-called positions, breaking barriers of centers and hierarchy as well as generation of some positive vibrations, I dedicate all that at the altar of SIS. I do thank each one of the colleagues who responded to my calls and made whatever little that was possible. Has it made SIS more visible? Only time is the answer.

With best regards,
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