# DISCUSSION

## The Poser

### Gift of Knowledge:
### Knowing Together in Compassion and Confrontation[1]

*Ananta Kumar Giri*

*The prime condition for a democratically organised public is a kind of knowledge and insight which does not yet exist.*

– John Dewey (1927: 166)

In the Bible we read about a woman who is wailing in the streets, and her name is Wisdom.[2] She is weeping because, despite knocking, we are not opening our doors. In human journey as well as in our contemporary world it is not only wisdom which is weeping, knowledge is also weeping, as it has become imprisoned within varieties of structures of domination, commodification, illusion, and isolation. But to know is not only to know of, but to know with – a practice of knowing with that involves both self-knowledge and knowledge of the world (see Sunder Rajan 1998). It is a process of knowing where we hold each other's hands, look up to the face of each other and learn together. This helps us realise our primordial need for self-knowledge, and knowledge of the other and the world. It is in this process of knowing together that knowledge becomes a journey of co-realisation, co-learning, and collective learning involving joy as well as suffering. Suffering comes from structures of domination imposed upon us, thereby limiting our reality and possibility of coming together and freely learning and sharing our heart; joy comes from the very striving towards it despite imposed restrictions and fears of many kinds. Suffering also has a much deeper root, for example, suffering emerging from our lack of readiness to embrace a new definition of self and society and clinging to our earlier conception of self. Joy emerges from experiences of breaking open such boundaries and realising liberation.

Knowledge is neither a noun nor a possessive pronoun, but a verb. As a verb it is not only activistic, but also meditative.[3] Knowledge is a multidimensional meditative verb of self-, co-, and social realisation. Knowledge as verb involves practices of knowing together, which in turn involves both compassion and confrontation. In practices of knowing together, we create a compassionate community and help each other to learn. This is also a space of solidarity, a solidarity which is always in a process of fuller realisation rather than a fixed thing. In knowing together, we compassionately understand each other, our points of view, including those of the ones we confront. In the process, our points of view become circles of view capable of more generous embrace. In knowing together we also confront each other, our existing conceptions of self, nature, and society, especially those conceptions which reiterate structures of domination and do not facilitate realisation of our human, societal, divine, and cosmic potential. But this confrontation takes varieties of forms – violent, non-violent; dualistic, as well as non-dualistic. There are also practices of knowing together which involves compassionate confrontation, where partners of confrontation are not eternal demons; though we fight, we realise that we are part of a bigger drama of co-realisation where we create a field, where transformation embraces self, other, and the world.

## II

Knowledge is at the root of realisation of living, and in spaces of togetherness living is nurtured and cultivated. It is in these spaces of togetherness with all their challenges and contradictions that life has learnt the art of living and facing the challenges of evolution. It is in the spaces of togetherness that humanity has also learnt about life, self, culture, society, Nature, and the Divine. These spaces are not just collec-tivist spaces; they are also spaces of self-, co-, and societal meditation. We find examples of such spaces of togetherness as spaces of knowledge and meditation in many different traditions of human striving – religion, art, and sciences.

In human history and societies we see such work on knowledge and togetherness unfolding in various fields of life, including in varieties of movements – socio-political as well as socio-spiritual. These movements have presented fields in which fellow beings have come together, have learnt new knowledge about themselves, each other, society, Nature, and cosmos. In these fields we have also learnt how to overcome our existing conceptions of self and social order and feel confident about new knowledge of self, society, and the other that we create. For example, in

our turbulent histories in the last two hundred years, workers' movements and anti-colonial and post-colonial struggles for freedom have been critical factors of transformations, and these movements have challenged existing structures of self and social formation. Workers' movements have fought for dignity of labour and against the oppression by the bourgeoisie, struggling for not only their freedom but also for fuller social becoming and freedom for all. Struggles for freedom have also created new knowledge of self, society, and the world confronting the existing colonial structure of self-formation, social governance, and exploitation. In Gandhi's anti-colonial and post-colonial struggle for freedom, this process of knowing together transcended many boundaries. As a space of togetherness, Gandhi-inspired mobilisations, like the Buddha and Jesus before him, created spaces of compassion and confrontation in which seeking and struggling participants knew together in struggle. This struggle brought together men and women from diverse backgrounds including sympathetic transformers such as C.F. Andrews from the national space of the colonisers.

In the last half century, varieties of movements, despite inevitable and understandable human and social limitations, have continued to create multiple fields of knowing together. They have acted as agents of self-production and challenge the prevalent conceptions of the normal and the pathological (see Touraine 1977; Das 2003). They generate a new language of self and social imagination urging us to realise how existing language traps us in bondage. In our contemporary world, dalit movements, women's movements, gay and lesbian movements, differently abled movements, and global justice movements such as World Social Forum (see Ferrera 2006) have created a field of knowing together in which social movements themselves play a key role as cognitive agents creating new knowledge about self, nature, and society and fields to generate and sustain such knowledge.

But social movements are not only cognitive agents in a narrow way; they are also spaces of emotional inter-subjectivity. Spaces of togetherness from the dawn of humanity till the most recent are not only cognitive spaces, but also emotional spaces of mutual nurturance and nurturance of flames of aspiration through music, art, poetry, and other expressive creativities. It is not true that we find such expressive dimension only in the so-called new social movements in the last three decades or so. The workers' movements also had a vibrant musical and literary engagement as do many political movements now, such as the Zapatista movement in contemporary Mexico. Fields of knowing together are multi-dimensional spaces of cognition and emotional nurturance, knowledge, and art of life.

## III

Life is not a property; life is a gift. Knowledge is not a property; it is a gift. We partake in this gift of life, we stand upon the great heritage of knowledge and life, and the only way we can pay back our debt to this heritage is by giving unconditionally knowledge and life we have received. But, not only today but down the ages, knowledge has been bound in various ways and used for domination rather than for liberation and unfolding of potential. In the past, as it is still in the present, knowledge is denied to vast sections of societies – slaves, women, 'untouchables', low-caste, poor, and the gentiles. These structures of exclusion have been challenged in some ways, but much still remains to be done, thus calling for the need to take part in movements of transformations.

We are confronted with an unprecedented challenge of comercialisation and commodification of knowledge that starts from the kindergarten and follows all the way to portals of higher education. Today, commodification of knowledge has reached a level of obscenity and sacrilege that is an assault on the essential divine dimension of knowledge. It is an assault on both Sophia (Goddess of Wisdom in the Biblical tradition) and Saraswathi (Goddess of Learning in the Hindu tradition). With new weapons, such as intellectual property rights, producers of knowledge are becoming slaves in the valorisation of capital, losing their dignity and responsibility in the process. Even spaces of knowledge sharing are becoming spaces of capital.

Making knowledge a gift is a continuous challenge for us, and it calls for multi-dimensional transformations – self as well as structural. Knowledge is usually associated with an exclusionary elitism and expertise and we are challenged to embody a new art of sharing and border-crossing.[4] Those of us who are in paths of learning have to confront the contemporary structures of commodification of knowledge by not only giving and opening up our spaces of knowledge to all souls, but also by ourselves becoming gifts of knowledge and life. We have to embody compassion and confrontation in our lives and varieties of spaces of togetherness where we belong. We would also have to make our field of knowledge a fertile one, nurturing varieties of cross-fertilisations. Our field becomes fertile with the work of earthworms and for generating knowledge as a field of cross-fertilisation, we practitioners of knowledge have to be earthworms.[5] We also need to communicate not only in our professional language and the dominant languages of global communication, such as English, but also in our mother languages and in other ways, such as writing novels and poems, thereby creating a rich

field of public knowledge on life, self, culture, society, and the world. But, in the social sciences in India, we have rarely cared to write in our mother languages. Thus, most of our self-valorised criticism and creativity fail to create ripples in society and is mostly confined to the select few who speak the same language which is often a language of isolation and distantiation. Most of us communicate in a so-called professional way and rarely use literary modes of expression such as novel, poetry, and drama; and those who take recourse to the later, rarely create social science knowledge such as ethnography of the present that is a cross-fertilisation of both social science and literary streams (see Srinivas 2002). In this context, knowledge is weeping in the street, and it calls for our courage and compassion to transform existing structures of domination and dominant communication and create multiverse of knowledge in our multiple languages of communication, making knowledge neither a monument[6] nor a document but a movement of activistic and meditative transformation.

## Notes

1. Some of the ideas here build upon my work on sociology of knowledge (Giri forthcoming).
2. Nicolaus of Cusa (1401–64), a seeker of the inspiring pathway of what he called 'knowing unknowledge' or 'learned ignorance' writes: 'I want to tell you that wisdom cries out in the streets, and her very cry indicates how she dwells 'in the highest'' (quoted in Dallmayr 2007: 61).
3. Such a view is in tune with the spirit of Karl Mannheim, a pioneer in the sociology of knowledge, who tells us: 'The world of external objects and psychic experience appears to be in a continuous flux. Verbs are more adequate symbols for this situation than nouns' (1979/1936: 20).
4. In the Indian context it challenges us to transform Brahminical exclusion of knowledge and create a new dialectic of self-realisation where Brahmins and dalits help each other to be seekers of both labour and knowledge together (see Giri 2002, 2009). It also challenges us to overcome the exclusionary division between the experts and the lay in practices of knowledge. Here we can build upon rich traditions of lay wisdom, especially in Nicolaus Cusa's the *Layman on Wisdom* where a poor untutored layman meets in the Roman Forum a very wealthy orator whom he addresses courteously (a manner reminiscent of Socrates in the marketplace): 'I am quite amazed at your pride, for even though you have worn yourself out with the continual study of innumerable books, yet you have not been moved to humility' (quoted in Dallmayr 2007: 60). This lay tradition is characterised not only by humility, but also by a 'pathos of immediacy: the immediacy of concrete experience as contrasted with the mere book learning and a purely scholastic treatment of real life' and 'speaking and writing in a simple vernacular idiom' (*ibid.*: 61). This has implication for writing in people's languages and in our mother languages, a challenge which the social sciences in India are yet to pick up.
5. In his practice of critical and transformative knowledge vis-à-vis the working of binding power, Socrates thought of himself as a gadfly. I submit that in our practice of

transformative knowledge, along with the Socratic ideal of gadfly, we also need to realise ourselves as earthworms, making our fields of relationship more fertile and thus capable of new beginning. In his reflection on Grundtvig, the inspiring founder of the folk high school movement in Denmark, Fernando (2000) writes that Grundtvig worked towards people's education where one part of the society could fertilise the other. This work of fertilisation and cross-fertilisation is an epochal need today, as there is so much exclusion all around and so little cross-fertilisation.

6.  In his *The Archaeology of Knowledge,* Foucault (1972) distinguishes between treating knowledge as *monument* and as *document*. He is critical of an archaeological approach to knowledge that reduces knowledge as document to knowledge as monument: '… in our time history aspires to the condition of archaeology, to the intrinsic description of the monument' (*ibid.*: 7). But we need to go further than just retrieving knowledge as document to understanding and creating knowledge as, what Heidegger (2004) might call, 'way-making movement'.

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*Ananta Kumar Giri,* Associate Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, 79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Adyar, Chennai – 600020
Email: <aumkrishna@yahoo.com>

# The Responses

## Knowledge: Towards a Sociology of Human Orientation

### *Piet Strydom*

The following reflections were stimulated by Ananta Kumar Giri's poser (*supra* pp. 99–104), with which I am largely in agreement. The reflections in one respect embed his arguments in a theoretical and philosophical context and in another reconsider them in somewhat more formal analytical terms. The intent, however, is to complement his thought-provoking ideas dialogically, thus continuing our exciting journey of 'knowing together' which had started several years earlier already.

## I

Human beings and their socio-cultural form of life are an integral part of an encompassing natural historical process. Knowledge is a collaborative, conflictive, cooperative, and therefore collective outcome of the permanent human endeavour to orient itself in an appropriate manner in participating in this larger set of relations. The inherited natural cognitive (intellectual, normative, emotive) endowment of human beings is the basis from which arose this overriding human concern with adequate, justifiable and congenial orientation. This endowment formed over millions of years in the course of a natural historical process in which embodied beings actively engaged in a variety of ways with their environment. Through their attempts to deal with the numerous problems, challenges, and threats that vulnerable beings unavoidably face under historically specific, concrete, situational conditions, they underwent individually experienced and interiorised collective learning processes which crystallised out the domain of relations with nature and the domain of socio-cultural relations.

As these learning processes became reflexive, as human beings became aware that they are undergoing learning processes and are not only able, but in fact responsible for seeing that they continue in order to secure their form of life and to integrate the new generation, two corresponding major permanent human tasks were taken on and deliberately organised, both socially and culturally – namely, problem solving and world creation. At this reflexive stage, the socio-cultural

organisation of learning processes drew the attention to the orientation function of cognition and knowledge and, through the further deepening of reflexive awareness, orientation intentions and the communication of orientations and concurrent goals aimed at mobilising others, teaching, learning, and so forth came progressively into view.

Not only could ideas, criteria, standards, and ideals, which transcend the actual situation and stimulate its potential improvement through the pursuit of their approximate realisation, now be spelled out and projected for different domains – whether utilitarian and instrumental, theoretical and technical, moral and ethical, religious and aesthetic. But these reflexive, generative, regulative rules could now also be practically used in a variety of different ways, in which case the particular form of practical rationality followed depends on the context of application and its conditions. Among the different uses made of such normative or regulative ideas by appealing to the goals they project and hence their orientation function – besides the many good and legitimate ones which, of course, are not necessarily without their own problems – were and today still are ones that could decidedly be evaluated as unjustifiable. In keeping with the extraordinary significance that appropriate orientation has for social human beings, the fitting standard of evaluation in such cases is provided by formally reconstructed moral-ethical considerations appropriate to the human social form of life in conjunction with the actual orientation intentions put forward in the concrete situation and the mode of communication of orientation with which this is being done. Political prestige, power, wealth, profit, rationalisation, illusion, delusion, and the like allow authoritarian, ideological, repressive, and obfuscating social structures and mechanisms to distort, deform, obstruct, and prevent the practical use and realisation of the potential of these ideas, and thus fracture adequate orientation in a variety of different areas.

On the one hand, orientation complexes and the goals they symbolise become one-sidedly stressed and utilised, distorted or reified, leading to real reductive or abstractive fallacies manifested in a whole series of debilitating socio-cultural 'isms' – from particularism, ethnocentrism, and racism, through etatism (fixation on *raison d'état*), imperialism, Eurocentrism, capitalism, and neoliberalism, to scientism, fundamental-ism and aestheticism. There even looms the danger of two of the most important leading ideas of our time, the ecological and the cosmopolitan orientations, falling foul of such a pathogenic fate. On the other hand, such selective, distorted or reified forms imposed on orienting generative regulative ideas represent structural problems which in turn induce cognitive deficits in individuals and groups. Reflexive competences and

the corresponding practices of orientation, evaluation, justification, and criticism are obstructed, with the result that problematic, alienated, or unjust situations in ordinary everyday life are rendered either inaccessible to those involved or indeed recognised by them yet not sufficiently understood to be subjected to criticism and correction.

## II

Sociology as a form of cognition and knowledge production is a part of the social practices whereby the socio-cultural world is constituted and organised and the latter's relation with nature is maintained. Through its contributions to problem solving and world creation and the learning processes underpinning them, it is a form of responsible cognitive participation in the elaboration of a justifiable society and a sustainable relation to nature which makes human orientation central in a way that gives sociology an evaluative and critical capacity. As such, therefore, it is best conceived as philosophically presupposing a weak naturalistic ontology, a pragmatic epistemic realist epistemology, and a critical-reconstructive methodology.

Ontologically, sociology sees society as a continuation of nature, yet for the most part, but by no means exclusively, treats it in its own socio-cultural terms. Epistemologically, it focuses on problematic social situations about which theoretical knowledge can be developed, first, in terms of reconstructed formal and actually presupposed pragmatic features enabling and constraining social practices and, secondly, with reference to real societal structures or mechanisms and related processes – all of which requires to be validated communicatively or discursively both in the scientific theoretical context and, crucially, in the public practical context in relation to its addressees and, more generally, the public. Methodologically, it seeks to offer critical, explanation-based directions for how to deal with reality, focusing specifically on a crucial juncture where appropriate intervention could potentially lead to learning processes, the transformation of reality and self-transformation of members and groups. It allows a materialist or realist theory of society to guide it to zero in on an instance of a powerful yet contingent interference of a societal structure or mechanism for the purposes of explicating its distorting or blocking causal impact which gives rise to the problem situation from which it started in the first instance. Rather than deduction and induction, as in positivism, empiricism, and interpretativism, sociology characteristically makes use of the multi-valued logical yet imaginative abductive mode of inference – what C. Wright Mills with a pragmatist and critical theory of education in his writings

famously called 'the sociological imagination' – in order to creatively forge insightful, theoretically fruitful and practically effective links among the micro lifeworld, the macro structural, and – note well! – the typically neglected or underplayed normative (or human social orientational) dimensions.

Unless all these dimensions are creatively fused and pursued with an explanatory and critical intent, both sociology's epistemic function and socio-genetic relevance are threatened. Sociology not only fails in its specific cognitive and knowledge producing assignment, but also reneges on living up to its assumed responsibility as a cognitive and knowledge producing participant in the collective constitution of society and nature.

***Piet Strydom,*** Sr Lecturer, Department of Sociology, School of Sociology and Philosophy, University College Cork, Cork, Ireland
Email: <p.strydom@ucc.ie>

# Sociological Knowledge and its Possibilities

## *Maitrayee Chaudhuri*

It is not easy either to sum up or to respond to Ananta Kumar Giri's poser on knowledge (*supra* pp. 99–104). It touches upon a whole gamut of issues with regard to knowledge, both in its *institutional context* of production, access, and control, and its *intellectual imperatives* that reproduce chasms between the analytical and intuitive, between thought and feeling, object and subject, self and other, analysis and compassion. To touch upon all of them would be outside my competence and, in the immediate context, well outside my mandate and given space. I, therefore, begin with that which marks off Giri's poser from more routine and recognisable discourses in sociology.

Central to the dominant language of sociology which we in willynilly ways pay obeisance is the divide between the empirical and normative, between what is and what it ought to be. Central to dominant protocols of the discipline of sociology are also the accepted sources whom one cites and on what body of writings one bases one's claims upon. Giri quite clearly breaks off from that. In Giri's poser, Srinivas shares dais with Aurobindo, just as Foucault does with Gandhi. The latter juxtaposition is, of course, more acceptable in current discourse. Further he steps into what may not be a central axiom but is an unstated practice that we privilege rational analysis and delink it from feeling one with the

other. Though a great deal of mainstream sociological theory has engaged with the inter-subjective, with communication, with meaning attributed by the actor, and with language, it has not pleaded for the need to simultaneously know about oneself, of the other and the world. Of course, much of reflective anthropology foregrounds the reciprocal study of the self and of the other. C. Wright Mill's *Sociological Imagination* (1959) illuminates the connection between the self and society, biography and history, and, therefore, of a sociological approach that locates both a study of the self and of society, of what Peter Berger (1966) would describe as a debunking motif inherent in sociological consciousness.

It can be argued that, in one sense, this turning away the analytical lens from the object of inquiry which lies outside the subject to turning on the compassionate, connecting with both self and the other, which Giri advocates, breaks tangibly from what we 'normally' do in sociology. It can also be argued quite the other way round, that as sociologists/ social anthropologists we 'normally' do seek to understand society essentially as a meaningful entity. To that extent, Giri does little more than rephrase it a bit differently. What appears to be Giri's effort here appears to be somehow more than this. The question that Giri appears to raise, though not quite so explicitly, is whether empathy can be seen as a form of cognition. Debates on affective cognition are being conducted within neuroscience. One is in no position to comment on that. But, on a more everyday level, we do understand each other and we do make sense of reality. This is what ethnomethodology is all about. However, so far as ethics is concerned, ethnomethodology would move away from ethics as a philosophical quest to understanding ethical behaviour more as a situated social accomplishment. Giri, on the other, strongly reaffirms sociology's ethical and moral quest. Understanding through compassion has a purpose. Knowledge, he argues, is a verb that involves practices of knowing together, which, in turn, involves both compassion and confrontation. And further, in practices of knowing together, a compassionate community, a space of solidarity is created that helps each other to learn. Anti-colonial or workers' struggles have created new knowledge of self, society, and the world. Social movements, Giri argues are, therefore, not only cognitive agents, but also spaces of emotional inter-subjectivity.

In more recent times, the most critical and imaginative new thrusts in exploring these dimensions of knowledge have been both the feminist and dalit movements. Significantly, within quarters of these movements, great emphasis has been laid on experience. Within feminism, however, questions were raised about how experience is at once always already an

interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, and always, therefore, political. The other problem with relying on women's subjective experience as a ground and requisite for feminism, however, lies not merely in its conceptual coherence, but also with its political efficacy and relevance for transforming society. The test of a good feminist theory seems no longer to be whether it helps in the liberation of women but rather, whether it reflects the female experience? (Chaudhuri 2002). Dalit intellectuals likewise express some disquiet with the idea that the journey of self-discovery is often seen as an end in itself (Guru and Geetha 2000). Hence, Sharmila Rege's idea of writing dalit or women's experience as testimonies whose task is more fundamental in making an epistemological challenge to received social science frameworks (Rege 2006). If this is what Giri is indicating towards, one would be happy to concur. However, he does not appear to spell it out quite in this fashion.

In his free wielding poser, Giri has referred to many ailments that plague the making and transmission of knowledge. An unprecedented challenge of commercialisation and commodification of knowledge that starts from the kindergarten and follows all the way to portals of higher education is one such ailment. Such observations are of great relevance to contemporary India, as every effort is now being made to make higher education entirely market driven (Chaudhuri 2010). Entirely relevant too is Giri's allusion to John Dewey about the absence of the conditions for the kind of knowledge needed for a democratically organised public. What one misses in Giri's exposition is a more sustained analysis of the institutional and intellectual conditions responsible for this present state of commercialisation. What one also misses here is an analysis of the consequences of this for knowledge-making.

For instance, one can push the argument that the methodological fallout of commodification of knowledge is what has been described as the 'radical empiricist onslaught' that provides the methodological justification for the debunking of the mind by the intellectuals. Outside the academia, a happy acceptance of the good life leads to an emptying of the public sphere of its critical thrust. If this is one aspect of the commercialisation and consumerism, the other is the shying away from sociology's moral and humanist endeavour, a point that Giri seeks to promote. In Zygmunt Bauman's words, morality is about commitment to the other over time. Morality is not about temporary whims; it is about humans *as* humans and not humans in so far as they are like me (Bauman and Tester 2001). He believes that morality is the fundamental human issue because we are always and inevitably confronted in our lives with other people in the general and a few significant others in the particular.

For Bauman, social thought is indivisibly moral in its content and concerns; it is about *humanity* (*ibid.*).

Giri's poser succeeds in initiating an exploration of ethical reflection. This is sorely required in a practice of sociology where theory at worst is often reduced to an 'operational point of view' where a concept is rendered synonymous with the corresponding set of operations (Marcuse 2002/1964: 15). At best, theory is about model building. To the extent that Giri's essay shifts the disciplinary grounds of certainty, this is welcome. However, one is left wondering whether normative discussions have to necessarily be in the abstract, independent of sociological analysis of the conditions and possibilities of knowledge production and distribution in an extant society. Normative prescriptions sans a critical analysis will invariably fall short of Giri's stated objective for a movement of transformation.

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*Maitrayee Chaudhuri,* Professor, Centre for the Study of Social Systems, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi – 110067
Email: <maitrayee1@yahoo.com>

**Civil Society, Social Movements and Alternative Development: Implications of Giri's Notion of Knowledge**

*Betsy Taylor*

The importance of Ananta Kumar Giri's writings over the past several decades comes in part from the unusual way in which he combines three

different scholarly voices – the ethnographer, the social theorist, and the public intellectual who engages urgent social problems and possibilities. The instant poser is in the abstract and philosophic voice of the theorist. But, it condenses brilliant insights gained from immersion – as ethnographer and activist – in daunting social justice struggles in an astonishing diversity of concrete and grassroots settings around the world. I will relate his ideas about knowledge as 'gift' to his critical ethnographic engagement with organisational strategies in social movements, civil society organisation, and alternative economic development. The amplitude of Giri's ideas here can best be understood in counterpoint with his earlier books. *Reflections and Mobilisations* (2005) explores these questions of knowledge, power, creativity, and solidarity through richly detailed and nuanced ethnography of dozens of grassroots social justice organisations in India, Europe, and the United States. *Conversations and Transformations* (2002) wrestles with such key challenges through creative, surprising but illuminating juxtapositions of thinkers from diverse global traditions. If one reads these various texts in counterpoint with each other, insights emerge that are immensely valuable in practical labours to construct effective, democratic, and just organisations and institutions.

Giri's notion of knowledge is temporally complex. Not only is it a 'verb', an unfolding over time – but it arises in the synapses of self with other, self with world, and self with self. Knowledge arises in relationship, and these relationships are integrally affective, cognitive, and actional. This means that any one moment of knowing is a joining of diverse and even contradictory story lines. This theory of knowledge powerfully shapes Giri's ethnographies of civil society organisations and social movements. (Or, perhaps, this theory of knowledge arose from his decades of close observation of grassroots organisations). For instance, he has followed the NGO Agramanee for years (see especially Giri 2005: Ch. 1) in its work with tribal communities in Orissa. He looks at the people in this organisation as 'verbs' – in terms of their unique unfolding life stories. A central concern in all Giri's thought is his non-dualistic understanding of the relationship of individual and matrix. He is particularly concerned with whether and how organisations and institutions create social, intellectual, and spiritual matrices within which individuals keep learning in creative and honest ways. Agramanee is committed to self-help through non-formal and innovative education – supporting tribal communities in their self-education about political rights, structures of oppression and equitable development. Understanding Agramanee as many dimensional and complex fields of learning, Giri rigorously and concretely traces how individuals – as creators and

learners – shape, and are shaped by, these organisational matrices. He always watches for the particular faces and unique life stories of people working in justice struggles. Too many scholars of civil society look at NGOs or social movements at one point in time, in order to create typologies – a form of rational reduction that often is blind to the tacit, long-term, and sedimentary processes which Giri is so adept at seeing. And, he is a constructive critic of NGO and grassroots organisations as learning organisations. He is empathetic to the strains of work, with too limited resources, in poor communities. But, he also, analyzes the organisational patterns and dynamics that lead to ossification of learning matrices in organisations – with the 'routinisation' of zeal or of charismatic leadership.

Repeatedly, he notes how philosophies of development contribute to civil society formations that lack sufficient spaces for self-reflection, self-transformation, and self-transcendence. This critique has been particularly important for Western theorists to hear. While Western ideologies are skewed towards individualism, many Western development models, ironically, have down-played challenges in self-development in civil society. Giri has developed an important post-dualist model of self and other in his philosophy for alternative development. Drawing particularly on Indian philosophic and justice traditions, he has built a powerful critique of Western models of development, as lacking a notion of the self as a 'verb', in which learning, creativity and action arise in a dialectic of self-transcendence and altruism (see Giri 2002: Chs. 1, 2, 15, 16, 17). Particularly striking is his analysis of similarities and differences between Gandhi's notion of *swaraj* and Kant's ideas of individual autonomy (*ibid.*: Ch. 2). He says that Kant's 'transcends the dualism between communitarianism and individualism' but that it 'is a tragedy of Western modernity that this aspect of Kant's thought has remained underdeveloped [in the West]' (*ibid.*: 32). The practical implications of these insights are front and centre in his detailed explorations of particular social justice struggles. He listens carefully and compassionately to the pain and weariness of staff and volunteers in movements or organisations – who lack time, space, and resources to recreate themselves, to reflect, and to learn anew. This is an urgent problem, and one that is ignored by too many donors, professional NGO administrators, and scholars of civil society.

However, it is not surprising that it is Giri who has been able to listen to the people at the frontlines of these struggles. Having observed his work over several decades, I can attest that his prodigious and wide-ranging thought and fieldwork can only arise from the kind of self-sacrifice, seeking, and *kenosis* which he sees as the key dynamic in

knowledge as seeking. He exemplifies what Herbert Reid and I, in *Recovering the Commons: Democracy, Place, and Global Justice* call 'participatory reason' or 'the ability to hold fast to particular beings within the flow of mortal time, using whatever cognitive, symbolic, ethical, affective, machinal, or sensory means are necessary to keep self and world in a relationship of mutual apparency' (2010: 171).

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***Betsy Taylor,*** Sr Research Scholar, Alliance for Social, Political, Ethical and Cultural Thought, Virginia Polytechnic and State University, Blacksburg, VA 24061, USA
Email: <betsy.taylor@gmail.com>

## Knowledge, Wisdom and Social Transformation

### *John Clammer*

The essential issue that Giri raises in his poser (*supra* pp. 99–104) is that of the imprisonment of knowledge – or at least of some forms of knowledge – in dominating and oppressive (although human made) institutions and structures. This is an issue that the sociology of knowledge (currently unfortunately an undervalued and little systematically studied branch of sociology) has long studied and a great deal of social theory – that of Marx, for example, and his concept of 'false consciousness' – has struggled with at least since the 19th century. Giri's solution to this problem is that of 'knowing together' – a notion which he does not systematically define, but which appears to refer to a process of collective learning. This too is hardly a new idea although Giri does not refer to its antecedents in Martin Buber's notion of dialogic learning (Buber 1993/1947) or to its contemporary expressions in works as varied as that of the philosophers Marjorie Grene (1966) and Emmanuel Levinas (see Hand 1997/1989), the Scandinavian sociologist Per Otnes (1997), or the theorists of transformative education Brian Murphy (1999) and Edmund O'Sullivan (1999).

But the essential problem with Giri's approach, clearly motivated as it is by the highest moral and humanitarian concerns, is that, as we know from sociological and psychological studies of prejudice, learning about and learning in proximity to the Other not only does not necessarily reduce prejudice, stereotyping, and conflict, but can actually intensify it. The question then becomes not simply learning together, but the context in which that learning takes place and the institutional structures that enhance a non-threatening space in which both dialogue and the expansion of hitherto restricted world views can take place, and which allow the continuation and application of the learning process and that which was learnt into the future social situations in which the learners will eventually find themselves. Some noble attempts have been made to achieve this goal, for example, the Palestinian/Israeli peace village of Neve Shalom/Wahat Al-Salam (Feuerverger 2001) and through the efforts of the late Edward Said and the Jewish conductor Daniel Barenboim to promote similar efforts in the same conflict-ridden part of the world through music (Barenboim and Said 2004).

What indeed Giri seems to be alluding to is a certain *kind* of knowledge – closer in fact to the notion of wisdom, than to the technical forms of knowledge that dominate much of contemporary education. The exact nature of this he does not spell out and while the moral thrust of his essay is welcome, it is philosophically confused and confusing. Most significantly, while it attributes the generation of new forms of knowledge, presumably more appropriate to positive social transformation as he understands it, he denies knowledge to groups as varied as women, dalits and the poor. Yet, as we surely know and as anthropologists have long since demonstrated, vast areas of indigenous knowledge exist amongst these and similarly socially excluded groups: medical, agricultural, ecological, artistic, and religious forms of knowledge and world view. The problem is not its existence, it is the lack of recognition that the dominant intellectual and educational are willing to give to such forms as being indeed legitimate knowledge. The possibility of genuinely alternative forms of development lies not only in resisting the commodification of existing knowledge, but equally in opposing the institutions that generate knowledge for oppression and domination (weapons, for example) and in drawing into the area of genuinely dialogic discourse those forms of indigenous knowledge, social practices and artistic expression that have hitherto been excluded from the range of the intellectually respectable.

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**John Clammer,** Deputy Director of the UNU-IC and Director, International Cooperation and Development, United Nations University, Tokyo.
Email: <johnclammer@gmail.com>

# The Rejoinder

## Seeking Together:
## Towards a Festival of Co-Realisations

### *Ananta Kumar Giri*

I am grateful to Maitrayee Chaudhuri, John Clammer, Betsy Taylor, and Piet Strydom, our co-walkers in this conversation, for their generosity. They bring many new issues and insights to this discussion on knowledge. They creatively supplement and expand many issues presented in my poser. Strydom presents an insightful sociology of human orientation in his dialogue on knowledge. In his inspiring reflections on knowledge over the last quarter century, Strydom (2000) has raised many key issues such as the challenge of responsibility before sociological knowledge and a new cognitive approach, what he calls 'metacognitive', which goes beyond the dualism of cognition and emotion. Such a metacognitive practice of knowledge embodies one dimension of knowing together suggested in my poser, that is, the cognitive and the emotional holding their hands together and embracing each other in the journey of knowing together. This resonates with Chaudhuri's reflections on cognitive

affection. Knowing together, thus, is an integral journey involving the cognitive and the emotional, cognitive and metacognitive, self and other, individual and social, individual and cosmos, and society and Nature. This journey of togetherness as Clammer rightly points out involves conflicts or, what he calls, 'prejudices'. Knowing together does involve disjunction as well as strivings to overcome prejudices, barriers, miscommunication, and violence. I have, therefore, described knowing together as a process simultaneously involving compassion and confrontation.

Clammer asks the wider philosophical root of my perspective on knowledge, as he finds it 'philosophically confused and confusing'. Maybe, because of the brevity of space and the nature of this dialogue, I could not elaborate my perspective on knowledge in my poser. My philosophical journey is one of dynamic non-dual co-realisation (what Taylor calls 'post-dualist model of self and other') in which knowing together is not imprisoned in any of the entrenched dualism such as cognitive and emotive, subject and object, ontology and epistemology, human and non-human, and society and Nature. Knowledge as knowing together is a work of what I have elsewhere called 'ontological epistemology of participation' where participating subjects are simultaneously knowing with helpful and facilitative epistemic tools as well as working on their own selves, what can be called 'ontological nurturance' (Giri 2006). This involves transformations in epistemology and ontology as we know, and making them mutually interpenetrative and transformative. Ontological epistemology of participation is a field which enables us to know together involving our whole being not just the isolated epistemic subject and this resonates with the notion of knowledge as participatory reason cultivated by Herbet Reid and Betsy Taylor in their recent work *Recovering the Commons* (2010), where participatory reason emerges and is embodied in 'body-place-commons', which offers new epistemologies – epistemologies of participatory reason – as well as new ontologies. These ontologies are ecological as well as folded in opposition to a flat ontology which is then opposed to a flat epistemology in modernity. This perspective of knowledge as knowing together also resonates with a creative relationalism, different from relativism,[1] where knowing is part of varieties of relational fields; these fields are not only fields of *a priori* determination and embeddedness, but also fields of emergent creative expressions. Knowledge as knowing together urges us to realise, as R. Sunder Rajan does in his book *Beyond the Crisis of European Sciences: New Beginnings* (1998: 86), the necessity of 'constitutive relationship' in our activities of knowing. For Sunder Rajan, this way of knowing is common to three most important turns in dis-

course and practice – the linguistic, feminist, and ecological in the last half century – which have made new beginnings and which in their many different ways interrogate the logic of isolated identity and embedded-ness that binds us to embedded hierarchies of domination and isolation, thus reiterating the significance of relations and emergence.[2]

Although knowing as knowing together reiterates the significance of relations and relational knowledge, it is not just collective learning understood in an uncritical and unreflective way. Given the dangers of collective turning into oppressive collectivism that annihilates self and co-realisation, learning here is a co-operative and collaborative journey, which, at the same, continues to nurture an emergent collective creativity as a collaborative field of co-creation and co-realisations. Knowing together, in compassion and in confrontation, builds upon a long pre-occupation of sociology of knowledge with overcoming domination. At the same time, it also presents the challenge of liberation from not only external structures of domination, but also liberation of oneself from oneself, for example, the liberation of self from ego and an illusive, blind, and arrogant individualism, which does not realise its inherent connection to sustaining fields of togetherness and responsibility to the other and the world. Togetherness here is a multi-dimensional verb, activistic and meditative, and it is neither collective nor individual in a fixed and reified sense. Knowing together as a field holds soulful togetherness as well as creative solitude.

Knowing together as a field creates what Leo Vygotsky calls 'zones of proximal development' that help the participants help each other to develop their potential as well as to complete each other (cited in Holzman 2009).[3] It creates zones of both cognitive and emotional development where the field of knowing together is also a performative field, where the identity of participants is not only that of knowers, but also performers. The field of knowing together not only creates zones of proximal development but also zones of disjunction, lack of communi-cation, and violence. Being in the field of knowing together we would have to begin with the reality and possibility of both violence and non-violence, mutual understanding as well as lack of understanding.[4] Institutions play a crucial role here in either creating spaces of liberative knowledge or prisons of binding and bounded knowledge of self, other, and the world. The project of co-realisation proposed here vibrates with Amartya Sen's agenda of social realisation where social institutions help individuals and societies to realise their capabilities and potential going beyond the logic of institutions to justify themselves for the sake of it, what Sen (2009) calls 'transcendental institutionalism'.

Knowing together is thus a complex journey of togetherness and it cultivates knowledge as an ecological field. It is a field which involves, in the words of Reid and Taylor, body, place, and commons. In my poser, I had hinted at the process of cross-fertilisation at work in such a field and now I will expand this a bit. It is the earthworm that makes the field fertile and as seekers we need to make our grounds of knowledge and life fertile by being earthworms ourselves. Knowing together also involves tending the garden of knowledge with care as gardeners. But, while both earthworms and gardeners could become only embedded in their soil and be bound to it, we also need to develop what philosopher Peter Sloterdijk calls 'avicultural skills' – grow wings and become birds and practice the art of flying out of our fixed locations and embrace emergence.[5]

Such a project of transformative knowledge is thus not just humanistic; it embraces human, non-human, and Divine. Though it resonates with the humanistic sociology of Peter Berger and Zygmunt Baumann, as Chaudhuri shares with us, it goes beyond modernistic humanism and morality in so far as these are anthropocentric and do not realise the project of simultaneous humanisation, divinisation, and naturalisation. It strives to realise the moral where the moral is understood in a post-conventional way nurtured by post-social articulations of solidarity, post-individualist, and trans-individualist cultivation of the individual, and non-anthropocentric and post-anthropocentric nurturance of humans. While much of humanistic sociology including that of Jürgen Habermas has not cultivated much our journey together with the non-human and the divine, the wider project of transformative knowledge and liberation on which my poser was based, brings our acknowledgement, nurturance, and responsibility to the non-human and Divine to the very heart of our knowledge of self, society, and the world.

Knowing together as a field of co-realisation involves human, Nature, and Divine in complex ways. Knowing together as a field of co-realisation of nature and human[6] helps us realise, for example, that we are part of Nature and that we are also the five elements of the universe – air, water, wind, fire, and *akasha* (space). Similarly, knowing together as a field of co-realisation involves a creative process of human-divine dialogue and mutual realisation. Divine is not just part of the religious and social system; Divine here refers to something beyond which continuously invites us to realise the meaningful, beautiful, just, and dignified relations with human, non-human, co-humans as well as the beyond dimension of existence.

Chaudhuri raises the issue of affective cognition and draws our attention to new developments in neuroscience. In this context, we may

note, for instance, the discovery that the division between left and right brain is not very strict there being creative border-crossing between them (see Connolly 2002). Thus, from a neurological point of view, we seem to be capable to practice rationality with deep sympathy. Recent collaboration between neuroscientists and spiritual practitioners, such as the Dalai Lama and his followers, shows us how creative work with the mind makes the brain much more plastic and open to transformations (Begley 2007; see also Mead 1934; Giri 2009). Chaudhuri also raises a question about the significance of experience, arguing that narrating one's experience or self-discovery is not just an end in itself. It is connected to wider inter-linked projects of transformation that involve epistemological mutation as well as ontological nurturance; its significance lies not only in 'making an epistemological challenge to received social science frameworks' (*supra* p. 110) but making practitioners of knowledge embody a new art of integration of critique and creativity, deconstruction, and reconstitution.

Chaudhuri reiterates the significance of John Dewey for nurturing the project of critical, transformative knowledge, and here we can learn with Taylor, a participant in this dialogue. Taylor and her co-author and husband Herbert Reid present Dewey's perspective of aesthetic ecology of public intelligence (Reid and Taylor 2010). In his engagement with knowledge, Dewey brings art and democracy (as 'cooperative experimental inquiry') together to create an aesthetic ecology of public intelligence that is different from a one-dimensional valorisation of the public or public sphere that does not pay attention to the dimension of self-creativity, especially artistic creativity. Dewey 'worked to situate knowing in a "creative ecosystem" distinguished by "change, plurality, possibility and mutual interdependence"' (Reid and Taylor 2010: 128). Aesthetic ecology of public intelligence relates to the non-anthropocentric and ecological dimension in knowledge. As Reid and Taylor write, 'Dewey's notion of public intelligence should help us understand the matrixical conditions of public life that provoke and sustain nonreified ecological consciousness' (*ibid.*).

Taylor and Reid (*ibid.*: 152) also bring Dewey and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (who helps us realise the 'kinship between the being of the earth and our bodies') together in creating a moving philosophical inspiration for knowing together as part of body, place, and commons. This also resonates with the spirit of Strydom who has brought together the creative and radiant aspect of the pragmatist tradition with contemporary emancipatory critical thinking, for example, bringing Pierce and Habermas together. Taylor is the one who introduces the notion of folded and ecological ontology, in place of the flat and disembodied ontology of

modernity, which is an integral part of knowing together as an ecological field. This resonates with the perspective of anthropological ontology of Clammer (Clammer *et al.* 2004). This can also be linked to the notion of caring as a mode of knowing that Chaudhuri hints at and R. Sunder Rajan (1998) has developed based upon his philosophical reflections on feminist and ecological movements.

Thus, knowing together is a field of manifold co-realisations of humanisation, naturalisation, and divinisation going beyond accepted modes of social organisations and thinking such as nation-state, rationality, anthropocentrism, secularism, and theology. It is part of a multi-dimensional process of planetary realisations, where, as participants in the fields of living and knowing, we go beyond our attributed self-definitions as members of a society, citizens of the nation-state, as humans cut off from Nature and Divine, and realise ourselves as belonging to multi-dimensional webs of relations, 'oceanic circles' connecting the self, nature, society, nation, and the planet in complex creative ways.

Unfortunately, I am not able to understand why Clammer thinks that I deny 'knowledge to groups as varied as women, dalits and the poor' (*supra* p. 115). In my poser, I had referred to how Brahmins and dalits can help each other to co-learn going beyond the dualism of labor and learning (see also Giri 2008). In my work and co-walking as a student of life, not just as a disciplinary sociologist or anthropologist, I have striven to learn, with all limitations, from social movements as well as actors, considering not only groups but also individuals as deep embodiments of knowledge working and walking, at the same time, in between knowledge and blindness (see Santos 2001).

In this seeking together and *sadhana* of co-realisations, knowledge is not ultimate; it becomes an enriching and enlightening companion when it is part of an intertwined field consisting of action and devotion. *Gyana*, *Karma,* and *Bhakti* constitute the field of multi-valued co-realisation of autonomy and interconnection in which, without nurturance of action and devotion, knowledge leads to darkness and becomes a curse. We only need to feel in our body, mind, and soul the abuse of knowledge in Indian traditions for justification of caste and gender oppression and the continued use of traditional knowledge and modern science in the machineries of war, annihilation, and violence in our times to realise that, without the *sadhana* of co-realisation, knowledge becomes a source of darkness, slavery, bondage, and curse. As *Ishopanishada* sings to us:

*andham tamah prabishyanti jo avidyam upasate, tato vuya ibate tamah
jo vidyaam ratah* [Those who worship ignorance are steeped in darkness
but those who are steeped in knowledge are also steeped in darkness].

## Notes

1. Mannheim makes the following distinction between relativism and relationism in the context of his related distinction between evaluative and non-evaluative approaches to knowledge. Mannheim writes,

   The non-evaluative insight into history does not inevitably lead to relativism, but rather to relationism. ... Knowledge arising out of our experience in actual life situations, though not absolute, is knowledge nonetheless. … Relationism signifies merely that all of the elements of meaning in a given situation have relevance to one another and derive their significance from this reciprocal relationship in a given frame of thought' (1979/1936: 76).

   About the non-evaluative approach to knowledge, Mannheim writes,

   … if, after the influence of the political and social position of knowledge has been accounted for there should still remain a realm of non-evaluative knowledge (not merely in the sense of freedom from partisan political judgment, but in the sense of the employment of an unambiguous and non-evaluative categorical and axiomatic apparatus)' (*ibid.*: 167).

2. Building upon Ernst Schatel's distinction between embeddedness and emergence, Sunder Rajan tells us:

   … the state of embeddedeness seeks to enclose and isolate the person in a self-protective manner as so many security operations. It is as if the person is looking out upon the world in a fearful and suspicious manner as from a protected Citadel. … As against the self-protective mode of embeddedness, emergence is the opening of out of the psyche to the world, when the person becomes, as it were, an explorer, in the intellectual, emotional and sensuous registers of the mind. Under conditions of emergence, thought, feeling, and even perception take on an allocentric quality. While this mode of living seems to be a requirement of presupposition of knowing in general, in the case of knowing another person or subject, it seems to be particularly needed; it is this mode of cognitive function-ing that may give us access to another, not as an object, but as another living cosubject. In terms of psychology of embeddedness and emergence, we could say now that to know the other in the sense of loving care, requires upon our parts, a movement of the whole personality towards the mode of emergence, it involves the self-protective mechanism of embeddedness (1998: 81).

   This distinction between embeddedness and emergence has important implications for sociology, particularly sociology of knowledge. Moving out of embeddedness is not to cut off one's umbilical cords with roots but not to be bound within these. It is not dismissal of context, but a practice of creative contextual realisation and necessary and integral context transcendence. This resonates with Mannheim's distinction between relationism and relativism. It also resonates with the distinction

between the earthworm, gardener, and the bird that I discuss later on in this essay while cultivating field of knowing together as a field of manifold cross-fertilisations.

3. For Holzman, '… Vygotsky's zone of proximal development is not a zone at all, or a societal scaffold, but an activity—simultaneously the performance space and performance' (2009: 32). Bringing Vygotsky to our field of knowing together transforms our understanding of knowledge and ontology. Knowing together then becomes an activity of performance where 'people are primarily performers, not thinkers or knowers' (*ibid.*: 34).

4. Here what Habermas says is helpful to think with:

> Communication is always ambiguous and always an expression of latent violence. But when this description of violence is ontologized, when one sees 'nothing but' violence in it, one misses the essential point, namely, that the critical power to put a stop to violence without reproducing it in new forms can only dwell in the telos of mutual understanding and our orientation to this goal (2006: 18).

5. Anthropologist Evans-Pritchard tells us how the Nuer think of human children as simultaneously human and birds. Srinivas (2003: 168), the distinguished student of Evans-Pritchard, writes that, among the Coorgs in South India, it is believed that cobras during the last phase of their life 'develop wings'. Instead of treating it as irrational, and drawing lessons from philosopher Sloterdijk as well as the spiritual traditions of humanity, we need to consider ourselves as simultaneously human beings and birds.

6. Sunder Rajan discusses the process of the 'naturalisation of human and the humanisation of nature' (1998: 152).

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*Ananta Kumar Giri,* Associate Professor, Madras Institute of Development Studies, 79, Second Main Road, Gandhi Nagar, Adyar, Chennai – 600020
Email: <aumkrishna@yahoo.com>