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Transcending disciplinary boundaries: Creative experiments and the critiques of modernity

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ABSTRACT

Academic disciplines have exercised a dominant influence in the way we think, perceive and seek to understand reality and the universe in the modern world. Modern modes of inquiry into the human condition have been characterized by a disciplinary mode—we make sense of the world through particular, specialized and bounded disciplines. Academic disciplines provide not only cultural frames to us but also social identity and locations in the institutions of knowledge. Academic disciplines not only help us classify the world but also classify ourselves. And both of these functions and objectives are fulfilled by the erection of rigid boundaries among them.

But if the rigid boundaries between disciplines have characterized the triumphant moment of the modern world, the recent moment has shown us a different picture. It is a situation where the rigid boundaries between disciplines are slowly breaking down and where we find more fluidity and permeability. The present article provides a glimpse of this permeability and the "profusion and richness" that working scholars use to think of themselves and their vocation at present. It describes the challenge of transcending disciplinary boundaries at the contemporary juncture and creating new kinds of knowledge, knowledge which stands at an alchemical meeting point of several disciplines. It describes few creative experiments of our times in this field. Building upon these experiments, the article argues that transcending disciplinary boundaries requires a critical history of the genealogy and worldview of modern disciplines. It also submits that meeting these challenges is not possible unless we understand the limitations of the discourse and institutions of modernity. Since the rigidification of boundaries of knowledge in the contemporary world owes a lot to the logic of modernity then transcending these boundaries on the way to creating new knowledge and a new mode of relationship must necessarily involve critiques of modernity and discover ways out of it. The paper illustrates this by pointing to the limitation of the very word "interdisciplinary research" to capture the simultaneous process of transcendence and immanence that is involved in this "alternative process of knowledge."

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Academic disciplines do not create their fields of significance, they only legitimize particular organizations of meaning. They filter and rank— and in that sense, they truly *discipline*--contested arguments and themes that often reach them. In doing so, they continuously expand, restrict, or modify in diverse ways their arsenals of tropes, the types of statements they deem acceptable. But the poetics and politics of the 'slots' within which disciplines operate do not dictate the enunciative relevance of these slots.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot (1991),
"Anthropology and the Savage Slot: The Poetics and Politics of Otherness," pp. 17-18.

The question of where the "general" went in "general education" and how one might contrive to get it back so as to avoid raising up a race of highly trained barbarians, Weber's "specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart," is one that haunts anyone who thinks seriously about intellectual life these days. But most of the discussions which arise around it seem to be condemned to a certain sterility xxx

Clifford Geertz (1983), "The Way We Think Now:
Towards an Ethnography of Modern Thought," p. 16.

Instead of thinking of knowledge as part of a larger process of self-realization, self-awareness and self-transcendence, it has been perceived as a means of streamrolling the entire world into a set of uniformities...If interdisciplinarity is not making much headway despite persistent advocacy of it by both men of science and men of affairs, it is because it is still being pursued within the dominant worldview and the role of technical experts in it. It is imperative for us to come to grips with the particular tradition of science and technology influenced by the homocentric worldview which put man at the center of creation and exhorted him to use knowledge to enhance his power.

Rajni Kothari (1988), "Towards an Alternative Process of Knowledge," p. 27.

The Problem :

Academic disciplines have exercised a dominant influence in the way we think, perceive and seek to understand reality and the universe in the modern world. Modern modes of inquiry into the human condition have been characterized by a disciplinary mode—we make sense of the world through particular, specialized and bounded disciplines. We look at the world through the eyes of the discipline to which we belong and tend to think that the whole world is characterized by a disciplinary significance. If one is a sociologist, one tends to firmly believe that the world is sociological and sociology holds the ultimate key to the understanding of reality, while if one is a psychologist then world presents itself to her only through psychological themes and figures—through the eyes of Sigmund Freud, as it were. To put it in the evocative words of Geertz (1983b: 155):

> ...the various disciplines (or disciplinary matrices).. that make up the scattered discourse of modern scholarship are more than just intellectual coigns of vantage but are ways of being in the world... In the same way that Papuans or Amazonians inhabit the world they imagine, so do high energy physicists or historians of the Mediterranean in the age of Philip 11...to set out to deconstruct Yeat's imagery, absorb oneself in black holes, or measure the effect of schooling on economic achievement is not just to take up a technical task but to take on a cultural frame that defines a great part of one's life... Those roles we think to occupy turn out to be minds we find ourselves to have.

Geertz further tells us that the way academic disciplines function in the modern world tend to create Durkheimian solidarity among the concerned scholars that would make a Zulu proud. Academic disciplines

provide not only cultural frames to us but also social identity and locations in the institutions of knowledge. Academic disciplines not only help us classify the world but also classify ourselves. And both of these functions and objectives are fulfilled by the erection of rigid boundaries among them.

But if the rigid boundaries between disciplines have characterized the triumphant moment of the modern world (1850-1950) (cf. Uberoi 1978), the recent moment has shown us a different picture. It is a picture of "blurred genres"—to put it in the words of Geertz (1980) again. It is a situation where the rigid boundaries between disciplines are slowly breaking down and where we find more fluidity and permeability. As Geertz tells us: ".. the present jumbling of varieties of discourse has grown to the point where it is becoming difficult either to label authors xxx or to classify works xxx It is a phenomenon general enough and distinctive enough to suggest that what we are seeing is not just another redrawing of cultural map—the moving of a few disputed borders, the marking of some more picturesque mountain lakes--*but an alteration of the principles of mapping. Something is happening to the way we think about we think*" (Geertz 1980: 166; emphases added).

The blurring of disciplinary boundaries that Geertz talks about can be understood by looking into the way new disciplines and sub-disciplines are emerging which embody the limits of conventional disciplinary boundaries and the quest for a new mode of engagement, which cuts across various disciplines. As Stanley Katz tells us in his provocative essay, "Do Disciplines Matter?": "Today's political scientist, for instance, probably belongs not only to the American Political Science Association, but also a subdivision there of such as an association of legal theorists xx Most of these new affiliations are reductionist in the sense that they are merely subgroupings of traditional fields, but many are cross-disciplinary. Thus traditional academic taxonomies built solely upon the traditional disciplinary categories do not reflect the profusion, confusion and richness the working scholars use to think of themselves" (Katz 1995: 871).

In order to have a glimpse of the "profusion and richness" that working scholars use to think of themselves and their vocation at present, we can take the striving of Amartya Sen as a case in point. Though trained as an economist, Sen's work represents a creative transgression of many disciplinary boundaries—economics, sociology and moral philosophy, to name just a few. When asked about how he negotiates the boundaries between different--and often oppositional--disciplines, say economics and sociology, in his work, Sen (1990) tells us that his ability to negotiate different disciplinary boundaries comes from his fundamental belief that both economics and sociology deal with "the complexities of social living." For Sen, "Economics is ultimately not about commodities. The interest in the world of commodities is a derivative one, and the ultimate concern has to do with the lives we can or cannot lead. That is of course a complex concern and the working of these lives cannot be really understood without bringing in society in which all this takes place" (1990: 266). Creatively moving from the existing problems of identification and classification to the aspired for world of integration, Sen further tells us: "I believe the task of integration of economics and sociology would be much easier if we recognize clearly how large an area of congruence we have. The immediate objects of attention are much more disparate than our respective ultimate concerns" (ibid).

Sen's description of his own identity and aspiration brings us to the core of the challenge in thinking about disciplines today, ie., the challenge of transcending disciplinary boundaries and creating new kinds of knowledge, knowledge which stands at an alchemical meeting point of several disciplines. The present article deals with this challenge of transcending disciplinary boundaries—the logic and process of it. It describes few creative experiments of our times in this field. It describes in some details the discourse, practice and experience of some of the experimenters concerned so that we have a fuller grasp of the processes involved in transcending our initial disciplinary identity but at the same time being continuously inspired by some of its unique insights into the human condition. It discusses several issues in the field of this exploration and experiment. For instance, one of the issues it discusses is this: if disciplines are modes of being in the world ala Geertz then to what extent they work as blinders, blinkers and hindrances when we pursue a more expansive mode of being in the world such as a concern with the "ultimate concern of life" that Sen talks about.

The article argues that transcending disciplinary boundaries requires a critical history of the genealogy and worldview of modern disciplines. Taking inspiration from several attempts at helping us understand the genealogy of modern academic disciplines at the conjunction of the discourse of modernity, the process of modernization and nation-state formation, colonialism and the structuration of the modern university system (cf. Kothari 1988;

Wagner 1988; Wallerstein et al. 1995 & Trouillot 1991), the present article seeks to move directly to the present moment and the challenges of criticism and creativity that we confront now vis-a-vis transdisciplinary striving in the world of knowledge. It submits that meeting these challenges is not possible unless we understand the limitations of the discourse and institutions of modernity. Since the rigidification of boundaries of knowledge in the contemporary world owes a lot to the logic of modernity then transcending these boundaries on the way to creating new knowledge and a new mode of relationship must necessarily involve critiques of modernity and discover ways out of it. The paper illustrates this by pointing to the limitation of the very word "interdisciplinary research" to capture the simultaneous process of transcendence and immanence that is involved in this "alternative process of knowledge" (cf. Kothari 1988).

Negotiating the Boundaries Between Disciplines: Issues, Instances and Experiments

Modern disciplines work with an ideologically surcharged assumption that disciplinary boundaries reflect the different essences of different segments of reality.[1] But what we are increasingly coming to realize is that the boundaries between them are contrived ones and their specialization and monopoly over their disciplinary territory were part of a modern academic division of labor. This is easy to understand when we examine the goals and striving of disciplines such as sociology and anthropology. Both deal with human beings and their social worlds. Of course, these two disciplines have their different emphases in the way they deal with the human socio-cultural world. Sociology gives more emphasis to the facticity of social structures and anthropology is always more attentive to listen to the human voice and accord it primal significance. But in the trajectory of pursuit of knowledge in the modern world, these two disciplines have proceeded as if they share altogether different goals and the dialogue between them, in most instances, has not been anything but a "dialogue of the deaf." Sociology has considered itself to be solely preoccupied with the study of industrial society while anthropology has considered the so-called primitive society and culture as its sole territory. Even the creativity that we witness during the early moments of the origin of disciplines in terms of scholars combining both the concerns of sociology and anthropology has given to rigid boundaries in the later years. A case in point here is the work of Emile Durkheim who combined in him both the quest of a sociologist and an anthropologist. Having provided us many insights into the working of modern industrial society in his seminal works such as *Division of Labor in Society* and *Suicide* Durkheim had made himself intimately involved in understanding the modes of thought of primitive societies. But this creative combination of disciplinary perspectives is missing in the later day professional world in general and French sociology in particular. We do not find this simultaneous preoccupation with the problems of industrial society and primitive society in the work of his most immediate and brilliant disciple Marcel Mauss. And in the subsequent generation French sociology came full circle when Raymond Aron preoccupied himself with only the studies of industrial society and Levi-Strauss with those of primitive society (Beteille 1974). Of course, now in the work of a scholar such as Pierre Bourdieu, we find the combination and a mutually enriching interpenetration of the disciplines of both sociology and anthropology.

Before I discuss the issue of sociology and anthropology--the way these two fields have negotiated their boundaries—I wish to point out some of the limitations of a Durkheimian quest in terms of the transdisciplinary formations that we are after and which is an epochal challenge before us. In Durkheim, we find a combination of interests in the study of industrial organization and the primitive world view, but we do not have either any experiment of interpenetration of perspectives or mutual interrogation of worldviews. In the Durkheimian agenda, the study of primitive society is not used as an other frame—possibly a critical frame— for the study of modern society. The same is true of the study of industrial society vis-a-vis reflection on structure and change of primitive societies. In other words, the combination of sociology and anthropology in Durkheim was just a matter of juxtaposition or at a stage of "mechanical solidarity," to put it in the words of Durkheim himself. It was not part of an experimentation for the formation of a creative hybridity. These two different disciplinary perspectives for Durkheim did not constitute a base for mutual criticism of the self and the other and the different selves within the life of the scholar himself.

Apart from the problem of juxtaposition rather than the necessary interpenetration of perspectives in the Durkheimian quest, another limitation in this mode that we must be aware relates to the work of a disciplinary fundamentalism in Durkheim himself. Durkheim spent his life time drawing the boundary between sociology and psychology. Durkheim was clinically obsessed with the distinction between social facts and psychological facts.

Of course such an obsession played a role in laying the secure foundation of the nascent field of sociology in the university system of the modern world but it also probably led to narrowness of vision on the part of the sociologists and hostility between sociology and psychology which has not helped much in a fuller understanding of the human social reality.

To come back to the case of sociology and anthropology as an illustrative case to understand the problem of disciplinary boundaries what we find here is the arbitrary nature of the bounded essences themselves. There is nothing essential about either the subject matter of sociology or anthropology. Both the disciplines deal with closely related subject matters but still the practitioners of these two disciplines have built impenetrable fortresses around them. The royal subjects who live in these enclosed palaces have continued to live under the illusion that the subject matter they so tightly cling to have been chosen by themselves--an object of their self-choosing and self-fashioning as it were. For instance, if anthropology were to be the disciplinary and disciplined caretaker of the savage then this savage slot was not anthropology's own choosing, rather it was assigned to anthropology by the discursive project of modernity, where the thematic object of anthropology, viz the savage, was part of a broader discursive field, constituted by the regime of economy and power, which had at least two other more determinant themes— namely those of order and utopia (Trouillot 1991). In the discursive field of modernity the savage made sense only along with a construction of an utopia while "utopia itself made sense only in terms of the absolute order against which it was projected, negatively or not" (Trouillot 1991: 30). In fact, the search for the primitive in foreign lands was preceded by the search for order at home. Thus in constituting an area of study around a thematic unit such as the savage "the internal tropes of anthropology matter much less than the larger discursive field within which anthropology operates and upon whose existence it is premised" (Trouillot 1991: 17).

Though anthropology and sociology have proceeded along separate lines, there have been many efforts to creatively negotiate these boundaries. In order to understand some of the issues and challenges involved in this process we can discuss the work and perspectives of Andre Beteille, a scholar who has contributed immensely to both the disciplines. Beteille has creatively combined both the perspectives of sociology and anthropology which has enabled him to make some original contributions in thinking about modern themes and ideals like equality. For instance, his essay "Individualism and Equality" (Beteille 1986) is a unique contribution to thinking about the tensions in these two ideals of modernity—a contribution which would have been impossible if he were sticking to either the disciplinary regime of sociology or anthropology.[2]

In his first essay on the subject written nearly a quarter century ago, Beteille tells us that "the scholars who have contributed most to the understanding of Indian society and culture are precisely those who have consistently ignored the compartmentalization of Indian society into primitive and advanced sections" (1974: 15). In other words, they have consistently ignored compartmentalization between sociology and anthropology. Beteille further tells us that in dealing with the disciplinary boundaries between sociology and anthropology we are dealing with "not only academic distinctions but also administrative divisions" (1974: 2). This is as much true of India as of the West. But these are not only innocent administrative divisions but also loci of power, position and privilege in the university system. Thus the rigid boundaries between disciplines such as sociology and anthropology has more to do with the play of and will to power on the part of practitioners in institutions of knowledge than with differences in the methods of study or the nature of the objective reality at stake. Beteille tells us how where the two disciplines were started in a single department such as Manchester (and we can add to this examples closer to home such as Universities of Sambalpur and Hyderabad) have mostly split into two.

From Beteille's autobiographical reflection, we find that his urge to navigate both the shores of anthropology and sociology was necessitated by his feeling that the intellectual resources of anthropology which he had accumulated after years of "primitive ethnography" was not adequate to cope with the challenges of the modern world. As Beteille writes: "My immersion in the literature of anthropology as I know it then meant that I was falling behind in subjects that were central concern to the brightest among my friends outside of anthropology, such as class, inequality, conflict, capitalism, socialism, democracy. xx I could of course tell them that there was no such thing as primitive communism or that the belief in a universal stage of matriarchy was mistaken, but that does not carry one very far" (1993: 295).

Beteille tells us that when he widened his horizons towards sociology, he was greatly attracted to questions of class and stratification. But "although class and stratification are pre-eminently sociological subjects," he

"incorporated into their study certain basic elements acquired in [his] training as an anthropologist" (Beteille 1993: 297). His "first book examined the changing relations between caste,class and power through the intensive study of a single village of the kind commonly undertaken by anthropologists in India and elsewhere" (ibid). But his navigation of these boundaries have not gone without criticism. As Beteille tells us, he "was criticized by certain anthropologists for introducing the concept of class which they regarded as inappropriate in the context of village India" but he "did not take their criticism to the heart and proceeded in later studies to explore the contours of the agrarian class structure at the district and the regional levels on the basis of the insights" he "had gathered through [his] village studies" (ibid).

Beteille further tells us that his work in sociology has been influenced by the economists of Delhi school of Economics in whose midst he has worked. But despite exchanges with anthropology and economics Beteille would like to stick to his identity and vocation "as a sociologist" (Beteille 1993: 299). Self-identifying phrases like "as a sociologist" and objectifying phrases like "as a subject of sociology" (consider here some of the titles of Beteille's paper--"Religion as a subject for sociology," "Individual, self and person as subjects of sociology") proliferate in Beteille's writings. Though Beteille's work presents an advance over the Durkheimian agenda of juxtaposition of disciplines to an interpenetration of perspectives, there is no urge to transcend disciplinary boundaries in Beteille. Rather what we find is a passionate clinging to one's disciplinary vocation and defensive reaction to the sweeping waves of some of the contemporary interlocutors like Levi-Strauss whose significance Beteille reads mainly through a disciplinary prism. Reacting to the structuralist wave of Levi-Strauss, Beteille writes: "There is no doubt that Levi-Strauss' intellectual enterprise has been a splendid success, but then I have not felt the need, *as a sociologist*, to attach myself to that enterprise" (Beteille 1993: 304; emphasis added). Then Beteille goes on to bring Weber as an alternative to Levi-Strauss because for him "it is obvious" that Weber's work is central to the enterprise of sociology. Though Beteille himself says that he is not interested in bringing Weber and Levi-Strauss into a public competition with each other, nonetheless this mode of relating to the pursuit of knowledge is a competitive and classificatory mode. Such a disciplinary mode of being in the world and the accompanying zeal for comparison may not be very helpful in creating transdisciplinary knowledge. Instead of comparing two influential interlocutors we can think of them as fellow travelers in our search; certainly they would have different significance at different stages of our inquiry and self-realization but we may have no need at all to judge who is closer to our disciplinary mode than the other. Nevertheless the closing lines of Beteille's essay are deeply insightful as they challenge us to think beyond: "Sociology must surely remain receptive to the ideas of great anthropologists--Malinowski and Evans-Pritchard, and also Frazer and Levi-Strauss—but I find it difficult to pretend that it has today any special relationship with anthropology that it does not have with history, economics or politics" (Beteille 1993: 304).

Beteille has negotiated the boundaries between disciplines while pursuing his vocation as a sociologist within the university system. Let us now examine the experience and insight of a scholar who has been engaged in such creative experiments outside it. He is Rajni Kothari, the founder of the Center for the Study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Delhi. Kothari was trained as a political scientist but his creative *ouevre* over the last quarter century has embodied interpenetration of many disciplinary perspectives and a dissatisfaction with the institutional and discursive boundaries of modernity which structure present-day academic disciplines. In his partly autobiographical reflection, "Towards an Alternative Process of Knowledge " Kothari (1988), tells us his own experience and experiment as well as draws our attention to many deeper issues in this field of experimentation which are rarely touched in the dried debates in interdisciplinary research. We need to discuss at great length this essay in order to understand processes of renewal and transformation—self and institution--that are involved in transcending disciplinary boundaries.

Kothari urges us to realize that the question of interdisciplinary research is not an end in itself but is linked to wider questions of both the crisis of the human sciences and our social systems and their need for transformation. Kothari relates the need for transcending disciplinary boundaries to historical problematiques—primarily the epochal challenges of multi-dimensional self and social transformation at present—and to alternative praxis. For Kothari, though interdisciplinarity has been a pious hope of our times, it is essential first to understand what interdisciplinarity is not. First, it does not mean "lumping together more than one discipline under a single roof" (Kothari 1988: 30). It does not mean merely having a sociologist in a department of economics or vice versa. In such cases, the departments continue to hold the flags of disciplinary chauvinism while the lone outsider is condemned to hold the flag of creativity as a marginal and marginalised Being.[3] Second, interdisciplinarity is not

an aggregation of concepts drawn from various disciplines. For Kothari, "lacking a more basic orientation, this [i.e. the aggregation of concepts] may in fact produce confusion and give rise to a jungle of categories and a multiplicity of jargons which have however not been absorbed in a general framework with a clear focus" (1988: 31). Interdisciplinarity is not also mere borrowing from other disciplines because some concepts and theories in these are more fashionable" (1988: 31-32).

For Kothari, creative social research involves an alternative chemistry of knowledge formation. Central to this alternative chemistry is the formation of an alternative community of seekers or alternative community of discourse and a self who conceives of his or her role as primarily a seeker and a transformer. The group provides a collective setting for cross-disciplinary conversations, transdisciplinary seeking and cross-fertilization of perspectives. The group however is not governed by the collective egoism of any discipline and conceives of its identity as a facilitator of creative experimentation and explorations. In fact, the group itself in the process of deliberations and conversations among seeking souls develops a "creative conviviality" (1988: 34) and the identity of an experimental subjectivity, an identity which not only inspires individual participants of conversation to set aside their fixations but also solve some of the problems of border disputes as and when they arise. The self-dimension of this process of renewal and transformation is equally important. As Kothari tells us, "basic to the whole chemistry is the fact that the intellectual process is located in each individual and is not just a juxtaposition of people from different disciplines. For true interdisciplinarity to develop, it is the individual that has to become interdisciplinary, not the group" (1988: 34).

At the same time, the significance of the institutional dimension in the whole process is not to be lost sight of. For Kothari, "It is here that the greatest challenge lies and little headway seems to have been made as yet. While there is no dearth of outstanding individuals who embody in their life and work the normative perspective of [transdisciplinarity]... the real growth of interdisciplinary, interparadigmatic and inter-civilisational process of knowledge and social action will depend on the growth of institutions around the world that share, sustain and nurture such a perspective—and such individuals" (1988:34). Kothari here describes his experiment of building of his center CSDS as an alternative institution of knowledge creation about which political theorist Fred Dallmayr (1996b) has also recently drawn our attention to. Kothari tells us that the interdisciplinary work of the Center has been inspired by the "larger human problematique"— the problematique of transformation and survival of the developing societies as well as the humanity at large.

Kothari's reflection on the alternative process of knowledge reflects his unease with the language of modernity. As this process opens up for scholars "new intellectual thresholds and vistas which respond less to the inner logic and momentum of a particular branch of knowledge and more to the logic of historical forces and their contemporary empirical manifestations," "even the term interdisciplinary proves inadequate.." (Kothari 1988: 33-34). Kothari urges us to realize: "For inherent in the interdisciplinary format is a mechanistic and aggregative, at best integrative, process rather than a transformative process which is what really takes place. What actually happens can perhaps be better described as trans-disciplinary or extra-disciplinary knowledge rather than an interdisciplinary orientation..." (1988:34). But Kothari is not merely quarreling over what is the most appropriate word here. His objective here is to draw our attention to the problem of the dominant framework of knowledge i.e., the modern framework of knowledge within which we pursue our inquiries and even border-crossing enterprises. For Kothari (1988:3), the framework of modernity promotes a "narrowly utilitarian view of science based on a conception of knowledge as an instrument of power in man's search for control and domination." Such a modernist equation of knowledge and power gives rise to the deification of the professionals and technical experts in the human condition who systematically erase alternative traditions of thinking about knowledge, for instance, knowledge being concerned with understanding, love and selfless devotion to humanity. The modernist framework of knowledge alienates the man of knowledge from the wider social and cosmic reality and moves towards transdisciplinary formations have to be part of a broader struggle against the "inverse correlation between the expansion of human knowledge and decline in the capacity to deal with real problems [of humanity] at present" (1988: 23).

In putting forward his critique of modernity, Kothari urges us to realize that there are other traditions of knowledge in China, India, Persia, the Arab countries and even the medieval Europe where knowledge is "first a search for truth and, beyond that, a basis for man's enlightenment and liberation" (1988: 27). "In all those traditions knowledge is considered as at once a means and an end, not just a means of control and domination as in the

modern West" (1988 : 29-28). These traditions also put forward a holistic conception of Being and knowledge and differ in their stress on pluralities of knowledge systems as compared with the modernist deification of an annihilating universalism. For Kothari, "If knowledge is to be integral with life, and if life is pursued in diverse cultural and historical contexts, then surely systems of knowledge—in both theory and praxis—must vary too and in their totality provide alternative schools of thought and action. It is only with the universalist claims of modern science (in turn based on a conviction of its superiority) that this view of alternative paths to truth and enlightenment has gone under. xxx Interdisciplinarity must also encompass interparadigmatic discourse as well as a 'dialogue of civilizations' implicit in each of which is the notion of alternatives" (1988: 28).

In Kothari's agenda and experiment, "interdisciplinarity is not an end in itself, only a means to a process of knowledge that is integral, sensitive to the intellectual challenge of a fast changing human condition, problem-oriented and capable of creative interaction with reality, and liberating" (1988:43). Another recent effort which provides a similar broad agenda of transdisciplinary formation is the Report "Open the Social Sciences, Report of the Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences" (Wallerstein et al. 1995). This report has been prepared by Immanuel Wallerstein and eight other scholars from different disciplines— natural and social—and different countries of the world. Wallerstein et al. provide us a critical history of the genealogy of modern social science disciplines. Among other things, they point to the determinant role of Newtonian physics, modern state formation and the rise of the university system in the structuration of modern social science disciplines and the subsequent demarcation and rigidification of their boundaries. Their agenda of opening the social sciences is an agenda for opening up all disciplines—natural science, humanities and the social sciences.

For Wallerstein et al, the urgent challenge for all disciplines now is to open themselves from their conventional rigidities and boundaries and break their chains of scientific and disciplinary illusions. Sciences should open themselves from their bondage to Newtonian mechanics and social sciences should breakaway from their uncritical tutelage to the natural sciences. In this agenda, it is important to take note of the new developments in science for transcending disciplinary boundaries. As Wallerstein et al. tell us: "The Cartesian view of classical science had described the world as an automation, which was deterministic and capable of total description in the form of causal laws, or "laws of nature." Today many natural scientists would argue that the world should be described quite differently. It is a more unstable world, a much more complex world in which perturbations play a big role, one of whose key questions is how to explain how such complexity arises. Many [natural scientists] now believe that complex systems are self-organizing, and that consequently nature can no longer be considered to be passive" (Wallerstein et al. 1995: 70). Many natural scientists now believe that the laws that they can formulate "enumerate only possibilities, never certainties" (ibid:70)

Developments in science, in realms such as quantum physics, point to the inseparability of the measurer from the object and process of measurement. In other words, it reiterates the untenability of the dualism between subject and object. Overcoming the modernist dualism of subject and object then seems to be an important step in the process of the needed opening up of our disciplinary and disciplined horizons. Wallerstein et al. argue that in place of the reigning ideal of "disenchantment of the world," what we now need is a "reenchantment of the world" (p.84). By reenchantment of the world, they refer not only to the breaking down of the boundaries between the object and subject (see Witz 1996 for an interesting parallel discussion of it from the point of view of Vedanta) but also to that between humans and nature—"to recognize that they both from part of a single universe" (Wallerstein et al. 1995: 84) (Again, please see here Ramakrishna Puligandla's (1996) work on this from a Vedantic point of view).

Social science disciplines have considered the universalism of modern natural science as their ideals and from Kothari we have learnt the need to deconstruct the supposed universalism of the modern sciences for our task at hand. It is interesting that Wallerstein et al also identify the problem of universalism as an important issue in the field of interdisciplinary research. Supporting the plea for a "dialogue of civilizations" as an important part of transcending our boundaries, Wallerstein et al. write: "There exist alternative views of such key social science concepts as power and identity proposing that power is transient and unreal, or that legitimacy must come from the substantive context rather than from formal procedure" (Wallerstein et al 1995: 64). Here our interlocutors draw our attention to the worldview of Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and the Caribbean social imagination to reiterate their argument that key social science categories have alternative imaginings—which must interrogate "the very foundations of their analytical constructs" (Wallerstein et al. 1995: 64).

Experiments to transcend the boundaries of our disciplinary thought inevitably and necessarily require a critical engagement with modernity. Wallerstein et al. provide ample insights to understand this. As we shall see, the key question here is the question of the self and other and transcending disciplinary boundaries requires transcending our bounded selves, reaching out to the other, inviting the other, being involved in a process of interpenetration of the self and the other and creating new bases of intersubjectivity and solidarity. In this context, it is demystifying to read Wallerstein et al. write: "If social science is an exercise in the search for universal knowledge, then the "other" cannot logically exist, for the "other" is part of "us" — the "us" that is studied, the us that is engaged in studying" (ibid: 64). Of the question of universalism, they urge us to understand the work of pluralistic universalism. What they ask is significant: "Is there a deeper universalism which goes beyond the formalistic universalism of modern societies and modern thought, one that accepts contradictions within its universality? Can we promote a pluralistic universalism on the analogy of the Indian pantheon wherein a single god has many *avatars*?" (ibid: 66).

In their agenda of reconstruction of social sciences, Wallerstein et al. also urge us to go beyond the state-centric view of social reality--"refusing to consider the state as providing the only possible and/or primary boundary within which social action occurs and is to be analyzed" (ibid: 87). For the social sciences, modern nation-states--their logic of operation and the need for justification--have provided ideals and models. But from the 1970s, the state-centric view has been subjected to fundamental criticism and now the rise of transnational processes at the multiple levels of the global human condition—both at the level of self and the state-system of societies (cf. Robertson 1992)—have added to the inadequacy of conceptualizing the state "as the natural, or even the most important, boundary of social action" (Wallerstein et al. 1995: 96). What is interesting to note is that "this leads to questioning the disciplinary boundaries that were based on the state-centric assumption" (Reddy 1996: 283). In the words of Wallerstein et al.: "Once we drop the state-centric assumption, which has been fundamental to history and the nomothetic social sciences in the past, and accept that this perspective can often be a hindrance to making the world intelligible, we inevitably raise questions about the very structures of the disciplinary partitions which have grown up around, indeed have been based on, this assumption" (ibid: 96).

Wallerstein et al. point to many movements within the academy and outside which carry the experiments of a transdisciplinary engagement. They point to the significance of the area study programme in the post-war period in this regard and many transdisciplinary spaces for knowledge production inside and outside the university system in the form of formation of institutes and centers. (Here, it must be added that their reading of the area studies programme is innocent and probably deliberately ignores the colonialist function of such programmes vis-a-vis study of the developing societies such as India. Rao's (1995) work in this field deserves our careful consideration). They suggest the need for encouraging four kinds of structural developments: (i) the expansion of institutions, within or allied to the universities which could bring scholars for a year's work in common around specific urgent themes; (ii) the establishment of integrated research programmes within university structures that cut across traditional lines; (iii) compulsory joint appointment of professors, i.e. everyone is appointed to two departments--one in which he or she has a degree and the other in which he or she has shown interest; and (iv) joint work for students, particularly for graduate students, in at least two departments.

Such an approach seems more managerial and does not place these suggested changes in wider socio-political struggles and transformations nor in the reflective practice of self- transformation. If opening up our disciplinary boundaries requires a new way of looking at the world, then such a weltanschauung must be cultivated by the institutions of our society. But the university system today is uncritically wedded to the institutional and discursive framework of modernity (cf. Bellah et al, 1991; Giri 1995) but Wallerstein et al. do not speak much about transforming the socially alienating base and the modernist orientations of contemporary universities. Moreover, they do not interrogate the foundation of existing institutions of knowledge—universities and research institutions and their mode of social alienation and the goal of professionalism. Universities in Europe and North America seem to forget that there is an outside social world and they have to contribute to a transformation of that outside social reality. As Russell Jacoby (1987) tells us, universities in the US have long ago killed the "public intellectuals" who wish to speak to the society at large and have promoted the specialized professionals who speak an "arcane language." In this context, we need new ideals of self-identity before us and Wallerstein et al. seem to be still wedded to the cult of professionalism, which itself is the source of the problem in the first place.⁴ But now we need new ideals such as thinking of ourselves as perennial seekers and pilgrims— images and ideals which are conspicuous by their absence in the agenda of Wallerstein and his colleagues. But if by opening

up sciences we are not meaning merely to open up among those of us who belong to the world of knowledge but open up to the wider society, the entire humanity and the cosmic reality and invite all concerned to be part of our "conversation" then we need more journey men and pilgrims who are prepared to hold the hands of the wretched of the earth and walk on the dusty soil than professionals who jump from one conference to another and have no time to stand and share. It is to be noted that Wallerstein et al. write that the keys to our ability to transcend boundaries lies in "increase in human creativity, the expression of self in this complex world" (ibid: 89). But what is the process of this referred to and aspired for self-creativity? What is the ontological preparation that such a creativity requires and how institutions can ensure and facilitate such preparations? What are the technologies of the self in such zones of engagement and is there any need here to have a dialogue with spiritual sources of self, for instance, as raised by interlocutors such as Charles Taylor (cf. Taylor 1989)? Wallerstein et al. are totally silent on these as well. Because of their cultural and social backgrounds, their critique of modernity can only be within a familiar boundary!

One contemporary interlocutor who combines both the concerns of my critique of professionalism as well as Wallerstein et al's critique of Newtonian physics in his agenda of broadening of social sciences is C.T. Kurien. Long before his just published *Rethinking Economics: Reflections based on the study of the Indian Economy* (1996), Kurien had stated quite clearly as co-ordinator of interdisciplinary research methodology workshop of the Madras Institute of Development Studies (MIDS): "Social science disciplines are alienated from each other because each one of them has become alienated from the social reality it is supposed to analyze, understand, interpret and influence" (Kurien 1981: 250). Kurien continues his critical challenge: "If this is the case the alienation of the disciplines cannot be eliminated by intermingling alone, however deliberately it is attempted. There is need to test how far removed each discipline is from the social reality. That crucial test has to be done essentially through involvement and introspection and less through academic research alone..." (ibid).

In *Rethinking Economics*, Kurien carries out a similar test for his field of vocation, Economics. Making the distinction between economics and the economy, Kurien argues how mainstream economics today under the influence of the neo-classical paradigm is far removed from the reality of any economy as a set of social relationships and as an "experiential reality" (Kurien 1996: 10). Kurien shows how contemporary economics with its penchant for mathematical modelling and abstract logic is not "interested in any real economy" (ibid: 12). For the model-building economists, Kurien argues, "the artificially created world may come to be viewed as the real world or as what the real world should ideally become" (ibid: 15). For Kurien, "..while abstracting enables one to get away from the immediate proximity of real life problems... it then raises the problem of 're-entry' to tackle those problems with better insight. For whatever reason, while abstraction and model-building seem to come naturally to economists few seem to be worried about 're-entry'. This is the biggest professional vice among economists.. that they tend to confuse the artificial world of their creation with the real word itself and are often unaware that they are doing so" (ibid: 15). Here one is reminded of a parallel fundamental critique of the discipline of economics: "..there is in the scientist called economist everything except the commitment to a field reality, a commitment that is a moral quality as well as an existential feature of participation" (Sivakumar 1986: 631).

For Kurien then, one important way of opening up the social sciences is to reestablish one's contact with reality back in a spirit of understanding and transformation. For this, votaries of disciplinary boundaries have to be critical both of their professionalism and their scientific heritage, namely Newtonian physics. As to the former, Kurien further writes: "..economics as a discipline is mainly the concern of the varieties of clubs it has —university departments, research institutes, professional associations. It is not surprising that academic activity consist primarily of reading, writing and talking .. But what of the links between the world of the professionals and the world which is the basis of their being?" (Kurien 1996: 11).

Politics has been conceived for long as one way of relating one's vocation as a student of the human condition to its wider social reality and from Aristotle to Gandhi we have always had an alternative tradition of thinking about political commitment which is not an adjunct to human will to power but is a manifestation of one's will to love and transform the reality which one re-enters. One way of transcending disciplinary boundaries, taking inspiration from Kurien, then is to bring the question of politics—of "life politics" (cf. Giddens 1994) as contrasted with the mere party politics—to the center of our theory and practice, to our modes of being in the world. In fact, when we come back to Amartya Sen we see the concrete way this helps one to seek beyond the walls of one's discipline. Speaking of his early years as a student Sen tells us: "Regarding my own orientation

to step beyond the boundaries of economics, I think that to some extent it is indeed connected with my interest in politics" (Sen in Swedberg 1990: 250). But from Sen we also learn the additional significance of philosophy in widening our horizons. As he says: "I have also been interested in philosophy—in an amateur way—from very, very early on in my life. And, in a sense, philosophy leads you to take an interest in a variety of other things" (ibid).

We can use the example of Sen to turn our attention to some of the concrete problems that a striving to transcend disciplines still faces. Sen tells us that he read economics quite early in his life and took an interest in other subjects like sociology at a relatively late stage when he was a young teacher in Cambridge in the late 1950s. He then read "some of the works of Weber and Durkheim and some other sociologists" who influenced his thinking. Still, they never stuck to his mind "as firmly as those works" with which he "grew up" (Sen 1990: 253). What Sen writes about his experience deserves our careful attention: "When I am thinking, for example of a particular point and I find it similar to a point made by somebody else but not quite the same, then my natural preference is to those things over which I have better command. And the command was acquired at a time when my receptivity was greater, namely when I read Marx or Mill, rather than later on when as it were the foundations of my own mental makeup had already been largely made up" (Sen 1990: 253).

Sen suggests that even if one is familiar with different disciplinary perspectives, this does not necessarily lead to a genuine interpenetration of perspectives since one's discipline can continue to remain at the core of one's being and other perspectives are allowed to stay only at the margins. Interdisciplinary research and transdisciplinary striving then must have the courage to abandon one's discipline and enter inside other disciplines with a genuine spirit of total participation and not with the casual stock-taking of a passer by. Such a courage we find in the work of a scholar such as Herbert Simon. Though awarded the Noble Prize for the Economic Science in 1978, Simon tells us that he had abandoned the field of economics since 1955. Simon (1992) tells us that his interest in economics began in 1935 as an interest in human decision-making. Pursuing this interest has led him to what he calls a "long, but pleasurable, search through a tortuous maze of possibilities" (Simon 1992: 265). He (ibid) describes his journey in the following way:

> To understand budget decisions, one has to understand decision-making in general. And to understand decision-making, even in its material aspects, it is necessary to study processes of decision-making, and more generally, the process of human thinking. To study thinking, I had to abandon my home disciplines of political science and economics... for the alien shores of psychology and, a little later, of computer science and artificial intelligence. There I have remained since, except for occasional brief visits to the home islands. My emigration took place about 1955, with some interdisciplinary commuting for a few years thereafter.

Simon's commitment to travel and live in the twilight zone of "interdisciplinary space" suggests us a way out. He argues that if as a sociologist one wants to travel inside economics, then one must speak the language of economics and not stick to one's previous vantage point and look at the newly arrived land through it. In his words, "When in economics, there is no substitute for talking the language of marginal analysis and regression analysis—even (or especially) when your purpose is to demonstrate their limitations" (1992: 269). Simon goes on to say: "It is fatal to be regarded as a good economist by psychologists; and a good psychologist by political scientists. Immediately upon landing on alien shores, you must begin to acquire the local culture, not with the aim of denying your origins, but so that you can gain the full respect of the natives" (ibid). He offers the ideals of a pilgrim or a journeyman in place of the tight-necked professional and urges us to realize:

> Disciplines, like nations, are a necessary evil that enable human beings of bounded rationality to simplify the structure of their goals. But parochialism is everywhere, and the world sorely needs international and interdisciplinary travelers who will carry new knowledge from one cave to another (1992: 269).

The Challenge of Transcendence

In the preceding pages, we have had intimations of various efforts and experiments to negotiate the boundaries between different disciplines and transcend their walls of enclosures. These experiments have suggested a number of creative paths as possible modes of engagement for us. These experiments invite us to

take part in the process of renewal, creativity and experimental seeking. I do not wish to summarize all the insights discussed above and the purpose behind my above submission has been to invite the readers as fellow travelers in this journey as well and arrive at their own interpretative breakthroughs. However, I wish to highlight a few key points and then to take the discussion to a new direction in order to grapple with the challenge of transcendence that we are confronted with in this field.

Transcending disciplinary boundaries, as some of the experiments and interventions discussed above have quite clearly argued, requires new institutional set up for the pursuit of knowledge as well as a new mode of engagement—a new way of looking at things. Our existing institutions of knowledge are based upon rigid compartmentalization between boundaries and they have to be transformed in order that they have transdisciplinarity as their goal and practice. But the goal of transdisciplinarity is not here a pious goal alone and is an inevitable product of the very process of seeking and is related to wider questions such as a fuller comprehension of social reality and its reconstruction and transformation. Therefore institutional reconstruction in the agenda of transdisciplinarity is not confined to mere reconfiguration of the internal patterns of institutions. It is not just creating new centers and new alliances within or outside the University system without interrogating their foundations and without providing them some goals which take the insiders of these systems out of their enclosed fortresses of knowledge and to participate in the dance of life on the street, as it were. Both Kothari and Kurien would reiterate this point that transcending disciplinary boundaries is not possible if their practitioners are not partners in the wider struggles for a more democratic society.

Thus institutional reconstruction and the striving of individual scholars have to be part of broader socio-political and spiritual movements. These movements embody different critical responses and alternatives to some of the outmoded features of modernity such as a sacrosanct attachment to a Newtonian view of reality. Another critical issue here has to do with the conceptualization of knowledge in terms of power. There is a connection between viewing knowledge as leading to power and putting the pursuit of knowledge in bounded disciplines. If knowledge is viewed as giving us power rather than a better preparedness to creatively participate in the dynamics of relationships in life, then there is an inherent tendency to project the boundaries of this guarantor of power and to rigidify these. Disciplinary boundaries become a servant to the will to power of the men of knowledge. So, in order to break down these boundaries we need a new way of conceptualizing, feeling and relating to the process of knowledge creation within us. This way has to go beyond a power perspective. We see glimpses of this in Kothari and Wallerstein et al. but now we need a much more clearer and radical articulation of it. For instance, spiritual traditions in India believe that knowledge is not for the acquisition of power but for serving the world with a spirit of *bhakti*, a spirit of devotion. A *Bhakti* approach to knowledge which does not discount the contribution that knowledge can make to human empowerment but seeks to provide a transcendent goal of unconditional moral and ethical obligation of the self to the other is important for breaking our disciplinary boundaries.

The goal of professionalism in modern social sciences is an integral part of the modernist equation of knowledge and power. From Kurien, we have learnt the stumbling blocks that professionalism creates in transcending our interests. But what should we have in its place? How do we create an alternative to the cult of the professionals? Kurien does not address this question.[5] A way out of this is to look at professionals as not executives of power alone but as servants of society. The traditions of Bhakti movements in India and traditions of martyrdom in all religious traditions provide us ample resources and insights to rethink the modernist vicious link between power and professionalism (cf. Uberoi 1996). What we need now is a new ethics of servanthood and it is easier for those men of knowledge who conceptualize their pursuits as those of a servant to break their disciplinary boundaries than those who think of themselves as masters. But are there enough resources within modernity for cultivating such an ethics of servanthood? When we ourselves are engaged in finding an answer to this perplexing question we find that modernity is solely preoccupied with the technology of power and has not really cared to develop spaces and technologies of reflection so that power is capable of self-criticism and renunciation. As we shall see below, transcendence requires a process of "self-emptying or kenosis" (cf. Wilfred 1996: 167) and if those who use knowledge and power do not know how to empty themselves, then it is difficult for them even to be aware of the need for going beyond disciplinary boundaries.

It has been argued in the paper that now we need new images and models of self-identity for us in order that we can look at our quest as part of a wider quest of freedom and for this the language of professionalism is not enough. It is probably keeping this in mind Katz (1995) argues that the practice of interdisciplinarity requires

reconciling "the demands of professionalism with those of citizenship" (Katz 1995: 876). As Katz makes clear: "..the problem of interrelationship of the disciplines is only part of a more interesting and much more important problem—the transformed professional roles of humanities and social science scholars in their universities and in a democratic society" (ibid). But as the model of citizenship provides a wider social responsibility to the bounded life of professionals, what we should ponder is whether this goes deep enough. The idea of citizenship in modern societies is integrally linked to the two bounded frames of modernity—the logic of nation-state and the logic of power. Who is a citizen? He is a member of the nation-state and his primary identity is that of pursuing the logic of power in society. Even the idea of citizens as belonging to civil society has not gone beyond the statist and power-model of modernity since it has not bothered to look at civil society as the space of developing spiritual alternatives to the logic of power (cf. Uberoi 1996). In this context, we need radically liberating self-images for ourselves. From Herbert Simon, we learn the significance of the image of a traveler. Zohar & Marshall give us the image of "citizen-pilgrim" to think about our vocation anew and Stanley J. Tambiah (1985) provides us that of a "clinician-journeyman."

I wish to argue that for the pursuit of transcendence, it is important to think of ourselves as pilgrims or seekers rather than as professionals. As seekers of knowledge, we are trying to understand reality but like a pilgrim we do not have any binding attachment either to our disciplines or to our instruments. We also have the courage to abandon our disciplines as part of our journey of life and the seeking of truth. But a call like abandoning disciplinary perspectives is bound to raise many questions. For many, academic disciplines perform important functions and interdisciplinary research is a matter of negotiating these boundaries only. It is not at all a matter of totally giving up the idea of boundaries since, for them, without boundaries of these kinds how do we prepare scholars to focus on different segments of reality—sociological, economical, political and psychological? For the proponents of such arguments, a discipline consists of a set of constitutive frames and it is not possible to give up the very idea of frame in negotiating disciplinary boundaries. Some go so far as to say that even the act of breaking boundaries presupposes the existence of some boundaries.

These questions are important and we cannot put these under carpet in our zeal of transcendence. But we can certainly have a clearer view of the issues involved. Disciplines provide us frames but what is our idea of a frame? Is it apriori and essentialistic or it emerges out of the meeting point between apriori truth and emergent truth? If disciplines have to inevitably deal with the horizon of emergence and are not bound only to the familiar patterns of stability within reality then is it helpful to think of both the discipline and frame in essentialist terms? Moreover, since after the contemporary confluence of Buddhist *sunyata*, Upanishadic theories of transcendence and the quantum vacuum we seem to agree that reality itself does not have a determinate structure, then can our frames which are meant to study reality have or ought to have a determinant structure (cf. Dallmayr 1993, 1996; Puligandla 1996 & Zohar & Marshall 1994)? Moreover what we call reality has an unknown dimension because the scope of reality is not itself determined apriori, to begin with. This makes it problematic the idea of apriori frames and disciplines as essentials abodes of such frames of world-making.

I do not want to pursue more some of these philosophical arguments here and reserve it for the discussion to come just a little later. But let us now think of some concrete issues involved in transcending disciplinary boundaries. Most of us are trained in one or two disciplines and these have provided us ways of looking at the world. Then how can we transcend these frame- nurturing disciplines? Would not this destabilize our very identity and make us insane? More than insanity, how do we reproduce our abilities to be sociologists, economists and anthropologists? What is the meaning of transcendence here?

Here I wish to submit two meanings of transcendence. First, transcendence does not mean cutting off from the ground where one stands but widening one's horizon, to be able to look to the sky, as it were. Our fear that transcendence means destroying the very holding ground is a product of a misreading of the process of transcendence, which is integrally linked to the process of immanence (see, Laclau 1997). Moreover, transcendence also provides us an opportunity to have a new experience of immanence. When we go beyond our homes and travel all over the world, we are able to look at our home in a new way as well. We can illustrate this integral link between transcendence and immanence by referring to the discussion of the link between *bhumi* (ground) and *akasha* (sky) in Indian spiritual traditions. The *bhumi* is not confined to the ground reality alone; it has the aspiration within itself to touch the sky, or better put, it has the dimension of the sky within itself. The same is true of the sky vis-a-vis its relationship with ground and their relationship is not one of bounded logic and essential difference (Das 1993).

Yes, it is true that disciplines work as cultures and we are born there academically and professionally. But then the growth of our life involves widening our bases. This is not at all cutting oneself completely from one's own disciplinary base. Here, going beyond Geertz's imagery of culture to think of disciplines, we can consider the imagery of mother. Disciplines not only work as cultures but also as mothers in as much they give birth to us. But as psychoanalysts such as Eric Fromm have taught us, human growing up inevitably requires going beyond one's mother's womb. This, of course, does not mean killing one's mother as the mythological figure Parasuram seems to be doing in Indian tradition. All of us adults have creatively gone beyond our mother's womb but have simultaneously learnt how to relate to our mothers with a deeper mode of love and intersubjectivity. If Geertz applies life-cycle analogy in his ethnography of modern academic disciplines, we can think of these issues of life and maturity rather than merely the issues of average age when people belonging to a particular discipline attain professional maturity.[6] It is no wonder then that Geertz's application of life-cycle approach does not enable him to address these questions of transcendence since Geertz's project is bound to the observable patterns of reality alone. Furthermore, Geertz's idea of academic disciplines as cultures has to be critically rethought in the light of discussions about the integral challenges of multi-culturality and multi-lingualism of the human condition. If to be multi-cultural and multi-lingual does not mean to cut oneself from one's initial language and culture, similarly to be multi-disciplinary does not mean to cut oneself from the wisdom, insight and special nuances of one's home discipline. Furthermore, as multi-cultural mode of engagement is no more an option before us but is a matter of indispensable challenge in this increasingly globalized world (cf. Wolf 1996), similarly transdisciplinarity or multi-disciplinarity is not a mere option for us but is a matter of indispensable challenge.

The second meaning of transcendence refers to a conscious striving to abandon one's initial starting point. Among the experiments we have discussed above, Simon has been most forceful in his plea for abandoning one's home discipline. Of course, even in this case of abandonment it does not mean lack of return or lack of homecoming. In Simon, we see that abandonment and homecoming go on simultaneously, though not necessarily at the same time.

The courage to abandon one's familiar and identity-giving discipline is also an integral part of the process of transcendence and in coming to terms with it, we can gain resources / insights from both Heidegger and the Indian perspective of *vanaprastha*. Heidegger says that it is important for human beings to abandon their homes and be strangers to themselves (see, Dallmayr 1993). For discovering the meaning of life, Heidegger states, it is important for us to move in strange lands.[7] The Indian perspective of *vanaprastha* also says that after the completion of prior stages of life—*brahmacharya, gahrasthya*—one has to abandon one's home and the world and be a *vanaprasthee*, a wanderer in the woods. The perspective of *vanaprastha* states that after one has accumulated one's wealth and power one should abandon all these and search for truth. This seems to have immense enriching suggestion for our task of abandonment at hand. Academic disciplines provide wealth, prestige, power and acclaim to the practicing professionals. But having gained all these through our respective disciplines, at certain stage, we have to abandon our assuring grounds in order that we are able to discover the unexpected truths of reality in the borderland and wilderness, as it were. This should not be a difficult task for people at the midpoint or end of their professional careers since they have already achieved to a great extent all the material and professional accomplishments that they needed. At the same time, in a Heideggerian sense, abandonment as a goal can be always with us no matter at what stage of our life-cycle and professional life we are. In fact, this is how we can reinterpret the agenda of *vanaprastha* for our contemporary times (cf. Das 1993).

The Heideggerian goal of moving in strange land is part of his wider commitment not to grant any essential boundary to Being and reality. Such a view of reality is now buttressed by developments in quantum physics and contemporary interpretations of Upanishadic agenda of transcendence and the Buddhist notion of *sunyata* (Zohar & Marshall 1994: Puligandla 1996; Dallmayr 1993; 1996). Since the idea of determinate reality has contributed much to our notions of academic disciplines as essential boundaries, it is important for us to gain insights from all these experiments in order to be free from our conceptual models of essential and bounded reality. Let us begin with the Upanishadic insights where it is believed that reality is beyond our categorical formulation and comprehension. Whatever categories and concepts we use to make sense of reality, they are not adequate to provide us a total picture. The Upanishadic insights refer to the simultaneous need for concept formation as well as their abandonment. The first exercise is an exercise of "superimposition" of concepts and forms upon reality and according to Upanishads and Shankara, this superimposition is a manifestation of *avidya* (ignorance of concrete reality, true self) (Puligandla 1996). It is only when one fully and thoroughly disengages oneself from

superimposition, does one open oneself to an experience of reality. Shankara emphasizes desuperimposition as an inevitable part of understanding reality and calls it *Adhyaropa-apavada*. As Puligandla (1996) argues, this means "advancing an argument and rescinding it at the end; one advances an argument in order to inspire and orient the listener, and one finally rescinds the argument" in order to enable one to launch upon the quest for reality which defies determinate structuration and is essentially open-ended.

In developing this alternative notion of reality and alternative methods of studying it, we can also draw inspiration from the Buddhist notion of *sunyata*. In this view, What characterizes reality is not an essential and determinate structure but a "dynamic sunyata," a vacuum--to put it in the language of quantum physics (cf. Dallmayr 1996a; Zohar & Marshall 1994). The significance of dynamic s*unyata* or the vacuum is not merely genealogical i.e., reality has emerged out of the vacuum; it performs its role as a permanent destabilizer of any stabilized form. As Dallmayr interprets, *sunyata* or emptiness "denotes not simply a vacuum or empty space; nor does it coincide with logical negation. Far from serving as a vacuum preamble to conceptual determination, the term signals an absent-present matrix allowing conceptual distinctions to arise in the first place (while simultaneously placing them in jeopardy)" (Dallmayr 1996a: 177). Reality has a *sunyata* aspect or a vacuum aspect as an integral part of it and our methods of study must be sensitive to this aspect of reality. As a mode of engagement, taking emptiness or *sunyata* seriously means that we are not totally and arrogantly certain about our methods, objects and subjects of study and we have the courage to take part in "self-emptying process"—to be free from the privileges, securities, and the power of essential categories. As Dallmayr further tells us: emptiness "harbors a practical-transformative quality in the sense that it 'empties' or liberates humans from attachment to 'ontic' things and ultimately from attachment even to emptiness itself. xxx In all these respects, emptiness—no longer one category among others—ruptures the bounds of western-style conceptual metaphysics, assuming instead the role of an emblem of liberation" (1996a: 177). The significance of the above mode of being for transcending disciplinary boundaries should not be difficult to discern. When we endow our disciplines with essential truths and rigidify the boundaries between them, *dynamic sunyata* as a mode of engagement has the courage and capacity to rupture these boundaries and make us seekers in a wonderland.

In order to relate the above to concrete issues of transdisciplinary research, it has to be noted that the central question here is our mode of self-engagement. Two anthropologists reflecting on this issue argue that the fundamental challenge here is overcoming a mode of refusal or what they call "politics of rebuttal" (Downey and Rogers 1995: 275). They suggest the following steps to go out of this predicament: "A first step might be for each of us to recognize and treat our allies, our opponents, and indeed our students as partners.. We could then search for specific ways to acknowledge these differences in academic practices, from including others on panels and in volumes to looking for ways of accommodating competing perspectives in our work rather than ignoring or rejecting them" (ibid). But how do we achieve this? Here, their language of partnership is a poor one as it seems to be an uncritical adaptation of the language of partnership proliferating in the American corporate discourse today and it does not at all wish to destabilize the idea of disciplines as containers of essential and privileged truth.

One important challenge in thinking about transdisciplinary research is the challenge of synthesis: how do we arrive at a synthesis of perspectives? This requires a dialogue between different—mutually competing--disciplinary perspectives. Transdisciplinary striving then is a process of dialogue where truth and synthesis emerge out of dialogue, rather than begin with it. Transdisciplinary striving is a search for "open totalities," to put in the words of Roy Bhaskar (1994). The first stage in the process of dialogue which opens our ways to an emergent open totality is a stage of deconstruction or de-superimposition which is a stage of "letting go" or "a suspension of one's point of view as the only point of view" (Zohar & Marshall 1994: 235). The second stage is a stage of resynthesis. What is true of dialogue between two seekers is true of the dialogue between two or multiple disciplinary perspectives. In thinking about dialogue as a way of transcending disciplinary boundaries and arrive at a new synthesis, the following lines bear a lot of insights:

> Once the participants in dialogue have let go of clinging to their own points of view, the second stage begins—the resynthesis. People discover they can listen to each other in a new way, that there is some common ground to be discovered: "When the rigid, tacit infrastructure is loosened, the mind begins to move in a new order." This new order is a whole new, emergent level of consciousness.. (Zohar & Marshall 1994: 237).

Endnotes :

1. In this context, S.S. Sivakumar (personal communication) argues that looking at an academic discipline in terms of its so-called subject matter is an archaic way of looking at disciplines. Academic disciplines, for Sivakumar, are not characterized by their unique subject matters but their methods of study.

2. We can also understand the significance of a latest contribution of Beteille such as his essay "The Mismatch Between Class and Status" (Beteille 1996) in the same way.

3. Kothari here gives the example of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, and argues that its adorable objective to build interdisciplinary schools proved a non-starter because it proceeded with an "additive" approach. In the words of Kothari: "Thus the attempt to make economists work in the Center for Political Studies misfired and pressure was built to set up a separate Center for Economics. In the field of science a truly interdisciplinary attempt at creating a Center for Science Policy proved moribund and it has been suggested that it better be wound up" (1988: 31)

4. It must be noted that Michel-Rolph Trouillot, one of the co-authors of this report, brings out this issue himself when he writes: "While the world is fast changing...the social sciences have not taken enough distance from the historical conditions that helped secure their institutionalization. This lack of reflexive distance is due in fact to the benefits of institutionalization to individual practitioners. It is also due to the pressures imposed by that institutionalization. In the United States, increased labor requirements make it riskier for academics to venture away from accepted paths, at least, before tenure. Institutional recognition, in turn, consolidates gains--including disciplinary prestige--that few individuals want to jeopardy. The result is corporate intellectual timidity" (Trouillot 1996: 11).

5. Kurien thinks that by performing their two-fold responsibilities as professionals and citizens, academics can overcome the traps of professionalism. But how do academics perform these double responsibilities where dualities do not become dualism and are transformed into an integral seeking of understanding reality and contributing to its transformation. Kurien leaves such questions unattended. Moreover, his model of "dual citizenship" (Kurien 1996: 251) does not problematize the foundation and telos of modern professionalism and its clinical preoccupation with the language of power.

6. Geertz calls it the problem of "maturation cycles" in various scholarly fields. In a field like Mathematics scholars attaining professional acclaim are quite young which is quite the opposite in a field like history (1983: 159).

7. This goes beyond our current thinking of inviting the stranger to the hard core of our moral self (cf. Bauman 1993).

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