

LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES IN INDIA

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Educated classes in India have long been accustomed to talk of the "common problems" of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. In the past, they have been content to rely almost exclusively on popular books in the English language published in Britain and the United States for information concerning those regions. Of the three continents with a sense of common identity, Latin America is physically the farthest from India and also the area that has afforded least direct contact. While these factors contributed to an attitude towards Latin America that was friendly and devoid of negative sentiments, they also resulted in a much slower awakening among the educated and elite groups of the desirability of initiating rigorous programs of study and research on contemporary Latin American institutions and developments. It was only a decade ago that a modest effort in this direction was begun in the School of International Studies of Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India. The program is now attracting somewhat greater interest from students, researchers, and agencies than was anticipated by the few enthusiasts who launched it ten years ago without any prospect of financial support from educational authorities and funding agencies.

In keeping with the evolving intellectual interest in Latin America, social studies curricula of middle and higher-level schools have recently begun to highlight the vast economic potential of the South American countries. At the undergraduate level, some universities have included courses on the histories and the political dynamics of some major South American countries as part of their syllabi in social sciences. Development strategies and problems of economic development of the leading South American countries figure increasingly in classroom discussions that attempt to analyze on a comparative basis the developmental problems of the Third World countries.

As an "area-study" program, however, Latin American Studies was introduced only in the School of International Studies of the national Jawaharlal Nehru University. The School of International Studies, originally named and established as the Indian School of International Studies even before the Nehru University came into being, is the only premier research institution that has pioneered in area-study programs in India. Even in the School of International Studies, systematic study

and research on Latin America is of recent origin. But though Latin American Studies is the newest full-fledged program in the school, academic interest in the area and preparatory work began as far back as 1955, when the Department of American History and Institutions was established. Intended to stimulate interest in North American affairs, the department also studied "special" historic relations that the United States had with its southern neighbouring countries, which eventually prompted some forward-looking faculty members of the department to underscore the need for training in Latin American Studies as well, and to emphasize the resources of the department as a basis for offering such training in Latin American Studies.

Although the early impetus could not produce rapid expansion, the seeds had been planted and a slow and modest accumulation of library resources took place over the next decade or so. Simultaneously, some faculty members of the Department of American History and Institutions underwent from one to three years of Spanish language training. The sustained interest evinced by the faculty encouraged the school to appoint a full-time Spanish instructor and to offer interested research scholars of the school three years' training in the language.

Under the Fulbright Exchange Program of Scholars, an eminent American historian with specialization in South American history, Harold E. Davis, was invited to offer courses and seminars for one academic year. A number of research scholars at the school and at other post-graduate institutions of Delhi who had acquired adequate proficiency in Spanish joined the special courses offered by Professor Davis. At the same time, useful discussions were held with him on the eventual organization of a modest program of Latin American Studies.

In 1966 a lecturer in Latin American Studies was appointed and a "minor" program consisting of two courses (one a survey of Latin American history and the other on the politics and government of major Latin American countries) was offered to doctoral students in American Studies. Spanish language training was made compulsory in the predoctoral qualifying examination and modest funds were allocated to build library resources.

Although the promotion of Latin American Studies was an outgrowth of North American Studies, the evolving interest in Latin America was not confined to the "special" U.S.–Latin American relations. Because South American countries shared many of the socio-economic and colonial experiences of India, and because some of the larger countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico were experiencing parallel processes in economic development and international outlook, the school began to focus more attention on the larger South American countries than on the region as a whole. The common colonial experiences of Brazil and some parts of Western India made Brazil the

obvious choice for in-depth study. With the active cooperation of two Brazilian scholars (one a product of Rio Branco Institute who has since become part of the language school of the university teaching Portuguese and Latin American cultural history), efforts were made to promote Brazilian studies by focusing attention on contemporary political and economic developments as well as on the foreign policy of Brazil. Portuguese language training was also made available to interested scholars.

In 1970 the Indian School of International Studies merged with Jawaharlal Nehru University and its expanded scope and resources subsequently helped launch a full-fledged Latin American Studies Division. The division organized master's and doctoral degree programs and administers elective courses in the master's program in International Studies offered by the school. The two master's elective courses offered by the division over the last eight years, Political Economy of Latin America and Foreign Policies of Major Latin American Countries, have drawn the largest enrollment of all the elective courses.

Informal surveys have been periodically conducted to ascertain the motivations of graduate students electing courses in Latin American Studies. While many point to the common colonial heritage of India and South America as motivating them to study Latin America, others emphasize the varied contemporary political experiences of South American countries as their motivating impulse. For some the success of Fidel Castro's socialist Cuba portended the "revolutionary" potential of Latin America, while others have focused on the high incidence of "militarism." The evolving international outlooks of many Latin American countries, which in many respects are similar to that of India, have also been cited by many to explain their interest in studying contemporary Latin America.

Many of the students who completed the master's degree in International Studies decide to pursue their interest and research at the M.Phil. and Ph.D. levels. Because of limited resources, only a few have been admitted to the research program on the basis of qualifying examinations and competition. No more than two students have been admitted each year for the M.Phil. (a three-semester, twenty-four credit program of coursework combined with the dissertation) and the Ph.D. (six semesters of research and a doctoral thesis).

The coursework for M.Phil. in Latin American Studies requires training in research methodology, intensive language training in either Spanish or Portuguese, and four core courses such as Major Themes in Latin American History, Governments and Politics in Latin America, Cultural History of Latin America, and Contemporary Economic Problems of Latin America. During the first two semesters, scholars select either a country study or a thematic study for the dissertation in con-

junction with their academic discipline (political science, economics, international relations, history, or sociology), always bearing in mind the availability of Indian library resources. These dissertations are not original research, but analyses and criticisms of existing secondary literature. Wherever possible, however, attempts have been made to utilize primary source materials such as published documents of governmental or international agencies.

Upon successful completion of M.Phil. coursework and dissertation, scholars are formally admitted to the Ph.D. program if they choose either to elaborate the M.Phil. dissertation framework or to begin afresh on a theme somewhat related to it. While scholars do their preparatory work, they continue further language training in Spanish or Portuguese. On the basis of contacts and consultation by correspondence with specialists both in Latin America and the United States, they are awarded field-trip fellowships for a modest period (four to six months) to continue their studies and research in the country of specialization plus, time and funds permitting, a short period in one of the leading centers of Latin American Studies in the United States. A cultural agreement between India and Mexico now provides for exchange fellowships in Latin American Studies allowing research scholars of the Latin American Studies Division to apply for such fellowships and spend a year or more in the leading Mexican universities. Recently three research scholars won such fellowships and have affiliated themselves with El Colegio de México and the National University of Mexico.

The special research interest of the scholars of the division has so far been in areas such as the economic integration processes in Latin America, the role, direction, and sectoral distribution of foreign investments, and operations of multinational corporations in Latin America; agrarian reform movements in specific Latin American countries; Latin American foreign policy, Latin American attitudes toward India, and trends of interest and relevance to India; trade relations of selected Latin American countries and trade and economic-cooperation prospects for India.

From the foregoing account, it is evident that the Latin American Studies program of the School of International Studies is by no means as large as similar programs elsewhere. While academic interest in Latin America is growing in India, it is still incipient. Current research and teaching programs are confined to contemporary Latin America. Domestic political and economic dynamics coupled with the foreign-policy postures of these countries are the major academic thrusts of the division's activities. As an area-study center, it is far from being interdisciplinary and may not become so even in the next decade or two. Basic obstacles to this goal may be divided into two broad categories. The

physical constraints comprise the most obvious obstacle. The set-up within which the Latin American Studies Division functions is largely directed toward stimulating research and study in contemporary international relations. While efforts have been made to make other area-studies programs interdisciplinary, so far no significant breakthrough has been achieved because of the evident bias in the school in favor of foreign-policy studies. Also, area studies have attracted mostly students from such disciplines as political science, economics, and history. Moreover, because job opportunities are presently limited in India for truly interdisciplinary area-study specialists, the need for such a broad-based program is not yet apparent.

A more fundamental constraint dictating a narrower approach to area studies, which applies even more in Latin American Studies, is the present lack of resources such as funds, library systems, and trained personnel. Funds for higher education and especially for specialization in Latin American Studies are very limited. Although some library resources such as books and related research materials have been acquired over the last two decades, they are hardly sufficient to enable scholars to pursue independent research in India. Field-research grants are meager and do not allow scholars to spend enough time in their geographical areas of specialization. Research guidance at the present limited level of faculty strength also does not permit expansion into other fields.

Nonetheless, in the coming years, the Latin American Studies program will make some modest headway because of the increasing interest evinced by both the government and intellectuals. More and more students are undeniably being drawn to study Latin America because of its internal political and economic dynamics, as well as its international outlook and interactions. The Latin American Studies Division is already acting as the clearinghouse for scholars at Indian universities and other interested persons by providing useful information. The division has also collaborated with the Latin American Trade Cell, a new unit organized by the national Institute of Foreign Trade that is devoted to studying market potentials for Indian exports and joint economic ventures.

Accelerated efforts are underway to build Latin American collections of books, documents, journals, and newspapers. Specialized inter-American agencies such as the Inter-American Development Bank and the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America periodically send us their publications. On the basis of requests made to several Latin American universities, relevant publications of monographs and journals are received, although not on a regular basis. Also, Latin American embassies located in New Delhi occasionally donate literature on their countries. The Indian Council of Social Science Research

and the Indian Council of World Affairs, located in New Delhi, are also acquiring recent titles on Latin America that will meet at least some of the division's needs.

Despite its modest accomplishments in promoting Latin American Studies, the academic program of the division is the only one of its kind in Asia (except in Japan) that is devoted primarily to teaching courses and conducting research on Latin America.