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GLOBAL DIALOGUE

INDIA AND LATIN AMERICA

AN INTERVIEW WITH
PROFESSOR JUAN FERNANDO
CALDERÓN GUTIÉRREZ

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**JUAN FERNANDO
CALDERÓN GUTIÉRREZ**

Juan Fernando Calderón Gutiérrez is currently Director of Research at the National University of San Martín (Argentina) and Professor at the same University, at the Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), and at the University of Córdoba. He obtained a PhD in Sociology (1979) and the Diplôme des Etudes Approfondies (1977) from the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris, and a Degree in Sociology (1973) from the University of Chile, Santiago de Chile. Professor Calderón Gutiérrez has taught at several

universities in the United States of America (Austin, Chicago, Berkeley, and Cornell), Europe (University of Barcelona, Open University of Catalonia), and Latin America (in Bolivia, Mexico, Ecuador, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Chile). He was Executive Secretary of Latin American Social Science Council (CLACSO), Social Policy Adviser at Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and Special Adviser on Human Development and Governance in United Nations Development Program (UNDP). He was Simón Bolívar Chair Visiting Professor at Centre for Latin American Studies, University of Cambridge 2017 - 18. He was Coordinator and Senior Adviser in over ten Human Development Reports in several countries of Latin America, Europe and Africa, at national, sub regional and global levels. In 2000 and 2002, he coordinated the Bolivian Human Development Reports. He has authored and edited several works on democracy, culture and development.

P. Sanal Mohan is a historian of Modern Kerala. He was a Professor of History, School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, former Director of Kerala Council for Historical Research, Smuts Visiting Fellow in Commonwealth Studies (2017-18) and a Postdoctoral Fellow at The Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity, Gottingen, Germany 2013 and 2015. His major works include *Modernity of Slavery: Struggles against Caste Inequality in Colonial Kerala* (2015), *Keezhalapaksha Charitravum Veendeduppinte Padangalum* (2021) and several articles in Dalit History, and History of Christianity in Kerala

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Rachel A. Varghese is currently Research Officer at the Kerala Council of Historical Research. She is Fulbright- Nehru Post-Doctoral Fellow (2022-24) at the South Asia Centre, University of Pennsylvania, the USA. She is an archaeologist who researches in the areas of Public Archaeology, Politics of Archaeology and Archaeology of Early Maritime exchanges. She has published book chapters and journal articles in these areas.

GLOBAL DIALOGUE: INDIA AND LATIN AMERICA

AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR JUAN
FERNANDO CALDERÓN GUTIÉRREZ

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KCHR invited Professor Juan Fernando Calderón Gutiérrez to Kerala with the support of the Kerala State Higher Education Council (KSHEC), Government of Kerala as part of the latter's ERUDITE Scholar-in Residence Program in 2019. He delivered a series of four lectures on *Latin America Today - Modernity, Development & Transformation*, from 11 to 16 October 2019 in different parts of Kerala. The idea of this interview emerged during this visit and was materialized through several rounds of email communication.

Q. P. Sanal Mohan (SM): I wish to start with the COVID-19 situation in the Latin American countries. The failure of the Jair Bolsonaro regime to deal with the situation became apparent from the news that has been coming in. How do you analyse this failure? Are there deep structural reasons for it than meets the eye? Also, much of our discussion here in India has focused on large regimes like Brazil. It would be interesting for us to have your views on other parts and governments of region including Bolivia and Argentina on the COVID-19 situation.

Juan Fernando Calderón Gutiérrez (FC): The current situation and trends in Latin America are very critical due to the general loss of quality of life experienced by a large percentage of population. States and their health policies, the dynamics of the economies, especially those linked to the expansion of the labor market and employment, as well as the weakening of the coping capacities of a majority of the population have increased both the risks and human pain associated with the COVID-19 pandemic. It seems that neither the State, nor the market, nor societies have the capacity for integrated action to face the diseases and the socio-economic effects of the pandemic. Today's problems precondition the tremendous difficulties of tomorrow.

Brazil, the largest country in Latin America and whose economy influences all the countries in the region, but especially Argentina, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay, is one of the countries, at global level, most affected by the coronavirus crisis. Under the Bolsonaro government – a nationalist, conservative and militaristic regime – the country's structural problems have not been tackled, the situation seems to be deteriorating at practically all levels, which in turn will affect all

the countries of the region. Furthermore, in the short term, the options of the opposition, which remains divided, are weak. As we argue with Professor Castells in our book *The New Latin America*, the crisis and limitations of both neoliberal and neo-developmental models have had dramatic consequences for both the region's political system and States. Even societies seem unable to find ways of renewal. The available evidence suggests that these "new" conservative regimes like Bolsonaro's are rather ineffective and possibly short-lived. Although it is important to stress that the *realpolitik* of a systemic governance focused solely on the conjuncture seems to prevail on the global arena.

Q. SM: Could you please explain to us the implications of what you refer to as 'new multi culturalism in Latin America'? Is this idea of multiculturalism similar to the ones in the United States or the UK? If not, what accounts for its difference?

Also, is it possible to talk about a single multiculturalism for Latin America? How diverse is multiculturalism within the region given the differences that are apparent among nations of Latin America; Brazil, Bolivia and Argentina to mention a few?

FC: Nature, and its relationship with the various native cultures and those that came afterwards, is a crucial factor to understand native peoples dynamics. The Amazon, the Andes Mountains and a huge network of rivers and two gigantic oceans have organized life for thousands of years. Of course, the Amazon is the largest ecological reserve of the planet, but what do we really know about its life, its leaves, its rivers, its transhumant myths, its Coca and Yucca plants, as well as the millions of different living beings that inhabit it and of their mutual ecological and cultural complementarity with the Andean world?

The Andean and the Mayan worlds are multicultural from its origins, *i.e.*, they are inhabited by numerous transhumant and polytheist cultures. With the arrival of Spanish and Portuguese settlers, culturally diverse yet predominantly Catholic, colonial domination was installed, based on conflicts of imposition and resistance. Thus, colonial-type social stratification, based on a culture of denial of the others, was established and supported by the Treasury and the exploitation of minerals. Colonial power since its inception segregated and degraded native populations such as women, Aymara, Blacks, and Indians, which led to the naturalization of stratified societies. Nonetheless, segregated groups organized varied forms of resistance and discrepancies among members of the colonial powers created spaces for exchange. For instance, there was a kind of “implicit and practical cultural interaction”. On the one hand Catholicism and the idea of a single god were accepted and internalized. On the other hand, the Spanish-Portuguese dominance, to achieve their economic goals, accepted, not without reservations, the polytheism of native peoples and later of Africans. This cultural interaction paved the way for a long-lasting, complex and multicultural fabric, a historical and cultural *chenko* (confusion, mixture, superposition, entanglement in Quechua) that entails the overlapping of temporary, religious, symbolic, political layers, of production models, etc, *i.e.*, diverse imaginaries that positivist rationality could not grasp but that the colonial power reluctantly accepted. However, there was some degree of recognition of the cultural richness of native peoples, particularly by Jesuits and some intellectuals and artists. That is the case with the rich socio-cultural experience of the Guarani communities and their baroque music as a European precedent for socialist. On the contrary, colonial powers failed to recognize the substantive rationality of the use

of mathematics or reading by the native communities, for example the *Kipus*, who produced complex accounting systems in Andean fabrics. With the advent of the Republic in the Nineteenth Century and then the revolutions and democratic surge of the Twentieth century, both native and Afro descendants' social movements achieved significant advances and created transformations that sought and began to change multiculturalism for interculturalism, understood as the coexistence of otherness, coexistence between equals despite cultural differences. This is a long process with tremendous limitations given the enormous weight and renewal of the culture of denial of the other and the sometimes-hidden persistence of colonial-type forms of social stratification. This is also an unfinished process that is becoming both more complicated and increasingly global through Latin American migrations.

In this context, it must be noticed that the Nation-State, that arose in the Nineteenth century, is one of the many levels of socio-cultural plurality. However, it is essential to also recognize that cultural diversities transcend nation-states. For example, both the Quechua people of the Andes and the Amazonian cultures have presence in several countries. The same happens with the Afro descendants and the Mapuche people. At the same time national configurations differ between countries. Mexico is different from Brazil, Bolivia to the Dominican Republic, and Argentina from Peru, but there are also overlaps, problems and common cultural challenges. The idea of Plurinational States originated in Bolivia clearly seeks to overcome this challenges and it is one of the topics of discussion for Chile's impending new constitution. Will it be possible to build a plurinational and intercultural State of Latin America or *abya yala*: a land in full maturity, as the original culture of Cuna from

Panama names it? This plurinational model is only in force in Bolivia since the MAS government, during which a Constituent Assembly was held to reform the National Constitution. In other countries, the institutional recognition of the rights of indigenous peoples and Afro descendants remains sparse. The reality in everyday life continues to be very harsh for them: they are discriminated against because of their origin despite the legal advances accomplished by democratic governments. In Argentina, I fail to see a precise multicultural policy, beyond the recognition of some rights (certainly not property rights of the Mapuche peoples). The same goes for Chile. In Brazil, the political inclusion of Afro descendants still is very limited. This is precisely why the struggle for the recognition of cultural identities is one of the main forces of democratic change and development in Latin America.

Q. SM: What would you consider as the salient features of multiculturalism in the informational era? Is there any fundamental difference in its character in the informational era?

FC: The network society in the informational era is a renewed field of conflict and, as such, it can mutate towards an ultra-conservative and nationalist side, as in the case of Bolsonaro in Brazil and most of the conservative governments today present in the region. But it can also become a space for action, communication and transformation for intercultural, gender, ecological, and ethical movements that are already present, with varying degrees and features, in most countries. The case of the Chilean youth movement for dignity is a good example, as are the protests for the lack of ethic in politics, political ethic of Peru or Guatemala, or the resistance of Aymara women in El Alto in Bolivia. Global acts of racism or the fight for the rights of those discriminated

against are spreading around the Internet. The consequences of ultra-conservative racism on the streets and the United States state power have expanded throughout the networks as well as the struggles and demands of African Americans and Central American migrants, creating a global field of multicultural conflicts. The Mapuche people of Argentina are in communication with the Sioux of the United States and questioning the anti-ecological method of fracking carried out by oil transnationals. This global field of multicultural conflicts is a fundamental part of the new informational era, interacting and challenging other socio-political fields.

Q. SM: In the above context what are the ways to think about Human Development? You have been connecting Human Development with human autonomy and dignity. Could you please elaborate on these ideas, especially in the context of Latin America?

FC: The idea that we have been working on during the past seven years is that we are experiencing a chained global multidimensional crisis. The financial crisis affected the real economy, deteriorated the social fabric and strained multicultural coexistence, impacted negatively on the environment and ended up weakening the democratic governance around the globe and of course also the development options, including Human Development. We believe that is time to renew Human Development perspective in accordance to the new circumstances. In this regard, given the responses to this global crisis and the pandemic, protests and social movements around the world have managed to install an agenda of dignity and human rights, as an indivisible and ethical issue that could give new life to the Human Development. Thus, the subject and the object of development would be people's and

their communities' dignity in a new complementary dialectic between the individual and the collective. With this new dialectic as a starting point, we find essential to us to formulate a green informational Human Development approach focused on the dignity of people and their communities. To a large extent it would entail a reframing of Sen's ideas. In a book coordinated by Professors. Castells and Himanen, we tried to make a contribution in that direction. The idea of Human Development with universal dignity and even an Human Development Index with dignity, which apparently is being considered by the UN – as can be seen in its most recent Human Development Report which includes for the first time an Sustainable Human Development Index. In the aforementioned book by Professors Castells and Himanen, not a single country was ranked with a very high human development level, since they found that it would contradict both the Human Development with Dignity Index and the ethical assumptions of universality. However, the global juncture has changed and the question is whether global political changes, especially those of the United States, will place a new logic of power and renew agreements on a global scale and how will such changes affect Latin America and the Third World. In my opinion, it is fundamental to rethink democracy and development in the light of a new emerging political moment.

Q. SM: There is an important critique of modernity that you have developed which is rooted in the Latin American experience. How would you connect these with larger debates in the studies on Modernity globally?

FC: The various projects and perspectives on Latin American modernity have been directly linked to European cultural mirrors, but we are

different and it is important to take into consideration that we are also partially European in different realities (Jorge Luis Borges used to say that Argentines were Europeans in exile). Nonetheless, the European mirror of modernity has been exhausted in all its varieties. Today we need to think about the many variants of modernity, Latin Americans have to learn to drink from other cultures and not just from Europe to try to recast a universalist Latin American project. Transgressing, of course, both our lived experiences and ideas. This, in my opinion, is a challenge that belongs to the new generations. If us, Latin Americans, fail to understand China, India, South Africa, for example, we will not be able to understand the new Latin American reality that we are already beginning to experience. I think that modernity must be considered from our roots, which are multicultural: we are native, but also European migrants as well descendants of African slaves. From that experience and complexity, we should question modernity as a unique rationality, but also value the integration, even if imperfect, it has provided to our societies.

Q. Rachel A. Varghese (RV): After your brief visit to Kerala, you went back to a turbulent political situation in Latin America with the 2019 Presidential Crisis brewing in Venezuela. You have been able to observe such events from very close quarters. Could we discuss more about the political regimes in Latin America drawing in the experiences of Bolivia after the coup or the situation in Venezuela? What are the ways in which we could make sense of the democratically elected autocratic regimes that undermine Democracy; which has become a global phenomenon now? We would be glad to know about the Bolivian situation after the recent elections that brought back

Evo Morales' party to power.

FC: One of the main arguments of my book with Professor Castells, *The New Latin America* – based on empirical data and systematic analysis – is that both neoliberalism and neo-developmentalism failed and as a consequence there was a crisis of the political system and the collapse of the State. Amidst this crisis arose a culture of mistrust between society and the state. From there on, political changes with conservative features took place in most of the countries of the region, with the relative exception of Mexico and Argentina. Venezuela's democratic and socio-economic crisis deepened and the overall state of affairs has continued its deterioration, especially during the last year. There seems to be no turning point or an exit from this situation, unfortunately. All this in the midst of Trump's nationalist and conservative government, which invigorated and promoted those governments and situations. No one who can cast the first stone.

Bolivia's case was both particular and complex because the economy was doing well and the socio - cultural advances were significant. However, flawed electoral management and the obsession with presidential re-election triggered mobilizations of mid and even popular sectors in some regions of the country that undermined the confidence of society regarding the State and especially of the Electoral Court. Plots and a kind of Coup d'État installed a conservative government with authoritarian features that aspired to perpetuate itself in power but failed to do so, because of the reaction of the popular sectors and the protests of social movements, especially in the Aymara highlands and in the El Alto city. Nonetheless, even with difficulties, parliamentary institutionality was maintained, which – with a renewed and legitimate

Electoral Court – allowed for a resounding electoral victory for the MAS. And with this victory, a new and updated government, different from that of Morales, began. Perhaps a more communal, institutional and pragmatic government, which is facing the social and economic challenges associated with the pandemic and the global crisis.

In reality, as I mentioned before, in Latin America, as in the rest of the world, regardless of political orientations, States are only seeking options for systematic governance, that is, for the minimum functioning of the economy, society and institutions to overcome the crisis accentuated by the pandemic. COVID-19 vaccine is at the centre of the political stage. I believe that in many cases we can observe a pragmatic “use” of democratic instruments to legitimize situations that somehow “go beyond” the democratic regime.

Q. RV: To add on that what are your views on the recent election results in the United States in terms of the above questions, especially with regards its implication on the Latin American situation?

FC: The Trump administration is over but the strong authoritarian and racist political culture of North American society still stands and this will be a key variable to understand the future. The United States will also seek systematic governance. The question is whether it will be to reinstall a government with market-friendly policies, like the Obama Administration, or will it try to forge alliances on both national and global levels to reinstate an agenda of social welfare, otherness and ethics. Any of these scenarios will affect not only Latin America but the whole world.

Q. RV: Moving back in time a bit, you were a student in Chile in the early 1970's. In fact you obtained your degree from the University of Chile in Sociology in 1973, the same year as the beginning of the military dictatorship. We are interested to know how the presence of dictatorship was being felt by the academic community in Chile. How did the academia deal with the transition? Was it any different for you as someone belonging to a different national identity? Would you tell us what it was like being student in Chile at that time?

FC: The authoritarian government of Pinochet destroyed the academic institutionality. Several colleagues of mine were assassinated, many others were imprisoned and the majority of my peers requested political asylum or went into exile. Careers in social sciences were closed. Some of them gradually recovered. FLACSO* was an instance where renowned intellectuals managed to survive, but also made a notable critical balance of the Allende experience, of the dictatorship and most importantly the revaluation of democracy. This also happened in other countries in the region, such as Argentina, Bolivia and Uruguay. For me, living these experiences provided the foundation of my human and intellectual, Bolivian and Latin American ethos. It was not easy, not at all.

Q. RV: Following up on the last question, in the recent years we have seen autocratic regimes interfering in academic and university spaces in this part of the globe. Could you reflect on the differences or similarities between the autocratic regimes of Latin America in the 20th century with those of the present? How is academia in particular

* Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences)

positioned in the current situation? You are closely familiar with what happened in Bolivia last year and other parts of Latin America in the last few years. Does this allow for a comparative reflection?

FC: With the advent of democracy, academia has had a long and uneven process of recovery and strengthening, new universities and research centres were opened and social science evolved in a double logic. On the one hand, a professional side with an increasing number of specializations, inspired by the United States university model, and on the other hand, with more ideological features, a critical social science that helped redefining left-wing movements, especially those of national popular orientation. I must say that in the darkest moments of the dictatorships the academic solidarity of several countries was key, especially of Mexico and Venezuela, but also from France, England, Sweden and other countries in Europe and even the United States. In the 90's with Patricia Provoste at CLACSO*, we carried out a study on the institutional evolution of social sciences in Latin America. It would be interesting to update this study to answer this question more precisely.

I know a little about CODESRIA's** experience in Africa. At the end of the 80s, with my dear friend and colleague Tandika Makandahuri, we advanced the possibility of a joint CLACSO-CODESRIA comparative studies programme, an itinerant Master's degree and other daring activities. I understand that there are new experiences but I do not have enough information to provide an informed opinion. However,

* Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales (Latin American Council of Social Sciences)

** Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa

I do know that science needs to be autonomous in order to thrive and the interaction between southern regions is essential to have a better understanding of our future possibilities.

Q. Mathew A. Varghese (MV) : Dealing with regimes in a direct way has become part of being academicians today. Doing academics from different parts of the globe itself is a matter of immense interest in the current global situation. As a social scientist, can we have your views on how your location in Latin America offers a distinct academic perspective, in comparison to other parts like India or Africa? For instance, ideas like decoloniality which hold a sway in Latin America are thought of in conceptually different ways in these regions. How does this distinct perspective become the part of a pedagogy in universities, social sciences etc.?

FC: In recent years I have tried to contribute from my Latin American perspective, and from my experience over several years of work at UNDP in different countries of the world, to the ideas of Human Development. I have been critically discussing this notion, for example in an article written for the book by Professors Castells and Himanen quoted before. Right now, together with Caterina Colombo, we are finishing a study, a balance, on the new challenges of a Latin Americanist approach to human development. Among other things, and also related to the previous question about modernity, I consider that the discussion and dialogue between academia from different regions (and not only with concepts and ideas we receive from Europe or the United States) it is key to thinking about our realities. In this regard, the relationship with views from other regions is essential. Working and trying to understand the society of Sao Tome and Principe helped me to understand a little

Bahia in Brazil. The Human Development Report for Mercosur conveys this perspective.

There is already a small but important connection between studies and intellectuals from India and Latin America. Clearly, authors such as Amartya Sen or Mahbub Ul Haq (from Pakistan) have influenced and strengthened the discussion of development options in Latin America. I have been fortunate enough to work with both of them, as a Latin American, on the Human Development approach. An interesting example was a study on culture and public policy: a group of intellectuals worked with Amartya Sen on the relationship between culture and development for a couple of years. Among them stood out the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai who wrote a chapter of the book¹ titled “The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and the Terms of Recognition”. The discussion and production of academic material on neo-colonialism and nation, decolonization was also very important, authors such as Chatterjee influenced the regional discussion. Notwithstanding, these exchanges are insufficient and needs to be strengthened beyond States, institutional bureaucracies and the constraints posed by languages. Let me tell you an anecdote. A CLACSO Congress in 2009, held in Cochabamba, Bolivia, gave me the opportunity to say in public to then President Morales that possibly for Bolivia the model of development and democratic communitarianism of Kerala was more interesting and relevant than the Venezuelan one.

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1. Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton, eds., *Culture and Public Action* (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press : Stanford Social Sciences, 2004).

Q. MV: In the study of social configurations, we feel that ideas like coloniality of power, dependency perspectives and more interestingly thinking beyond self-contained identities (the complex connectivities in cosmologies different 'ethnic' groups have had for instance) become interesting for those who try to study those social configurations. Could you comment on this?

FC. Yes, I fully agree with you, it is key to study these types of configurations and experiences. Right now, actually for the past two years, with the support of a group of young researchers, we are trying to finish an investigation that I started with my friend Enzo Faletto on Latin American Imaginaries of the Twentieth century: young people, aesthetics and politics. We intend to provide a critical reconstitution of these configurations. It is curious how aesthetics are often ahead of politics.

Q. RV: Here in Kerala, there is a strong popular understanding about Latin American polity and society which you might have encountered on your visit. There are two main axes to this. The first is shaped by an affinity to Latin American football. The second is through the literary public that has been closely familiar with authors from Latin America over the years; Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Jorge Luis Borges, Pablo Neruda and Eduardo Galeano to name a few. Could you comment upon the influence that such figures have had on the global perception on Latin America?

FC: My trip to Kerala was fascinating as it widened my knowledge of this fruitful historical experience. I'd like to take this opportunity to thank life for such an adventure: the encounter with the academic world but also the cultural one with people from both the countryside

and the cities of Kerala. And foremost to with those young people who shouted “Messi, Messi” while dancing on a boat ... through those rivers of Kottayam. I was surprised by their interest in soccer, the images of Che Guevara and especially with their academic interest in literature and magical realism. It truly was a work of magic to talk and exchange ideas about Garcia Marquez, Cortazar, Vargas Llosa or Fuentes, and it was really fascinating how they were reinterpreted in the light of Indian culture. It seems to me that the most significant intellectual production of the Latin American imaginary of the 60s is this peculiar cross between magical realism – that shows the subjective and diverse density of Latin America – and the school of dependency – which is essentially rational and objective. Certainly, there lies a vein that would be crucial to strengthen in order to learn from one another. The global cultural impact of magical realism stems from its reproduction, with a great aesthetic quality, of Latin American societies’ pain, absurdities, as well the joy and madness of real life. Publishers and intellectuals everywhere found magic, mirrors, playful acts, and nostalgia for something they did not have, lost, or wanted. Perhaps there lies the secret of its commercial. There are other great Latin American authors who remain in oblivion.

I would also like to apologize for the enormous number of questions I had and you generously allowed me to ask my colleagues and companions on that magic journey. Thank you very much.

Q. SM: Finally, the Covid 19 situation has been with us for over a year now. The period also saw important political changes like we discussed, including the electoral defeat of the United States president Donald Trump. Do you see a future for deepening democracy in Latin America in the Post Covid19 situation? We wish

you reflect on this in the context of your idea of Global ‘Kamanchaka’

I believe we are living a global Kamanchaka and at the moment there are no strategic solutions that could improve human lives. We are in a conjunctural moment where the most important thing is the equitable provision of the COVID-19 vaccine. Hopefully a global neo-colonial strategy, where a lot of money is made by a few and the poorest are excluded, will not be imposed again. This is a new field of conflict where a pedagogy of sustainable human equity should prevail. Thus, at this juncture, not only systemic governance is at stake, but also the construction of an ethic of otherness, where India and Latin America have a lot to say about and contribute to.

Thank you!!

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