**Module : Social & Human Sciences**

**Lesson 03 Area studies**

**Area studies** are interdisciplinary fields of research and scholarship pertaining to particular geographical, national/federal, or cultural regions. Typical area studies programs involve history, political science, sociology, cultural studies, languages, geography, literature, and related disciplines. In contrast to cultural studies, area studies often include diaspora and emigration from the area .

Since their inception, area studies have been subject to critiques—including by area specialists themselves. Many of them alleged that because area studies were connected to the Cold War agendas of the CIA, the FBI, and other intelligence and military agencies, participating in such programs was equivalent to serving as an agent of the state. Some argue, that there is the notion that U.S concerns and research priorities will define the intellectual terrain of area studies. Others insisted, however, that once they were established on university campuses, area studies began to encompass a much broader and deeper intellectual agenda than the one foreseen by government agencies, thus not American centric.

**History:**

During and immediately following World War II, governments discovered an alarming shortage of individuals who were seriously acquainted with the languages, cultures, and topographical characteristics of the world areas in which troops had to fight and about which important political and social decisions had to be made.

In the United States during the war, many individuals were trained in special language programs instituted by the armed forces. These programs gave intensive instruction in Japanese, Chinese, and other languages. Shortly after the war, the delicately poised hostility between East and West necessitated the development of scholarly specialization in the study of the political, economic, and social institutions of the Soviet Union.

In Great Britain institutions such as the School for Oriental and African Studies, which had been founded in 1916 chiefly for the language training of colonial officers and others, were broadened after 1945 to include cultural and social studies.

The British government gave support to language departments in half a dozen universities. A related report, made in 1961, on Oriental, Slavonic, east European, and African studies (Hayter Report) emphasized the expansion of area studies outside the language departments.

In France a remarkable expansion of area studies took place after 1955 for the development of studies of the Far East, Russia, India, and the Muslim world Cooperation with such institutions as the École des Langues Orientales, the Musée de l’Homme, and the Foundation des Sciences Politiques was encouraged, and a new center for African studies was established at the Sorbonne.

There are centers for southeast Asia as a whole, rather than for Indonesia or Thailand. The usual areas are Latin America, southeast Asia, south Asia, the Soviet Union, eastern Europe, east Asia—with a tendency toward separation of Japan and China—Africa south of the Sahara, and the Middle East, including north Africa. There are, however, other areas, such as the Caribbean islands and western

Europe, that are given attention in the United States. Similarly, there are centers for American studies in European countries. The problem of dividing the world into “areas” is a continuing one, changing as the international situation creates new research needs. For example, there are 20 countries in Latin America, which differ greatly in size, language, racial composition, and other characteristics.

Area centers are formed on the theory that collaboration is more effective than isolation (parochialism “narrow-minded way of thinking) in advancing knowledge about foreign areas through research, publication, and teaching.

Although area studies in United States universities were largely created on a “know-your-enemy” basis with World War II came a sudden and great demand for exact information about places. An important justification has been found in the system of liberal education. More recently, acquaintance with the cultures of other peoples has been promoted as an important element of training for potential government officials concerned with the administration of programs of technical and educational assistance; this is currently an explicit justification for area studies in France.

Finally, studies of foreign areas by scholars qualified by disciplinary training have received an intellectual honor: they are becoming more and more acceptable as scientifically interesting because they offer comparative data significant for the advancement of a discipline. The post-World War II expansion of the scope of foreign policy into propaganda, education, and technical aid has created a demand for government personnel with specialized knowledge of foreign cultures and languages.

The first issue in the establishment of recognized area programs in United States universities was the relative importance of linguistic and social science studies. Immediately after World War II the viewpoint tended toward equating language training with area training. In practice, most of the new “area specialists” learned modern, “newspaper” Arabic or Japanese, for example, with special emphasis on one or more oral forms. Linguists developed new methods for more rapid language learning. For many of the men and women who are known as area specialists, the thorough mastery of a foreign language is not looked upon as the fundamental condition for understanding a foreign culture. Language “competence” is seen, rather, as an instrument for serving various specialized requirements, for which different vocabularies and minor competences are sufficient.