METHODOLOGY IN
SOCIAL RESEARCH

Dilemmas and Perspectives

Essays in Honour of Ramkrishna Mukherjee

Edited by
Partha Nath Mukherji

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Contents

Acknowledgements 7
Ramkrishna Mukherjee: A Biographical Note 9
Introduction: Methodology in Social Research: Dilemmas and Perspectives 13

I
Methodology: Orientations

1. For Science, Against Scientism: The Dilemmas of Contemporary Knowledge Production
   Immanuel Wallerstein 87

2. Manufacturing Meaning in the Social Sciences
   Joseph R. Gusfield 93

3. Resuming the Methodological Discourse—Changing Role of Human Knowledge in Our Time
   Rajni Kothari 116

   Satish Saberwal 126

5. Changing Modes of Conceptualising the World: Implications for Social Research
   T.K. Oommen 153

II
Methodology: Applications

6. Man is the World of Man
   Claude Meillassoux 173

7. My Encounter with the Scientific Method
   Victor S. D’Souza 184
Acknowledgements

It was sometime in 1995 that I decided I would take up the responsibility of bringing out a volume in honour of Professor Ramkrishna Mukherjee. An earlier project was gathering dust with the Sage Publications, India. Mr Tejeshwar Singh, Managing Director, Sage Publications, had to abandon that project reluctantly. He was keen, nevertheless, to bring out a felicitation volume in honour of Professor Mukherjee befitting his academic stature. All this, because of the high regard and affection he had for him. This is what brought us together, the admirer and the student, on this project.

My unexpected shift from the Indian Statistical Institute, New Delhi, to the Tata Institute of Social Sciences loaded me with very heavy administrative responsibilities as its Director. The primacy of the obligations of the new position resulted in the delay in bringing out the volume. I feel happy and relieved that the work could be accomplished in spite of the extraordinary demands on my time.

I am grateful to all the authors for their important contributions to the volume. These have come out of the high regard and esteem in which they hold Professor Mukherjee. My apologies to them for this delay in publication.

Mr Tejeshwar Singh knows by now how much I owe to his subtle and not so subtle pressures that prodded me on to beat time and make it. My thanks are due to Dr Vikash Pandey and Dr Rajashree Mahtani for having gone through a very early draft of my Introduction-in-process, giving me valuable suggestions.

Over the last two months I have been ensconced in a secluded corner of our Library outside office time. Dr Muttaya Koganuramath, Librarian and Mrs Shyamala Subramanian, Assistant Librarian, in particular, and the Library staff in general, extended all cooperation. My very sincere thanks to them. I also thank Mr Shreehari Annam for having typed the contributors’ chapters.
1944–66 (1977) and Social Indicators (1975). Of these, the study of family structures is an outstanding piece of macro-empirical basic research, the only sociological research of its kind done in India on a sample population of an entire state.

His retirement from ISI was a smooth transition to Adjunct Professorship at the State University of New York at Binghamton, New York from 1977 until 1989. While in New York, he published Trends in Indian Sociology (1977), Sociology of Indian Sociology (1979) and What will it Be? (1979). The last book dealt with the philosophy of social science thinking, and the trend continued with his Quality of Life (1980), Society, Culture, Development (1991) and Systemic Sociology (1993).

In recognition of his outstanding contributions and his distinguished professional career, he was honoured with the Asiatic Society Gold Medal for Anthropology in 1981, the Swami Pranavananda Education Award in 1985 (UGC) and the Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru Award for Social Sciences in 1986 (Government of Madhya Pradesh).

I remember well when I met him for the first time at ISI in 1966, he made two important observations. He said emphatically that what was important were ‘facts’. The second thing he had communicated was his strong disagreement with the primacy given to ‘cultural values’, rather than to structure, in American sociology. In three-and-a-half decades since then, Ramkrishna has traversed a long way in conceptualising values, in dealing with valutational aspects of value, in objectifying the value problematic through value accommodation, in clarifying the relationship between culture, culture product, social process and change, and proposing the inductive-inferential methodology for the study of society and change. The position that he holds on social science is captured in conversations with him on the methodology of social research in the concluding section of the book.

Even at this age he is involved in research with NGOs in West Bengal, delving deep into discovering the prioritisation of the cardinal valuations of life amongst people. His indefatigable energy and his unbounded thirst for knowledge, makes Ramkrishna Mukherjee the archetype of scholar par excellence.
analysis; (b) analytical tools such as statistical tests and methods; and (c) philosophy, theory and epistemology of social science guiding the conduct of research in the definition and understanding of the problem and the logic of inquiry.

Four points merit consideration at this initial stage:

1. It should be noted that research is not invariably associated with scientific research. A considerable amount of research can go into generating important and useful information, which are facts. Such information is often necessary for an individual, group or organisation while taking vital decisions or planning some action. The rich field of social work practice provides an illustration of this. Such information may very well lead to theory construction at some later point.

2. Research that is scientific, in some way or the other, has to do with abstractions of reality that contribute to the formulations of theory. Description or the mere adducing of facts does not necessarily lead to an adequate comprehension of a phenomenon. There is need for conceptual and theoretical abstractions for an efficient and deeper comprehension of reality.

3. Research that is scientific is geared to the production of knowledge that has generalisability beyond the spatio-temporal context in which it is produced. Such knowledge generally has implications for application on a wider scale.

4. Production of knowledge per se is regarded less and less as the sole preserve of science, natural or social. For instance, it is asserted that knowledge is not 'separate from creativity or adventure or the search for the good society' (Wallerstein 1997: 1250).

**METHODOLOGIES IN METHODOLOGY IN SOCIAL RESEARCH**

The field of methodology in social research is characterised by a multiplicity of methodologies. I shall confine myself to a discussion of this at only three levels: (a) the major paradigms in social science, including the feminist discourse; (b) quantitative and qualitative research; and (c) participatory research methodology.

One of the ways of distinguishing between the various coexisting and competing paradigms in social science is on the basis of delineating contentious issues relating to what are the proper methodologies for the study of society. The logic of inquiry adopted in researches by social scientists is prompted not to a small measure by the theoretical and philosophical orientations to which they subscribe. It is but natural that the academically inclined and/or action-oriented social scientist and social worker will be inspired by methodologies more or less consistent with their theoretical, philosophical and praxiological predilections and dispositions. All these paradigms attempt to explain or interpret the complexities of a multifaceted social reality and indicate how to go about studying it, and in some cases, changing it.

Very generally speaking, there are those in academics and/or in direct intervention (they number few), who are conversant with the field of theory, philosophy and methodology of social science. They identify their anchorage in methodology with respect to the coordinates of one or more of the parallel paradigms. There are others (they may be many) who subscribe to a particular methodology in which they are trained and pursue their path of research mainly within the confines of the relevant paradigm. There are still others (they may be numerous) who do research at the purely empirical level of useful information and data, and are not concerned with theories or paradigms or philosophy and history of science. No matter whether a researcher is aware or not, it is possible, largely, to locate her/his methodological orientation regarding the position s/he occupies in the paradigmatic space. Above all, the debate over methodologies in the social science at the end of the twentith century is linked up with the larger question of their capacity to produce relevant social science knowledge of an uncertain world in a period of continuous and unremitting rapid change.

At this point, one should be clear that just as methodology has a theoretical and philosophical dimension, paradigms too have a methodological dimension. The two are not coextensive with each other, since methodology also has a 'technical' dimension. Often, paradigmatically different research programmes use overlapping or even common tools and techniques of data collection. Illustratively, both positivistically and phenomenologically or functionally oriented research may (and do) make use of structured or semi-structured questionnaires, open-ended interview guides, participant observation techniques and so on concurrently and/or sequentially. It also happens that social science researchers find themselves between overlapping paradigms.
12. It has been stated earlier by Glaser and Strauss that

there is no fundamental clash of values between the purposes and capacities of qualitative and quantitative methods or data. What clash there is concerns the primacy of emphasis on verification or generation of theory—to which heated discussions on qualitative versus quantitative data have been linked historically. We believe that each form of data is useful for both verification and generation of theory, whatever the primacy of emphasis. Primacy depends only on the circumstances of research, on the interests and training of the researcher, and on the kinds of materials he needs for his theory.

In many instances, both forms of data are necessary—not quantitative used to test qualitative, but both used as supplements, as mutual verification and, most important for us, as different forms of data on the same subject, which, when compared, will generate theory (Glaser and Strauss 1970: 17–18).

13. Rajesh Tandon mentions the influence of sociology of knowledge on the evolution of PR. In particular, he refers to Habermas. However, the methodology associated with the critical hermeneutics of Habermas does not figure in any discussion of PR (Tandon 1996: 20).

REFERENCES


