

RETHINKING SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBALISATION

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Abstract

There is an increasing awareness today about the fact that social reality cannot be understood by surveying empirical conditions and quantifying them, for social reality is socially constructed. In order to understand constructed realities we need methodological strategies of deconstruction enabling access to the profoundly buried social universe of the production and reproduction of realities.

The higher knowledge enunciated in social sciences of both the positivist and hermeneutic types, has always been remaining inaccessible to the mass due to its positivist academic pretensions expressed in scientific equations as well as the hermeneutic highbrow humanism expressed in theoretical nomenclature. By and large social scientists have been studying social phenomena empirically under the methodological assumptions of the positivistic science, a contingent practice inspired by Newtonian Physics that used to be the aspired foundation taken for granted. Most of us as professionals and non-professionals continue the practice by surveying the empirical situation using scaling and sampling for understanding the social aspect that we seek to study. There is an upper hand of neo-positivists in the contemporary social science research, who use higher statistical techniques to quantify the data in the most sophisticated manner ensuring maximum accuracy. Hermeneutic method necessitating the faculty of higher theoretical cognition is to a great extent set aside.

The Case for the Hermeneutic

Quantitative empirical assessment is important in social science research but that is not enough, for the linear quantification is possible only in the case of basic statistical data.¹ Beyond that the study ceases to be mathematical, for many a social aspect defies at the outset the use of quantitative method. There is an increasing awareness today about the fact that social reality cannot be understood by surveying empirical conditions and quantifying them, for social reality is socially constructed. In order to understand constructed realities we need methodological strategies of deconstruction enabling access to the

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profoundly buried social universe of the production and reproduction of realities. To understand what constitute social reality; who produce and reproduce it and how, we should know where to focus and what to analyse. Social scientists and philosophers in the past have offered a lot of explanations that provide insight into these. As a summing expression we call these explanations, social theory. A social researcher should unfailingly know social theory not only for being capable of grasping deeper social processes, but also for not being ridiculously engaged in reinventing the wheel.

A social researcher has to learn a lot from Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Malinovsky, Levi-Strauss and so on. Social theory is an ever-growing domain that helps us unravel the processes and interconnections below the surface reality of social life. It is the wisdom accrued through sustained attempts at exploring the deeper meanings of explicit features and practices of the society. By resorting to various analytical strategies it helps us understand the link between the surface reality of social practices and their submerged referential. Society is an ambiguous term unless defined conceptually and explained theoretically in terms of material processes, relations, systems and structures. Description of surface features of the society makes little sense if does not lead to an explanation in the context of social structure. It is essential to know whether the society is stratified or non-stratified, redistributing or expropriating, hierarchical or non-hierarchical and so on before we characterise its practices. Descriptive characterisation of social practices fails to capture not only connotations and denotations but also their ontology. What do we understand about the conventions in a hierarchical society if they are merely described and not explained in the light of social theory of hierarchy? Interconnections and correlation between practices and system of social relations have to be discovered by the social researcher. It is important to unveil the embedded as well entrenched nature of the semantics of social practices by drawing upon their homologous relation to social structure. Practices are syntagms that signify the social structurally contingent semantics of power relations, which is often covered by a veil of ideology indispensable to the system. In short, for a social scientist to ask serious questions theoretical insights into correlation of social aspects is essential. Higher level quantification through sophisticated techniques is fine for achieving precision in answers, but often statisticians ignorant of social theory waste their time answering precisely a wrongly framed question.

It is not difficult to make a case for the supremacy of the hermeneutic over plane empiricism, in the context of social science knowledge of intellectual depth. But despite their

methodological differences and subjectivity >< objectivity debates both – the hermeneutic as well as empiricist – belonged to the same epistemic base. Both of them grew up in positivism and modernism as the obverse and reverse of scientific knowledge, one along the path of logo-centrism and teleology taking major hermeneutic strides and the other in the path of mathematical analysis giving rise to a series of all inclusive equations.

Postmodern Critique

For the past two or three decades, the modernist hermeneutic assumptions have been under epistemological attacks from postmodernism poised against foundationalism, logo-centrism, structuralism and teleology. Today, under postmodern academic conditions the positivist as well as the hermeneutic are being seriously critiqued – the positivist in the context of its tottering foundation acquired from material science and the hermeneutic in the context of its logo-centrism and meta-narration. Through semiotics, feminism, psychoanalysis, new historicism, cultural materialism, desire-based queer theory, theories of ethnicity, cultural relativism and so on, postmodern theories have questioned the epistemological validity of the concept of social totality. Jean-Francois Lyotard and Michel Foucault first and Baudrillard with many others subsequently have written a lot to unseat modernity from its intellectual hegemony by bashing right at the roots of its authenticity, authority and credibility. The writings made meta-narratives and teleological grand theories epistemologically unfounded and suggested alternative modes of perception confined to the local or micro as intelligible for all intellectual inquiries. There is an assertion in them of deconstruction and solipsistic outlook with uncertainty about the validity of scientific theory tantamount to the celebration of doubt as the hallmark of intellectual efforts.

Postmodern is often identified as the feature of the latest in art and literature by a few and there is a tendency to brand everything purposely unstructured and disorderly as postmodern. Postmodern is not all that. For a social scientist who understands it epistemologically, postmodern denotes a major cognitive crisis that intellectuals confront in the regime of knowledge production – a condition of uncertainty, flippancy, incredibility and elusiveness about all theories – caused by the realisation of the archaeology and genealogy of the organisation of ‘scientific knowledge’ exposing the figurative character of its language. It is the realisation of the constitution of science, its strategies of authentication or production of truth-effects, and secrets of domination. It is also realisation of a series of intellectual impossibilities such as tracing the historical origins of social processes, systems and structures, institutions, practices etc., theorisation of social phenomena and human affairs in

any definitive sense; derivation of fixed meanings; and identification of facts. The postmodern understanding that is post-structural and de-constructive successfully exposed the foundation of knowledge in modernity as imagined and not real.

Postcolonial is a general expression that has come in vogue almost as interchangeable with postmodern. Postcolonial social researches are concerned about the other, the subaltern, the subject, the marginalised. They are avowedly inclined to resist the multiple forms of social institutional oppression rampant today under the iron hand of homogenisation. They strongly and convincingly articulate the plurality of centres, a re-inscription of a multiplicity of emergent identities.² Their main intellectual strategy is textual deconstruction exploring the sub-text, hyper-text, and context to reach out the trans-textual regime called intertextuality. Postcolonial sociology views authenticity as relational and identities unstable. It maintains that the self >< other dichotomy is a part of the rhetoric of power and not of cultural essence.³

Depoliticising Dimension

No critique of postmodern/postcolonial perspective can afford an outright denial of the latter's relevance to social science research, for its influence is academically transforming and intellectually entrenching to any of the serious social scientists of the contemporary world. This is not to postulate it beyond criticism at any rate. The first and foremost criticism is against its re-articulation of the imperialist agenda, a sort of re-enactment of colonialism in a reverse gear.⁴ It acts as an intellectual mask of neo-colonial processes. It is important to note that postmodern/postcolonial studies as such do not address the material exigencies of neo-colonialism, including the neo-colonialism of western academic institutions themselves. As Gayatri Spivak has observed, "the attribution of a unified speaking voice and an authentic native essence to the colonised, far from destabilising imperialistic cultural practices actually serves to reconstitute the subject of the west."⁵ While colonialism was engaged in forcibly bringing the native minds to the European pattern of organisation of knowledge through sciences and laws, postcolonialism discovering the process, re-enacts the same thing. Despite its theoretical repositioning within the process, postcolonial studies turn out to be exercises with the inaccessible and irreversible, concerned with interchange, assimilation, appropriation and re-appropriation. The postmodern/postcolonial perspective, poised against colonialism and committed to decolonising initiatives, is noted for its colonising nature.

Always away from people and social reality, postmodernists/postcolonialists, are interested more in the epistemological plain of deconstruction than in the political plain of social reconstruction. At the same time it is true that postmodern/postcolonial thinking recognises resistance to the current social institutional oppression its responsibility. But it has no praxis to change the social institutional oppression that it rigorously describes in a language of radical politics. At a closer look this radical politics turns out to be apolitical and reactionary with no creative potential to respond to the question of political actions and reactions of the contemporary world. It inadvertently urges to withdraw intellectuals from activism. The main problem with postmodern/postcolonial intellectualism is that its project ends up with the analytical game of discourse and textuality, a domain wherein its anti-colonial rhetoric then quite appropriately gets subsumed. By celebrating doubts postmodern/postcolonial thinking provides a legitimate status to ignorance on *a par* with theoretical knowledge. Consequently, postmodern/postcolonial knowledge occludes any understanding of the determinate logic of capitalism. Its widely celebrated concept of cultural plurality is not only illusionary but also dangerous in the sense that it encourages sub-nationalist divisions, fundamentalist beliefs, and identities. This apolitical character cannot be overlooked in the context of neocolonialism/neoimperialism and neoliberal globalisation. So perhaps the most important social criticism against postmodern/postcolonial perspective is its politically disengaging nature or the depoliticising character.

Nevertheless, there are many virtues about postmodern/postcolonial thinking that social science research cannot ignore at any rate. Its epistemological contribution to the making of the limitations of modernity transparent is probably foremost among them. We have to draw critical insights from postmodernist epistemology and confront its apolitical dimension intellectually. A socially committed researcher has to constitute a methodological perspective that at once accepts the limitations of positivism and modernity on the one side and rejects the apolitical dimension. This leads to open up the gate of post-positive social science research methodology that upholds the primacy of people's needs.

Globalisation

Within a decade of globalisation and seven years of WTO reign economic nationalism has become impossible and sovereign power impaired, in the third world. The number of the poor people has increased phenomenally. Many are deprived of access even to drinking water that is a commodity of MNC/TNC industries. Globalisation has caused the loss of aids to food and fuel, making the life of the poor incredibly miserable and pushing them into popular

revolts for survival as exemplified by the upsurges in Indonesia in 1998 for food and fuel, and Bolivia today for drinking water. Commercialisation of health, education, drinking water, agriculture, media, information system and what not, has made miserable the life of the middle class too. There is a peremptory halt to welfare measures in all developing countries. With the state growing indifferent to problems of drinking water, food, education, welfare schemes, public distribution and so on enhancing market dependence, localities decline. In the light of the new drafts on Intellectual Property Rights all life forms are being patented. Having made agricultural seeds a patented commodity, the peasants are unable to exchange them any more. Fertilisers have become all the more expensive making agriculture costly but with a lot uncertainty about the market for their goods. There is widespread social unrest across the third world where the governments are advised to suppress the people's movements ruthlessly. Privatisation of public assets is pushing developing nations like India into solvency crisis, where public sector disinvestment is forging ahead under the pretext of a reform, transferring national resources into the hands of a minority. Underdeveloped and developing nations are in debt traps and people commit suicide under the myriad of pressures that the market-friendly culture exerts. Naturally there is economic decay, starvation, suicide, drug abuse, prostitution, Mafia rule, terrorism, bribery and other forms of corruption in unprecedented magnitude.

Globalisation means financial globalisation facilitating flight of American and European capital to developing countries through liberalisation of capital market leading to a series of factors like privatisation, free trade, foreign investment growth, hegemony of global organisations, mounting debt, intensifying competition, strengthening of new market pressures, heightening of political, cultural, social and economic insecurity etc. The sudden and arbitrary withdrawal of foreign capital investment happens in the name of one excuse or the other pushing the host nation in trouble as experienced recently by Malaysia and Indonesia. Decline of the public sphere is another disaster. In the third world the TNC/MNC capital makes unbridled influx into areas of natural resources and eco-systems of bio-diversity causing dispossession of local people's age old subsistence strategies, disruption of culture, destruction of local wisdom and devastation of habitat.

The Social Need

Social Science knowledge as such cannot solve social problems and no one would expect any social scientist to do it either. But all social sciences, if taught and read with a genuine concern for social reality, would lead to the making of an active citizenry capable of

praxis intervention ensuring social progress. Serious social scientific knowledge engenders the faculty to critical assessment of social reality and it is critical consciousness that citizens need the most in a democratic society to engage in policy debates and facilitate progressive legislation resolving social problems. Social scientists should know the epistemological relation of their sciences to the politics of human progress combining liberty with equity. Such social scientists alone would be capable of empowering people to partake in policy debates. Unfortunately we do not have many such social scientists, a tragedy we owe to the poor social science curriculum.

There are numerous issues like violation of human rights, gender discrimination, child abuse, dispossession of marginal communities, denial of common property rights, environmental degradation and so forth besides the hackneyed questions of socio-economic inequality, poverty and exploitation. Students graduating in social sciences should be able to acquire the socially useful knowledge in their disciplines to get themselves empowered with the faculty to critical assessment, the vital service that the society needs the most from higher education. As this knowledge is essential for any citizen to effectively participate in policy debates, a crucial function that s/he has to discharge under democracy.⁶ In that sense, reorienting social science research to people centred and empowerment oriented ways is part of the national democratisation strategy.

The tendency of social science research has been by and large to address itself the question of development, often uncritically assuming that the term development means people's development too. It ignores the multiple meanings of the term development and the ambiguity in its generic use. This at once forecloses the possibility of realising the fact that people's development is only a part of the rhetoric of the dominant paradigm of development, the centrality of which is the agenda of capitalist growth that precludes equity. The mainstream social science research fails to recognise that the term development has become an obfuscating metaphor that hides its real meaning and subsumes its critical alternatives. In fact, there has been no metaphor like development, so popular, influential and charged with ideology, until the term globalisation gained currency. Under the rhetoric of development all the larger social goals get sidelined and neglected.

There is no wonder that conventional social science researches have proved to be of no use for the people and that social science higher education is being widely branded as useless. The quality of social science higher education has been invariably poor all over the country during all these years. Commercialisation of education has led to a further dilution or

even replacement of pure social sciences by their auxiliaries that are capable of being vocational subjects. Largely social science education has become a mechanical procedure that alienates the youth from social reality. It is indeed, a depoliticising exercise.

Paths of Diversification

Several non-conventional areas of knowledge are emerging in social sciences as a result of multidisciplinary and cross-faculty researches today. Many of them are interdisciplinary domains of knowledge that belong to none of the conventional disciplines. Disciplines are drawing closer to one another and their boundaries are waning. Even faculties merge and give rise to new faculties that defy kinship with the extant ones.⁷ Correspondingly many discipline-based academic Departments disappear or get radically reconstituted all over the world. This is a sure sign of the collapse and phasing out of conventional disciplines and discipline-based higher education in general and researches in particular. It is therefore, imperative for us to shift research from the stale areas of mono-disciplinary culture to interdisciplinary nature with people occupying the central place. Departments of each social science discipline/sub-discipline have to restructure themselves by merging with one another and emerging afresh. Those of us who refuse to change and tend to duplicate the research in conventional disciplines are inevitably doomed to replacement.

Many new areas of knowledge are emerging in the domain of Social Sciences, which the conventional Departments of research can absorb to get themselves structurally adjusted to the changing social needs. The interface of Geography, Environmental Systems and Human Existence is one example of an emerging area of great possibilities and potentials in the context of the contemporary social needs in India. Geography is the most neglected, least updated, and much wanted vital social science. The discipline of geography traditionally encompasses the study of spatial patterns in both the natural and cultural environment. The dynamic and interdisciplinary character of the field is making it increasingly linked to a wide range of societal and environmental problems, including those related to urban and suburban economic development, poverty, crime, human health, water resources, water quality, soil resources, biodiversity, habitat loss, and climate change. A Department of Geography and Environmental Systems highlighting the importance of interactions between natural environmental systems and social, political and economic systems is becoming increasingly relevant far more than a conventional Department of Geography or Geology. Plenty of socially useful researches can be designed combining natural sciences, mathematics and social sciences with human geography as the central domain. The exposure to knowledge about the

interconnectedness of faculties conventionally separated into sciences, social sciences and humanities can produce social scientists with better vision, analytical skills and cognitive ability. The conundrum of socio-spatial processes of our times necessitates serious social science researches of people-oriented nature.

People Oriented Research

People-oriented social science research is possible only when we have enough social scientists with clarity and conviction about the politics of their specialisation. The politics of knowledge enables them to be actively responding to social needs. There are several instances of remarkable social benefits generated as a result of intellectual responses of committed social scientists to social requirements in the third world. The methodology of Process Documentation Research is a notable example of such a fall out of social scientists' intellectual response to the strategic needs of local level development initiatives involving the designing of people centred institutions and capacity building. This is taking social science to people. The social scientists of the Institute of Philippine Culture of the Manila University [IPC], well known for their innovative adaptation of social theories to meet local transformation needs, are credited with the formulation of PDR tools (1988). Their first intervention to the people's development issue was by evolving Participatory Techniques [1978]. The Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University developed Participatory Appraisal Tools [1980] in the light of the success achieved by the IPC social scientists. The International Development Studies, Roskilde University, Denmark which evolved interdisciplinary comparative methodology [1992], to cater to the local development needs elsewhere in the third world, was also inspired by the ICP social scientists.⁸ The PDR methodology is founded on post-positivist social sciences of reflexive analytical strategies. The focus of PDR is on Social Process Learning through systematic documentation for collective use.

The context of the innovation of PDR tools is that of the ineffectiveness of the usual Managerial Techniques of Monitoring and Evaluation (MTME). Even participatory monitoring and evaluation tools that sought to transcend the limitations of the MTME package faced lacunae. The main shortcoming in all these was lack of experiential learning. Very often the people's development initiatives involved recurrences of the same follies and rediscovery of the old ways to success, both indicating absence of learning either from failures or from success. This accounts for the need of a shift from process monitoring to

process documentation and participatory learning enabling institutional development and social capital accumulation.

The PDR tools are the same for both the bureaucrats as well as the people's bodies at the local level, so long as the goals converge and the thrust is on institutional learning through experience. Acquisition of systematised knowledge about the structure and working of the local governance activities is the first step of PDR in the present context. It includes the reconstruction of the history of the local people and their material conditions of existence and experiences. The experiences include perceptions of activities, differences of opinion, conflicts, conflict resolution measures and so forth. Open-ended interview records and ethno-methodological appraisals help the social scientists produce retrospective PDR output.

Reflexive Sociology

Reflexive sociology is perhaps the most successful approach in the effort to understand human affairs in terms of social processes and relations, for it helps the researcher position himself/herself free of the biases inherent in the social science, in the individual social scientist and in the researcher.

It is Pierre Bourdieu who comes foremost among the social theorists who sought to propound Reflexive Social Science Methodology.⁹ Bourdieu states that the challenge of social research is to unveil the most deeply submerged structures of the various realms which constitute the social universe, as well as the 'mechanisms' which tend to ensure their reproduction or their transformation. He then proposes what is called reflexive methodological process of social research to respond to the challenge. Reflexive Methodology is a methodology of methodology in the sense that using this approach, social researchers can keep reassessing the epistemological status of their methods, assumptions and hermeneutics. The starting point of Reflexive Methodology is rebuttal of 'common sense' that is an outmoded cognitive device. Then comes the acceptance of the primacy of the analysis of social relations and processes rather than the ontological priority of structure or agent, system or actor, the collective or the individual, that constitutes all forms of methodological monism. According to Bourdieu, these binary oppositions emanate from a perception of social reality based on common sense.

Bourdieu identifies three major biases that affect social science researches. The first is the individual researcher's socially entrenched bias relating to class, gender, ethnicity, etc. This is a social structurally imposed bias by virtue being inescapably linked to the social

position of the researcher. The second bias relates to the official or academic position, the theoretical orientation and the methodology of individual researchers. This is the bias embedded in the academic field, in correspondence with the possible intellectual positions, status and ranking in the system of power relations that the researchers at a given moment wield. The third bias is what Bourdieu calls, the 'intellectualist bias' that lures the researcher to a determinate worldview and a framework of comprehension. This relates to the intellectually entrenched state of the social researcher's perception.

Bourdieu prescribes self-reflexivity as the first essential prerequisite for confronting the biases. The next indispensable pre-requisite is social theoretical scholarship that facilitates methodological uncovering of the submerged structures, relations and processes of society. The application of self-reflexivity has to start with the theories themselves in order to be wary of and avoiding their hermeneutic limitations and inescapable predetermination about the scholarly judgement. This should help the researcher acquire epistemological know how about the construction of the theories, their assumptions, methods, and hermeneutic potential. However, the theoretical scholarship should be deeper enough to understand the mechanisms behind the formation and transformation of social groups, institutions and relationships. This has to enable social researchers to overcome constraints and biases internalised by them in the process of socialisation.

It is enough to read Bourdieu to know how fruitfully one can contribute to social theory in an eminently original way by reflexively negotiating with and creatively responding to pre-existing theories. Bourdieu is singularly important because he represents the most convincing hermeneutic riches in social theory with Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Malinovsky and Levi-Strauss in the centre and an array of others around. So it is enough to illustrate the theories of Bourdieu to indicate the kind of grip a social researcher must secure in social theory for practising reflexive methodology.

Bourdieu has enunciated a series of theories that help us surmount the inherent as well as acquired biases and gain access to deep sociology unveiling the mysterious world behind the manifestation of varied social phenomena.¹⁰ The two key concepts of Bourdieu, which explain the production and reproduction of the social practice are structures and *habitus*. Structures refer to the field of relationships within a society and *habitus* their net effect on each individual's everyday practice.

The concept of structure in Bourdieu is the result of a fusion of ideas drawn from Marx, Durkheim, Weber, Malinowski, and Levi-Strauss. Bourdieu views structures as patterns of social relationship evolving under the design of the class in relation to control over material conditions of human existence. Structures are therefore the patterns of relationship based on unequal power relations among differentiated classes of people, say for example, the relationship between 'X' that appropriates the labour of 'Y'. It is the ensemble of structures with their norms of operation that makes the social system. The operational process of structures produces the class mindset of the people from their childhood onwards. This mindset is called *habitus*.

According to Bourdieu, *habitus* refers to structuring principles of social practices, which are predisposed to function as structuring structures. They are not formally imposed rules but underlying principles of practices in a given social system wherein the people rather live them than obeying. *Habitus* is inherent and hence not the effect of conscious obedience to rules. It refers to the principles of practice inevitable to the social system, which get imbibed in any individual through socialisation. *Habitus* is the social structurally created rhythm of actions that is like a collective orchestration without any master conductor. It is the rhythm of behaviour required by the social order, the 'socialised subjectivity' of individuals, which binds them into a system. The social system owes the reproduction of structures to *habitus*, leading to the persistence and change of the system of domination from generation to generation. In the process the *habitus* also undergoes the dynamics of continuity and change. There are various forms of *habitus*, which reproduce, justify and maintain the system of domination. *Habitus* makes the dominated feel solidarity and fellowship to the dominant, by enabling the former to see the forms of domination imposed upon them natural and compliance normal. This naturalisation of the unbearable is realised through the strategies of symbolic representation covering the objective conditions of oppression. The symbolic representations distract people's attention from the social origins of oppression to imagined causes and develop in them a subjective mentality, for example, the mentality to blame the destitute for their poverty, or the exploited for their misery, or nature and biology cause unequal power relations and so on. This is Marx's theory of ideology retold in the language of sociological nuances. However, Bourdieu reflexively proceeds further into the socio-cultural mechanisms and processes of domination, through a fresh conceptualisation of capital in its sociological context.

Bourdieu conceives capital in four exchangeable forms such as economic, symbolic, cultural and social, which the individuals or groups incessantly negotiate and exchange with a view to enhancing their status and ranking.¹¹ Economic capital refers the material wealth in kind or cash. Symbolic capital refers to the practices, appearances, body postures, gestures, stature, manners, speaking habits, honour, prestige, etc that are symbolic of distinction. Cultural capital is to highbrow culture, the practising or participation or appreciation of which enhances social power. Social capital refers to the network of institutions, groups and relations of people that help individuals secure higher goals. Accumulating the various forms of capital through exchange, individuals and groups acquire higher ranks and positions in the relations of domination. Just as the exchange of economic capital facilitates domination, the exchange of cultural ideas facilitates expansion of one culture into the areas of and dominance over another. In the process of cultural exchange, people construct tastes of distinction in cultural practices. Through the imitation of the practices and tastes of the upper class, the lower class seek social mobility and in the process giving added legitimacy to the upper class culture. Imitation of upper class or elitist tastes for foods, costumes, ornaments, arts, sports, games etc., by people in the lower rungs is a universal social phenomenon. Participation in or at least a familiarity to upper class culture helps the lower class the world over accrue cultural capital. Bourdieu's social theory of capital and 'distinction' goes a long way equipping reflexive social researchers with enormous insights.

A vital aspect of reflexive social science methodology is its politics of praxis. The epistemological relation of reflexive strategies of knowing social reality, to politics is explicit. Destined to reach out deeper processes and relations of social life, reflexive social science methodology facilitates production of knowledge enabling critical assessment of the contemporary social reality. As the pioneering praxis sociologist Bourdieu combined the theoretical traditions of sociology to evolve a methodology for generating socially useful knowledge. So Bourdieu's reflexive methodology is also known as practice theory or praxis.

The symbolic capital is the main defense of the prevailing system of social power relations and the central strategy for maintaining its *status quo*. The symbolic capital is drawn from historically contingent symbols. It is extremely important today for a social researcher to understand the construction of symbols, accumulation of cultural capital and its strategic use in our societies. Always the upper class wields control over the strategies of cultural capital accumulation, though the lower class seeks to access it for social mobility. Since the latter lacks the required economic capital for acquiring cultural capital through exchange,

their yearning for it seldom affects the *status quo* of the social power relations, but at the same time helps sustain the hegemony of the upper class values, tastes, and aesthetics. Through the use of symbolic capital in multiple ways the lower class is permanently kept off from but cleverly sustained to be aspiring for high culture. This situation by tempting the lower class for exchanging what they earn through hardships for high culture goods keeps the contrast in the social order reproduced and perpetuated.

To conclude Reflexive social science methodology helps researchers continually question the methodology, assumptions, and hermeneutics of their peers as well as their own. It enables them keep an unfailing epistemological self-vigilance, the impact of which on the contemporary social research is profound. No other methodological strategy in social sciences has contributed so much in recent times to cause path-breaking hermeneutic turns. It enhances critical thought that is essential for the restoration of local self-reliance, crucial in the context of the deleterious impact of globalisation.

Notes

¹ This point has been well expounded sometime ago in David & Judith Willer, *Systematic Empiricism: Critique of a Pseudo-Science*, London

² See the discussions in Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson, *De-scribing the Empire*, New York, 1994.

³ See the arguments in James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, New York, 1995.

⁴ For a different approach to the issue, see Ashcroft, Griffiths and Chris Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back*, New York, 1993.

⁵ Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, New York, 1990

⁶ There is a liberal and welfare oriented perspective also. See, Timothy K. Stanton, *Civic Responsibility and Liberal Arts Education: Linking Public and Community Service to the Curriculum*, New Jersey, 1987. Also see, Frank Fischer, "Beyond Empiricism: Policy in Post-positivist Perspective," *Policy Studies Journal*, vol. 26. No.1(1998).

⁷ The growing interconnectedness of disciplines is emphasised by the UGC in its X Plan Profile, New Delhi, 2001. p.5. Also see, Robert M. Diamond, *Designing and Improving Courses and Curricula in Higher Education: A Systematic Approach*, San Francisco, 1989.

⁸ For an idea about the initiatives see, the IEDP monograph on PDR. Also see, Bodil Folke Frederiksen and Kristen Westergaard, eds. *Political Culture, Local Development and Local Institutions*, Occasional Paper No. 7, Roskilde University, Denmark, 1993. Henrik Secher Marcussen, ed. *Improved Natural Resource Management: The Role of the State versus that of the Local community*, Roskilde University, Denmark, 1994.

⁹ See the discussions in Pierre Bourdieu, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1992

¹⁰ One should read all the studies of Bourdieu. However, the most innovative aspects of his hermeneutics appear in the following studies. First is *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge: University Press 1977. *Distinction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1984. *Homo Academicus*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1988. *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1989.

The Logic of Practice. Stanford: Stanford University Press 1990.

Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture. London: Sage Publications 1990.

¹¹ For details see, Bourdieu, *Distinction*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. 1984.