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Research Methodologies: An Exciting Mixed Bag!

Professor Saraswati Raju[†]

There are many books and articles, which discuss a variety of social scientific research methods. As such, bringing out an issue on research methodologies may be somewhat questioned. However, our purpose here is different and twofold: to expose the readers to different subject fields with varying methodological concerns having specific disciplinary edges in one place and, in the process, indirectly touch upon the various possibilities while relooking afresh at existing research trends. The mixed bag thus deals with scholars directly pointing out the inadequacies of existing doctoral theses in the Indian universities on one hand to positioning the local in the historiography as one of the research concerns on the other.

The issue opens up with the invited paper by Gillian Rose. She discusses the evolutionary trajectory of visual representation of the city which has familiar and yet extraordinarily complex history, unravelled by many. From the maze of kaleidoscopic images that it has, Rose has picked up the visual medium of photography, and its interface with the urban. Photography has been chosen because of its widespread use in diverse conditions and the focus is on scholars - professional social scientists or otherwise who use or create images as ways to understand what 'the urban' is. A seemingly trivial medium, photographic representation is in fact about politics of that representation - a glossy and idealised cityscape can also be captured through its underbelly of squalor, shanty settlements, and so on. The criticality of such representation, however, is assumed to be self-evident thereby missing the point that the text thus produced can be read differently by different people. Photograph perceived as 'speaking for itself' is then seen as somehow objective.

Contrary to this, are the recent shifts in photographing and videoing the city to incorporate the contemporary theoretical concerns to show embodied experiences of urban spaces. Such works use visual images to implore the affective feel rather than to decipher the representation of urban spaces. For these scholars, photographs thus become important analytical tools. The other shift is through digital visual images. Rose observes that these two - the theoretical and the technological - are analytically distinct. However, the multimodal technology and online platforms not only allow for new ways of scholarly engagements with places, they are now being effectively used to create their feel as well making 'representation' just one among several epistemological possibilities. Such an approach makes a way of looking at photos with 'an aesthetic sensibility rather than a semiological/discourse, a response that takes the form of a bodily and emotional stance rather than interpretive or hermeneutic work'. The differentiating methods have their own pitfalls, and a meaningful collaboration between urban scholars interested in visual modes and a visual practitioner is what is required to overcome them - a concern that has remained inadequately addressed. Whether such collaboration would be considered well within the purview of critical social sciences is another issue.

Rose mentions geographical practice of map-making that does not depend on the distinction between professional and amateur cartographers in claiming the ground realities and use 'representation' as the preferable mode of depicting urban spaces.

The camera/smartphones have added another dimension to the whole debate about everyday social practices through which urban lives are being performed, often going beyond representation and/or evocation of urban. The digital mediums act in close association with

[†] Professor, Centre for the Study of Regional Development, School of Social Sciences, (CSRD), Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Email: saraswati_raju@hotmail.com

the social networking sites with accompanying images, texts, comment, and so on. This, according to Rose, is 'networked urbanism' wherein the emergent form of urban visual culture offers significant challenges to prevalent social science methodologies. The three-way relationship between photographs and urban - representation, evocation and performance - necessitates rather different methodological approach from social scientists interested in the mediation of urban spaces by visual technologies. In order to work as representational devices, photographs require interpretation so that their meaning can be decoded; for them to act as evocative devices, the photographs entail an aesthetic sensibility in order to experience their affect, and their understanding as performative devices require an engagement with the dynamic network of social practices, their creation and distribution for enactment. The three - the photographic, the urban and the social-theoretical - are, however, interlinked and cannot be understood apart from one another.

The second article by Venkat Pulla is about Grounded Theory which works in reverse order as compared to the conventional method in social science research, i.e., theoretical framework first which is to be substantiated with data. Instead, the grounded approach is from ground upward, i.e., with no preconceived theoretical ideas prior to a research project, it is the empirical observations, the data collection in various ways, which form the basis for generating a theory. In a way then the researcher goes to field without being constrained by ongoing theoretical constructs. The author deals with the principles and processes of the Grounded Theory followed by discussion on the nature of codes, coding process and the concept of saturation. Not surprisingly, there are arguments against and in favour of Grounded Theory. Pulla delves into these issues in depth and is of the opinion that the theory does provide a sound theoretical basis for practice. Selected narratives from the author's recent studies explain the processes involved in Grounded Theory.

Misra et al. explore the Social Network Analysis (SNA), which has received increasing attention from various disciplines and is used to unravel social relations among individuals and institutions in the next article. According to the authors, the analysis has been largely adopted by scholars interested in studying livelihood systems of the rural poor. The growing commercialisation of common property resources as well as movements to non-farm employment has rendered a complex tenor to rural livelihoods; there is information overflow from diverse sources and the service needs are becoming progressively multifarious. The intertwining of these factors requires not only a comprehensive understanding of issues faced by the rural people; any services aimed at sustenance entail efficient rural institutions and their restructuring at multiple levels. According to the authors, SNA is such an analytical tool which can handle livelihood system analysis and can deal with matters of practical importance such as the influential actors as well as the key institutions in a livelihood system and the functioning of their interactive network, their role in rural development, and so on. The paper offers elaborate research methodology along with graphic details about different kinds of networks, matrices, terminologies commonly used in the analysis, etc. for those who would like to adopt SNA as a research tool.

The article that follows is by Indrajit Goswami who has systematically analysed several doctoral theses selected randomly from the reference sections of two leading universities in Tamil Nadu, India to point out the loopholes and conceptual inadequacies therein. Following a brief introduction to quantitative and qualitative methods, the author discusses the problematic issues in research, which include irrelevance of thesis titles, insufficient attention to data collection, sample size and selection, identification of proper instrument for their execution and framing of objectives, hypotheses and operational definitions, etc. The case-by-case observations on each thesis gives a critical edge to the study, which should

help the prospective researchers, academicians, and students avoid the pitfalls. The objective of this article is purely academic and its scope is limited to enhancement of quality of future research studies in the domains and related fields.

Sarma's article carries out a critical review of the trends of historical writings with reference to Assam. The historical writings of Assam have more or less followed the basic periodisation of Indian history in terms of Early Historical Period (600 BC to 400 CE), Late Historical Period (400 CE to 700 CE), Early Medieval Period (700 CE to 1200 CE) and Medieval Period (1200 CE to the Colonization Period). According to the author, there is no apparent difficulties whatsoever in following this specific periodisation. However, the absence of an early historical phase is an intriguing problem in the dynastic history of Assam. The author opines that a pan-Indian approach to the history of Assam in the Northeast would thus not be just in decoding the cultural dynamics of the complex society in the region; the history would lack authenticity. An alternative and more precise periodisation of the historical phase that has been provided by him does not suggest any clear marker between periods and eras in the region, but emphasises on slow and steady transformations. Sarma stresses on corroboration of the historical events through 'proper' historical source material for reconstructing the history of the region rather than deriving inferences from mythology and legends. However, he acknowledges the importance of recent trends such as selective utilization of oral traditions, folklores and memory in historiography. Sarma's exposition, although not directly dealing with research methodologies per se, pointedly brings out how any research has to be contextualised by taking into account local histories and spatially distinctive communities rather than adopting all-encompassing metanarratives.

We hope that the readers would enjoy this issue, as always feedbacks are welcome.

About Professor Saraswati Raju

Prof. Raju's teaching and research interests include issues related to social development with focus on gendered marginalities in labour market, access to literacy/education/skills, empowerment, and gender and space. She has published extensively on these issues in national and international journals of repute. She is one of the founding members for the International Geographic Union (IGU) Commission on Gender and Geography.

Member of editorial boards of Annals of Association of American Geographers, Antipode and Progress in Human Geography, amongst others, she has been at the forefront in introducing gender studies in Indian geography; her co-edited publication of the *Atlas on Women and Men in India* has been praised as a landmark work in this direction. Her recent co-edited and edited books include *Colonial and Post-colonial Geographies of India* (2006, Sage Publications), *Doing Gender, Doing Geography: Emerging Research in India* (2011, Routledge), *Gendered Geographies: Space and Place in South Asia* (2011, Oxford University Press) and her co-authored book titled *NGOs and the State in 21st Century: India and Ghana* (2006, INTRAC, UK).

Saraswati has received many visiting awards and fellowships in her long and illustrious career. She is a recipient of Janet Monk Service Award (2010) given by the Women Specialty Group of Association of American Geographers for exemplary contribution to the study of gender/feminist concerns in geography. This is the first ever award outside the Anglo-Saxon world. She has also been awarded the 2012's Distinguished Service Award for Asian Geography instituted by the Asian Geography Specialty Group, Association of American Geographers, USA. The award honours '*outstanding scholars in the field of Asian geography who have demonstrated exceptional scholarship as well as service to the specialty group*'.