

Terrain of social science research

The collection of essays on qualitative methods in Social Sciences with an astute gaze on the global south is insightful and engaging. The collection is an assemblage of thinking and knowing the global south by scavenging through methodologies in existence and 'in the making'... A review

**ANUP SHEKHAR
CHAKRABORTY**

Bonita Aleaz and Partha Pratim Basu's co-edited volume *Revisiting Qualitative Methods in Social Science Research* is a collection of 13 insightful articles. The introductory note by the editors attempts to unbraid the complex bridle of the gaze in Social Sciences research. The collection includes: Surajit C Mukhopadhyay's "Ideas and Concerns in Doing Social Science Research: An Overview of its Development through Time" (Chapter 1); Sobhanlal Datta Gupta's "The Methodological Journey of Political Science: An Overview" (Chapter 2); Bonita Aleaz's "The New Qualitative Turn: Mobilities, Unobtrusiveness and Grounded Theory" (Chapter 3); Partha Pratim Basu's "Discourse Analysis" (Chapter 4); Joseph N Goh's "Queer Political Scrutinies and Other Ruminations: Methodologies, Methods and Complexities in Qualitative Research among Non-Heteronormative Men in Malaysia" (Chapter 5); Arnab Das, Suman Nath and Suman Hazra's "Field Research for 'Present' as Collaboration among Fragments and Difference: A Journey within, Across, In-between and Beyond the Boundaries" (Chapter 6); Sushmita Gonsalves' "Participant Observation: Revisiting Other Cultures" (Chapter 7); Kaberi Chakrabarti's "Case Study Methodology" (Chapter 8); Srilata Sircar's "Oral History for the Qualitative Researcher: From Modern Method to Decolonial Device" (Chapter 9); Debi Chatterjee's "Investigating Caste and Dalit Marginality: Perspectives and Methods" (Chapter 10); Sudarshana Sen's "The Epistemological and Methodological Assumptions

in Feminist Research" (Chapter 11); Shibashis Chatterjee's "International Relations: Epistemology, Ontology and Methods" (Chapter 12); and Sidsel Saugestad's "North-South Collaboration Comparative Experiences of Participation, Action and Research" (Chapter 13).

Social Science methods, pedagogies, and competing mediums styled and tailored in the west often fail to provide an understanding of myriad home-truths of the global south. The ambivalence calls for methods homespun, grounded, and more accommodating to the lived realities of the region. At one level is the problem of adopting, inventing/birthing, acceptable methodologies and at another level is the problem of autonomy or shedding the methodologies and pedagogies implanted through the colonial encounter. The first level of the problem reflects the contested nature of voices in the global south and the plurality of the society. The projected unified face of the south is as diverse and fissured as is the demonised projection of the north.

The second level of the problem refers more to the contestation of the dominant methodologies in more or less incoherent unison by the global south. There is a fixation to quantification and a doubtful sneer to other methodologies relying on qualitative analysis, biographic approach, use of music, photographs, and the virtual spaces. In short, there is a discomfort in using sources clubbed as "mundane"/ "unreliable" and a wedge demarcating the "authentic source" and the "inauthentic". Can the global south provide an authentic/indigenous southern methodology based on their unique experiences? Well, such a proposition seems unreal, keeping in mind the unique positions within and among the global south.

Therefore, the urgency to "detoxify" the south from the toxicities of the north remains a challenging project. This dilemma of detoxification is best summed up in my words as "you may hate it (north), you may love it (north), but you cannot ignore it (north)."

The terrain of social science research methods and methodologies is highly contested so much so that it is always in the process of "becoming". The conjoining feature of this area of study is usually the focus on 'the social,' and conceptualising "the social" has moved through different phases in academic thinking. Increasingly, we take home the understanding that there is no "one social," but many "socials" operating temporally and spatially. Social science methods seek to investigate that "which cannot be reduced to", and at times contest the traditional forms of data collection methods and in the process, capture only in parts the fuzziness of social worlds.

Also, such methods often question the place of social science in understanding social lives (without being reductionist) by challenging the tenants of social science research, such as rigour, clarity, and the possibilities of "knowing" social life. Social research methods in particular when dealing with "ambivalence in Sexualities", may or may not necessarily adhere to any "scientific" structures of knowledge. Strategies of data collection (and interpretation) need to address this understanding of social worlds by including various forms of observation, visual materials, and engagements with auto-ethnography as well as exploring the intersections of humanities and social sciences through art and textual analyses.

However, there is a danger that investigating social worlds in this sense

returns us to textual analyses that proclaim the messiness of everyday life, without involving the people and materialities present in the creation of these studies.

The collection of essays on qualitative methods in Social Sciences with an astute gaze on the global south is insightful and engaging. The collection is an assemblage of thinking and knowing the global south by scavenging through methodologies in existence and "in the making". However, in parts, the contributions succumb to the overload of west toxicity, especially if one skillfully gleans into the repository resources used by the individual authors to moot their observations.

Copious use of the contributions of Indian (or African or South-east Asian) sociologists and scholars engaged in the study of communities (in their most extendable forms) and ethnic groups in the region; also, the use of sources from the vernacular languages could have undone the disbalanced referral points and leveraged the mantra of 'academic social responsibility.'

The book will be a useful text for teaching "Research Methodology" at the graduate level. Students, research scholars and academicians of the social sciences and in particular, those with a keen interest in community studies should find this book valuable.

The reviewer teaches in the Department of Political Science and Political Studies, Netaji Institute for Asian Studies, Kolkata



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Light**
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