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RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND SHIFTING PARADIGM IN SOCIAL SCIENCE

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ABSTRACT:

This article explores the importance of the ethnographic empirical work to understand the wider public issue related to the existing knowledge under the process of cultural production through interrogating the field by becoming a 'participant observer' of everyday life practices of the subject. The way this process of cultural production transforms the traditional social structures and institutions into a new inclusive democratic structure. How the construction of new power relationship in the context of the changing dynamics and emerging paradigm of Dalit politics impacts on the broader political mobilization in India. To understand the specificity of their different accounts, multiplicity of the process and depth of social and historical transformation what really the research methodology need to follow, transform and understand while using various techniques provided under ethnographic method and methodological principle.

KEYWORDS: Research Methodology, Ethnography, Paradigm shift and Social Science.

INTRODUCTION

The importance of the method and methodology to explore a wider public issue and the contribution of finding to existing knowledge is the most important aspects for any relevant social science research. Its contributions to resolve social problems and to achieve emancipation for some oppressed group are some major criteria for a valid social science research. From the above assumption two potential questions arise here. The first question is related to the method adapted for the research to derive a required empirical response. Second question has to do with the meta-physics for the epistemological justification of methodology as a guideline to method in order to deal the nature of existence and truth and to make knowledge claims equally valid for the subject. The main purpose of this article is to explore the relevance of ethnographic method for the social science research under shifting paradigm. In this article I have discussed the importance of ethnographic methodological principles to analyze the subject and content of the changing dynamics of Dalit politics in India. It is intended to see this broadening concept and idea of the construction of an alternative identity to the process of 'cultural production'. I will treat the process of the construction of a new 'culture' that Dalit communities want to promote as what Raymond Williams called an attempt to develop an alternative 'complete way of life' (Williams 1976) and the site where these processes have been observed can be considered as Pierre Bourdieu's 'field of cultural production' (Bourdieu 1993).

This article has three sections. First section deals the importance of the ethnographic empirical work to understand this phenomenon by interrogating the field and the process of the cultural production by becoming a 'participant observer' of everyday life practices of the subject. It will also examine the way this process of cultural

production transforms the traditional social structures and institutions into a new inclusive democratic structure. Second section intends to understand the broader impact of invention of new power relationship in the context of the changing dynamics and emerging paradigm of Dalit politics. To understand the specificity of their different accounts, multiplicity of the process and depth of social and historical determination/transformation we need to follow various techniques provided under ethnographic method and methodological principle. Last section concludes.

Methods, in social science research, are the process of using techniques and following principles in our research set up by methodology. It is the way to study society with the help of various tools and techniques and to acquire knowledge from the social system. According to Brewer 'Methods are merely technical rules, which lay down the procedures for how reliable and objective knowledge can be obtained. As procedural rules they tell people what to do and what not to do if they want the knowledge to be reliable and objective' (Brewer 2000, 02). It plays a central role in social science research.

Methodology is the guide to conduct a research. It directs a researcher how that knowledge from society could be acquired. It deals with the principle, sets the values, ethics and morale to follow throughout a research. It also instructs the researcher how knowledge would be acquired during the entire process of research starting from research design, field study, data collection and various other techniques to interpretation, analysis and generalization. It is 'the theoretical and philosophical framework into which these procedural rules fit' (ibid.). According to S. L. McGregor and Murnane;

The word methodology comprises two nouns: method and ology, which means a branch of knowledge; hence, methodology is a branch of knowledge that deals with the general principles or axioms of the generation of new knowledge. It refers to the rationale and the philosophical assumptions that underlie any natural, social or human science study, whether articulated or not. Simply put, methodology refers to how each of logic, reality, values and what counts as knowledge inform research. On the other hand, methods are the techniques and procedures followed to conduct research, and are determined by the methodology (i.e. sampling, data collection, data analysis and results reporting, as well as theories, conceptual frameworks, taxonomies and models) (McGregor & Murnane 2010, 420).

The debates on method and methodology are central in social science research and its trends keep on changing according to the paradigm shift. According to John D. Brewer the current discussion of method and methodology has found three changes.

First; 'a concern with technical issues has shifted towards theoretical one. The early attention given to clarification and perfection of the procedural rules we know as methods has given way to a concern with methodological issues about the nature of knowledge, evidence and how it is that we know what we know' (Brewer 2000, 04). Now research method is no longer a 'cook book' like following a recipe but it tells us what procedural rule should be followed under the particular circumstance considering the nature of social reality and the theory of knowledge associated with it (Brewer 2000, 04).

Second; research in social science is no longer remain 'a set of discrete and logical steps or stages – planning, access, data collection, analysis, writing up, dissemination of the results – but as a whole event occurring over time, in which stages merge and are not sequenced' (ibid, 05) In modern paradigm the perception of social science research as both process and practice have changed. The importance of locating procedures are now perceived in larger context having stronger methodological impulse (ibid, 05)

Third; the method, in modern trend of social science research, is 'focus on research styles as much as on specific techniques. Feminist research, sensitive research, dangerous field work etc. are styles of research rather than techniques and identification of the problem and procedures associated with such styles of research broadens our understanding of what research is' (ibid, 05-06). Further, another important shift regarding the method in modern trend of social science research has taken place is overshadowing the quantitative style of research qualitative style of research has become more acceptable. Allegation of being stereotype has been removed and it has gained the more positive reputation of being more reflexive, reliable and authentic (Atkinson 1990). Then it is obvious to raise a question related to the philosophical/methodological principle underlying it.

Ethnographic method of research involves collecting information of a community about various modes

of existence, their beliefs, values, myths and social relationship to constitute a holistic description. It is an analysis of a complete way of life of the community. It is the analytical description/study of the way of behavior, their experiences, sufferings, feelings and treatment. It also involves collection of literature, artistic performance, photos, movie or video and various other materials, which can be interpreted and analyzed to know the information related to a community. Researcher seeks 'a detailed and comprehensive description of a people' (Angrosino 2007) or a community by spending an extended amount of time in that community whom he is studying. Their research is known as fieldwork. This method generally appreciate a researcher, for collection of authentic data becoming a participant observer but researchers who are not participant observers can also use the ethnographic method to study social, political and cultural pattern of behaviours and to describe a 'complete way of life' of a community. The elements of traditional modes of existence (caste, class, birth, race, colour, region and religion) are losing their relevance. 'People no longer live exclusively in small, self contained, localized communities. They are involved in extended global networks facilitated by advanced communication and transportation technology' (ibid). In this age of broaden scope, widen network and advanced technology even the local practices have established global connections. The values of democracy and the growing consciousness about freedom, equality and liberty, rights to equal participation, recognition, dignity, self-respect etc. have changed the traditional way of life of people. So, it is very difficult to use both the traditional ethnographic method and the elements of traditional modes of existence in this changed scenario. It is also very challenging task to use same traditional ethnographic method to study society in completely changed mode of life. It demands a researcher to be more equipped with more pragmatic and progressive understanding while using the research method and elements/illustrative case materials for conducting social science research.

What distinguishes a community is their distinctive way of life i.e. culture. The study of a particular community needs study of their particular culture, which involves an observation, examination and description of their collectively shared behaviours, customs, belief, rituals and everyday practices. It needs to understand their myths and to interpret their story and history in collective sense. Further, to 'encounter the dynamics of lived human experience' the beliefs and practices are compared and contrasted in particular context through participant observation of their everyday practices. So does Michael Angrosino, explains that 'ethnography is the art and science of describing a human group- its institutions, interpersonal behaviors, material production, and beliefs' (2007, 14). 'Ethnography literary means a description of people. It is important to understand that ethnography deals with people in collective sense, not with individual. As such, it is a way of studying people in organized, enduring groups, which may be referred to as communities or societies' (ibid, 01). Further, it can be understand by understanding the general philosophical principle of social science research.

The philosophical principle of social science research can be interpreted as the study of 'theories of knowledge' within a methodological context associated with a particular research method. It includes two basic assumptions i.e. 'ontological assumption' and 'epistemological assumption'. The ontological assumption is the assumption about the 'nature of society' while the 'epistemological assumption' deals the nature of knowledge associated with that nature of the particular society under study. These basic assumptions are also subjective to the theoretical framework inherent in methodological trends (Hughes 1990, 41). Further, the methodological trends are not static and it keeps changing with respect of different paradigm shift. The trends, method and technique are different in different paradigm because the philosophical and technical aspects in each paradigm are different. The philosophical aspect of a research covers basic questions related to ethical and moral values, beliefs, and myths. It also covers meanings and assumptions about the visible and invisible world. The technical aspect includes method, technique, tools of data collection (sampling, interview, participant observation etc.) adopted during the research. Each paradigm can be distinguished by their philosophical principle underpinned i.e. methodology and the method and technique adopted to conduct research within that paradigm.

What distinguish methodology are the methodological and philosophical principles underlying in it. According to McGregor and Murnane there are four principles to distinguish research methodologies. These are Epistemological principle, Ontological principle, Logical principle, and Axiological principle. And question such as, what is knowledge? What can be counted as knowledge? What are the sources of knowledge? How people come to know that source and knowledge are related to epistemological principle. Whether the knowledge,

which is going to be discovered during the research exists in that particular culture with the lived experiences of that community? Are those knowledges being practiced to maintain relationship within that (local) power structure and social reality? What counts existence of nature, reality, feelings, experiences, everyday activities and practices of human being or community are dealt with 'Ontological principle'. What are the elements acceptable to build inferences and to develop argument from the logic inferred during conducting research? What are the elements helpful to provide deep insight to have a good analysis of findings? Are those opinions, arguments and inference guiding people's reasoning to form a meaningful thought to prove or disprove the hypothesis? These questions test the 'logical principle' of research methodology. The axiological principle interrogates the fundamental moral and ethical values involve in proper conduct of research. It also fixes the ethics and moral of researcher while conducting interviews and observing the field as a participant observer. What risk amounts to a researcher or participant observer while touching that issue, values, beliefs, feelings, myths, etc related to that field (local people) are the testing ground of 'axiological principle' of a research methodology. However, during ethnographic study these philosophical and methodological questions differs in different paradigm like modernism, post-modernism, positivism, post-positivism, liberal, neo-liberals, Marxist, feminist, critical, phenomenological and other paradigms but they are always there to test viability and reliability of methodology for the valid research. These 'philosophical awareness' provide a researcher required security inferring inducing, deducing and generalizing the findings of research (McGregor & Murnane 2010, 420- 21). So, the question arise here is that what does methodological justification means?

Justification of methodology comes from the kind of ethnographic research based on ontological and epistemological assumptions where researcher need to get closer and better access to the real world to understand both the nature of society and the nature of knowledge hidden in the universe/field of study. This is highly associated with the model of research. To know the social phenomena, patterns of human behavior, way of life, culture etc. a researcher needs to get as close as possible to insider. It needs not only to observe the elements but also understand insider's account, narration, and life history. It needs to understand the epistemological assumptions behind theirs' believe rituals, myths and everyday life practices. It follows 'proper purpose of ethnography' to understand the 'truth' of social phenomena. According to Brewer (2010, 38) 'ethnography best permits these truth statements and that these truth statements reflect the 'real' understanding of the phenomena'. Further, 'humanistic ethnography sees itself as producing a very privileged access to social reality and it is often associated with the forceful assertion that social reality constituted by people's interpretative practices what Denzin call 'interpretative interactionism' (Brewer 2010, 23). So, for me, in order to better represent the real picture of the truth and the true understanding of the social phenomena of Dalit communities in India is the ethnographic method based on humanistic model of social science research. It can be the best-suited methodology for the research related to the ongoing practices of the construction of an alternative identity of Dalit communities in India.

However, ethnography may be the suitable method for this subject but there are two major critiques of ethnography come within the social sciences. First; the natural science critique and second; the post modern critique. The natural science critique comes from the norms and standard set up under positivism. It advocates maintaining the standard of natural science model of social science research. It accuses ethnography not maintaining the standard of science. Followers of natural science model of social research believe that ethnography falls 'short of its standard' by following sub-standard practices.

- + Ethnography focuses on people's ordinary activities.
- + It uses unstructured, flexible and open-ended method of data collection which is unsystematic. Absence of structure prevents the true assessment of data.
- + However, ethnographers are not detached from the research but, depending on the degree of involvement in the setting and their obtrusive presences come to influence the field.
- + Mostly ethnography involve introspection that is not introspection in actual sense rather it is 'auto-observation whereby the researcher's own experiences and attitudes changes while sharing the field has become the part of data' which is not scientific.
- + Ethnography breaches dearly held principles in science concerning the nature of data. Natural science

deals with quantity and collects numerate data while ethnography deals with quality and meaning by means of natural language.

This is why, in order to meet the standard of the natural science model of social science research, according to John D. Brewer, there are three responses can be made. First response proposed by the school of thought which includes Denzin and Lincoln, Becker, Lofland, Bogden and Taylor. It proposes that ethnographer should improve their 'procedural rules' by distinguishing the positivist, post-positivist and modernist 'scientific mode of ethnography' (Denzin and Lincoln 1998, 13-22). If they use a more systematic and structured technique the more accurate is the findings. Ethnographers must differentiate between believes in 'fixed reality' and reality and meaning they want to capture. Further, it must be supported by the causal relationship.

Another set of ethnographers, which include Hughes and Goffman, propose to reject the natural science model while conducting ethnographic study because it is not a 'humanistic model' of social science research. They advocate the primacy of humanistic model of social science research over the natural science model of social science research because human behaviors are the outcome of 'social causation' and 'practical consciousness'. The help of natural science model cannot derive their meaning and understanding. Only humanistic model of social science research has the capacity to articulate and explain this understanding. The ethnographic process of 'reality construction' need to observe and understand the process of what Denzin calls 'interpretative interactionism' and social construction. Concerning itself with the interest of natural science model of social science research will not fulfill the interests of ethnographic method to study a society, a community or a group.

The third school of thought who includes ethnographers like Ian Dey, Bryman and Hammersley, proposed to come out of the dichotomy between these models and the associated binaries like qualitative and quantitative, numbers and meanings and so on. For them numbers and meanings are interrelated and implicit to each other (Dey 1993). 'Social meanings are always better understood when articulated in relation to the numbers' (Brewer 2000, 23). Thinking in the domain of 'postmodern reflexive ethnography' these ethnographers reject the claims of both the model while questioning the ability of any model to represent the reality on three following grounds: 'there is no one fixed 'reality' in the postmodern understanding of nature to capture 'accurately'; all methods are cultural and personal construct, collecting partial and selective knowledge; and since all knowledge is selective, research can offer only a socially construct account of world' (Brewer 2010, 23-24). Postmodern critique of ethnography not only raised the fundamental questions on claims of models but it questioned their legitimacy itself.

Despite these strong critiques, the utility of ethnography is immense. Ethnography is a multidimensional approach. It is both, a method and a methodology. It is an approach to research as well as a means of data collection. Generally the utility of an approach to research is examined through its contribution in generating knowledge, building a theory and the contribution in the development of grounded theory to understand the society. At larger context its utility is judged through the contribution to resolve a social, economic or cultural issue related to a community, a group or a nation. What is their application for further policy making and what should be the model to apply under this policy. Talking about the role of ethnography in generation of knowledge Brewer (2010, 143- 144) is of the opinion that:

Ethnography is an attempt to understand society by the generation of knowledge in a rigorous and systematic manner. It attempt to produce generic propositional answer to question about social life and organization... ethnography can generate knowledge on a variety of subject matters relevant to different academic disciplines and to many occupations and working life.

What we need is to distinguish and categorize various kinds of subject matter into three broader ethnographic practices i.e. 'structural ethnographies, 'articulative ethnographies' and 'practical ethnographies'. For example; to generate knowledge or to understand the way of life within a 'folk structure' of the group the structural ethnography is prescribed. The meanings underlying it are highly subjective to the experiences of the people in the setting under study. The social meaning and knowledge are derived through understanding the patterns of organization and observing the 'field realities'. This kind of generated knowledge is useful in two

respects. First; it is helpful in developing a locally suitable 'native model' to represent their social process and help to understand the structure and their requirement sufficiently. Secondly; it is useful in policy making to resolve the local issues related to that community. This is because 'the meanings are traditionally hidden and have not been explored before' and this is what Burgees call 'undercover agent model' (Burgees 2002, 16). Second procedure relates the process of articulating 'subjective meaning' of actions related to everyday life practices of the people in the field and their settlement. It examines the 'sense making' procedures that how people of that community construct meanings under given situation and life condition through their local pattern of interactions and use of symbols associated with their myths, beliefs, activities and everyday life practices. This is what Brewer (2010, 145) calls it 'articulative ethnographies' where ethnographer with the help of logical subjective common sense reasoning tries to articulate 'how' the people through 'what' process construct their version of reality and the 'subjective meaning' related to them. This process of constructing subjective meaning is not only useful to describe the various aspects of social world rather it helps to pursue the larger interest of their social, economic and cultural life. Further, the every pattern of behavior, way of life, pattern of organization, 'structural regularities in everyday engagements' (Brewer 2010, 149) and other routinized practices of a community, a group or society are highly influenced with the local traditions, myths, beliefs, histories and symbolic meanings. These given situation and life conditions may be orthodox and imperfect to resolve the issues as well as to pursue the interests as a whole but it is very much helpful to understand their 'behavioural conduct'. So, the third kind of subject matter of ethnographic understanding is used to improve 'behavioural conduct' more pragmatic in the way they can generate a new sense of meaning and understanding relevant to that particular community or group what Brewer calls it 'practical ethnographies' and Burgees (2002, 20) keeps it under 'advocate research model'. This is the kind of ethnographic study which 'intervene in the setting and improve the position of people' of that community or group. It suggests them alternative way to improve the 'conduct of social action', patterns of interaction, organizational set up in order to have practical application in policy and to influence the policy makers. So, utilities of ethnographic study lies, first; to generate knowledge both for the sake of exploring ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying in the everyday social, religious, cultural and political engagements of people having shared a common 'way of life'. And, second; for the practical and pragmatic purpose such as to improve the life condition of the people, providing the better political engagements to influence policy makers and to pursue local interests and resolving the larger social issues.

CONCLUSION

This process of production of a kind of culture within a new domain of ontological and epistemological assumptions is emerging as a 'popular culture' from the perspective of establishing socio-economic justice. It is emerging as a most expressive tool for Dalit communities in northern India to overcome the boundaries (Lakshman Rekha) set up by mainstream Hindu religion. This conceptual as well as structural transformation being brought out with this new paradigm shift needs to analyze under modern temporality. What would this new conceptual assumptions mean to that communities? How significantly their evolving culture is helping them to establish a kind of autonomy so that they can challenge the 'hegemony' of mainstream religion.

The modernity and democracy, as the simultaneous process in India, have drastically influenced /changed the way of life of various communities including Dalits in India. Old institutions of society are being broken. New institutions are being installed. Paradigm has been shifted, traditions have become modern, scopes have been broadening, networks have been widened and technologies have gone advanced. The social, political and cultural patterns of interactions and modes of behaviour have changed the perception of thought and understanding of people. The age of globalization has turned into the age of glocalisation. So, the methods, materials and elements under the changed dynamics of life must be changed to study, understand and explore the hidden knowledge of society. This brings ethnographic method of social science research under way of study society. Despite that the modern democracy is very much skeptical to Dalits and other marginalize sections of India the process of altering the social and institutional arrangement has hugely affected the way of life of Dalit communities in India. However, this phenomenon is observed uneven in different parts of India but people of this community have at least started to understand the meaning of democracy, participation and identity.

Through their various attempts they want to change their traditional way of life based on old identity of untouchable, outcaste etc. they are trying to construct their own social, religious and cultural institutions and political organizations that represent their local and indigenous conditions. It is very common that if fruits of democracy and modernity could not be realized in hegemonic brahminical institutions. So, for some communities it becomes obvious to construct alternative institutions through the process of construction, deconstruction, interpretations, re-interpretations, re-evaluation, and re-invention of alternative histories, memories, stories, myths, beliefs and practices. This process is known as 'symbolic interactionism', which aims to construct new inclusive democratic culture replacing hitherto exploitative, irrational and inhuman Brahminical culture. This is what American anthropology referred it to as 'cultural anthropology' and to study this ongoing community based phenomenon, Malinowski and Boas are recommending the field-based research with the help of participant observation technique of data collection, a way of conducting research that places the researcher in the midst of the community he or she is studying (ibid. 37). It is the ethnographic method of research and it has wide variety of theoretical orientations to understand and explain the ongoing phenomena in India.

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