

Department of Sociology
Faculty of Social Sciences
South Asian University - New Delhi

Methodology of Social Sciences
(Compulsory Course for M.A)

Total Credits: 4

Objective of the Course

This course seeks to understand various approaches to sociological knowledge. This is not a course on methods, tools and techniques of doing sociological research. Instead, it deals with the methodological perspectives, grounded in the essential epistemological issues. Given the socio-cultural context of the students from various parts of the region of South Asia, the course creates a creative opportunity for the students to bring their contextual specificities in face to face with the textually informed debates. The mode of transaction of the course will entail substantial lecturing, debating, and recapitulation.

Epistemological Question: Knowledge and Enlightenment

This section briefly introduces the key epistemological question, such as what is knowledge and how to approach it, what ideas on rationality and objectivity surface in the Enlightenment thinking. To make it substantial there will be debates with reference to Descartes' meditation and Kant's submission on the key idea of the Enlightenment. This will be a very brief discussion to flag the main epistemological issues, pertaining to science, cognition, knowledge and approaches. This will seek to connect the enlightenment propositions with the issues in sociological approaches.

Cassirer, Ernst. 2009. *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment*. Princeton University Press (Page 1-50) (optional)

Russell, Bertrand. 2004. *History of Western Philosophy*. London: Routledge (p. 453-455, 484-498, 511-520, 551-560, 600-650)

Descartes, Rene. 2008. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press (p. 10-15)

Descartes, Rene. 2006. *A Discourse on the Method of Correctly Conducting One's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. New York: Oxford University Press (p- 5-35)

Kant, Immanuel. 1998. *Critique of Pure Reason*. New York: Cambridge University Press (Introduction)

Positivism: Philosophical Background and Sociological Promises

This section unfolds the philosophical background of the positivism as a distinct approach to knowledge. Starting with a modest reference to Kant's critique of Pure Reason, this section deals with the works of August Comte and Saint Simon. Positivism is further established as a practical methodological tool with the 'Rules' propounded in the functionalist work of Emile Durkheim and its impact on sociological and social anthropological works. While germs of positivism are

not entirely absent in Marx's approach to knowledge, there also surfaces another significant approach of historicism stressing on historical materialism.

Giddens, Anthony. 1978. Positivism and its Critics, in Tom Bottomore and Robert Nisbet edited. History of Sociological Analysis. London: Heinemann, page: 237-286

Durkheim, Emile. 1982. Rules of Sociological Method. London: Free Press (Introduction & Chapter 1)

Marx, Karl. 2010. The German Ideology. Delhi: People's Publishing House (Chapter 1)

Turner, J. H. 1985. "In Defense of Positivism." Sociological Theory, 3:24 - 30

Mukherji, Partha. Ed. Methodology in Social Research: Dilemmas and Perspectives. Delhi: Sage (Introduction)

Debating Science: Ways beyond Positivism

This section attempts at a succinct debate on the nature and scope of science, its limitations and possibility in the domain of social science, and imperatives to find the approaches beyond positivism. With reference to the arguments of Thomas Kuhn, Karl Popper, and Feyerabend, it seems to chalk out alternative methodological approaches to sociological knowledge. It draws also from sociology of knowledge to underline the anti-foundational, as it were, methodological propositions.

Kuhn, T.S. 1962. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

Feyerabend, Paul. 2010. Against Method: Outline of an Anarchist Theory of Knowledge. 4th edition. New York: Verso

Popper, Karl. 2002. Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge. London: Routledge

Mukherji, Partha. Ed. Methodology in Social Research: Dilemmas and Perspectives. Delhi: Sage (Introduction)

Interpretative and Everyday Life

This section discusses the interpretative approach in Weber's sociology marking a hermeneutic turn in methodological approach to sociological knowledge. Furthermore it looks at the methodological propositions emerging from Phenomenology and Ethnomethodology. It attempts to place the methodological propositions in the larger framework of debate between structuralism and post-structuralism. It settles with the account of the 'social construction of reality' approach.

Weber, Max. 2011. Methodology of Social Science. New York: Transactions (Introduction & Chapter 1)

..... . 1978. Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology. California: University of California Press (Introduction & Chapter 1)

Schutz, Alfred. 1967. Phenomenology of the Social World. Northwestern University Press

Garfinkel, Harold. 1991. Studies in Ethnomethodology. London: Polity Press

Winch, Peter. 2007. The Idea of a Social Science and its relation to Philosophy. London: Routledge

Mukherji, Partha. Ed. *Methodology in Social Research: Dilemmas and Perspectives*. Delhi: Sage (Introduction)

Localizing Approaches: Indigenous, Subaltern, Dalit and Feminist

This section, in the background of methodological pluralism, seeks to comprehend the various ways in which alternative methodological approaches emerged with reference to the local contexts. On one hand it subsumed attempts to make sociology indigenous by bringing in the categories from the local context. On the other there were also limitations characterized by the anxiety of methodological nationalism. In this wake subaltern, Dalit and feminist approaches make sense.

Sarukkai, Sundar & Guru, Gopal. 2012. *The Cracked Mirror: An Indian Debate on Experience and Theory*. Delhi: OUP

Menon, Nivedita. 2012. *Seeing Like a Feminist*. Delhi: Penguin and Zuban (Introduction)

Haraway, Donna. 1988. Situated knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the privilege of partial perspective, *Feminist Studies*, 14(3): 575-599.

Hekman, Susan. 1997. Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint theory revisited. *Sign: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 22(2): 341-365

Mukherji, Partha. Ed. *Methodology in Social Research: Dilemmas and Perspectives*. Delhi: Sage (Introduction)

Reflexivity Turn: Revisiting The Rules

This section attempts to draw a closure, though temporarily, to suggest of the methodological possibilities arising from the reflexive turn in the methodological debates. It elucidates an imperative for each contributor in social science to develop methodological approaches with an eclectic sense.

Bourdieu, Pierre & Wacquant, Loic. 1992 . *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. London: Polity Press (Introduction)

Giddens, Anthony. 1993. *New Rules of Sociological Methods*. London: Polity Press (Chapter 2 & conclusion)

Gouldner, Alvin. 1980. *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*. Basic Books (Conclusion)

Mukherji, Partha. Ed. *Methodology in Social Research: Dilemmas and Perspectives*. Delhi: Sage (Introduction)