

Book Review

Instruments of Social Research by Jaspal Sing

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There is little doubt that teaching sociological methods is the most challenging task for a sociologist. This is also the course that students hate most everywhere (Judkins and Hand, 1994). This is particularly so in the South where we rely on Western books and Western examples. This new book on the craft of sociological research is different in this respect; it is both witty and indigenous. Divided into ten chapters, it covers major areas of social research that undergraduate students of sociology should know. The first chapter interestingly begins with creativity and its process. The analysis is often laced with witty parables and examples drawn from a variety of sources including the *Mahabharata*. I greatly enjoyed the story of an African student who went to Germany, produced his dissertation and got his degree although the only educational qualification he had was a license to kill wild elephants written in Swahili language which the university authorities had innocently accepted as a valid educational qualification for his admission.

The second chapter focuses on Max Weber and his interpretative sociology as an example of non-empirical methods of research. The chapter has very little to do with Weber's methodology. It is strange that the author thought it proper to discuss induction and deduction in this chapter. The third chapter aims at elucidating the meaning, characteristics, and steps of social research and distinctions between pure and applied research. The fourth chapter deals with the meaning and characteristics of scientific methods and provides definitions of various terms related to the scientific method. The fifth chapter focuses on observation as a method of investigation and focuses extensively on participant-observation. It provides a guideline of how to conduct field work and how to do it easily. The sixth chapter deals with how to do interviews and construct questionnaires. The chapter provides practical tips about interviewing. The seventh chapter deals with measurement and scaling in great detail. This chapter will be particularly helpful to students although some of the concepts and themes are presented ambiguously and arbitrarily.

It is very difficult to understand why figure 5 describing Seeman's types of alienation is inserted after an analysis of Max Weber's Protestant ethic. Important entries like subjective class consciousness are discussed in a sketchy way. The types and techniques of sampling are discussed in chapter eight. It is a short chapter but provides a lot of necessary information about types of sampling and its techniques. The techniques of data processing are described in chapter nine. The chapter covers some aspects of elementary statistics such as mean, median and mode. It describes coding, tabulation and preparation of tables. It also briefly discusses correlations and tests of association. This chapter again will be helpful to students. The final chapter briefly elucidates the techniques of report writing.

As I have said earlier the book has been written in an engaging tone with anecdotes and parables which are highly useful for a manual on doing sociology which is most often highly technical and humourless. The examples are often drawn from Indian situation which is valuable and makes the book user-friendly for students of South Asia.

Most sociological text books of the South suffer from three shortcomings. Firstly, the authors are often inadequately familiar with the epistemological basis of their engagement. Secondly, they are dated by decades. Thirdly, they are often unimaginative and dull or weak replicas of Western textbooks. The particular merit of this book is that it is engaging and Indian. It draws upon examples or situations (although hardly scholarly) which suit the South Asian students. But the book reflects methodological preoccupations that are dated by several decades. The concepts discussed in the book are occasionally far from clear. There is hardly any indication that we have

reached the age of mixed methods, feminist epistemology, SPSS, postmodernism or at least, Robert Chambers.

Yet, I recommend the book for class room use along with other more reputed Western texts in the area. Good locally produced text books are essential for improving the quality of teaching and research in sociology in the South. It is a gradual process. Involvement of publishers, professional associations and critical peer reviewing has significant roles to play here. I hope the author would be able to use the impressive series the Sage publishes on research methodology and a few of the high quality recent texts on methodology such as Neuman, 2010 and Price, Status, and Breese (eds), 2009 in the next edition of the book.

References

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Neuman, W. 2010. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. London : Pearson
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