

Knowing the Social World: Perspectives and Possibilities. Edited by N. Jayaram. Orient Black Swan, New Delhi. 2017 Pp. i-xviii, 1-434. Rs.1271

Learning a new method is a life changing experience for those who study social dynamics. This book has suggestions on so many such useful methods that are tried, tested and made available by contributors for academics focusing on South Asia, researchers in non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and students of social work, sociology, and anthropology of India. The title 'Knowing the social world' may initially scare a reader who lacks philosophy training and deep knowledge of India's intellectual legacy. However, the arguments made in twenty carefully selected articles inform issues in collecting empirical data from India.

The major themes such as conducting ethnography in ethnic communities; trends in science and technology studies (STS); overcoming the difficulty in predicting ruling parties; appropriating vistas in methodology opened up by visuals, behavioral psychology, statistical and auditing softwares; and theorising historical, oral and literary materials like autobiographies, life histories, and court records which are circulated at a fast pace, laid out here address emerging problems faced by any scholar globally.

In introduction, N. Jayaram distinguishes between positivist and ethnographic traditions of conducting fieldwork (p.8). He relies on this typology to determine the selection and deployment of articles too. Furthermore, he stands for combining statistics, and cultural interpretation. First, as we live in the digital era, the use of positivist tradition that carries the burden of surveys, measurements, and mathematical analysis is a must in any pursuit to understand empirical reality. Doubtlessly, smartphone apps, emails, and the advent of excellent cartography increase the efficiency in documenting social networks which consists of spatial-temporal relations

between people and things. In India, State apparatus of filing information have become more transparent when Right to Information Act (RTI) set in (see Sthitapragyan Ray, pp.119-140); biometric technology such as Aadhar card is in vogue; and judicial activism and public interest litigations (PIL) catapult social transformation (see Sawmya Ray, pp.263-278) pointing us towards new opportunities of data collection. The articles written by R. Bhagat, M.R. Narayana, Siddharth Swaminathan, and the one co-authored by D. Rajesekar, E. Berg and R. Manjulalay list guidelines on trends in research incorporating these data even as in the backdrop, aborigines, Muslims, weaker among women, Dalits, and old people rely on the State which pushes privatization drives. After reading the whole book, we will be left thinking if there are politically correct steps available other than the State providing laptops and cars to the poor whereas in metropolitan cities people may buy goods and services of their own as mentioned by R.B. Bhagat (p.23).

Second, as we try to understand meanings of social actions, the art of interpreting texts, analyzing visuals, and bringing in political economy requires to be perfected because in case we fail to do so we will miss the impending revolution in the culture of writing. While archives from police stations (thana) (see, Meeta Rajivlochan & M. Rajivlochan, pp.247-262); maps of liquor shops (sharabkhana); life stories from underworld, and details on rituals in prisons (see Viay Raghavan, pp.190-207); and ethnography of changing modes of toiling in the paddy fields (Vineetha Menon, pp.139-166) are becoming available majority of contributions are revising existing categories of analysis.

Third, given that our life as anthropologists takes unpredictable twists and turns at the sites, alertness, sensitiveness, and attention to details becomes a major ethical imperative to avoid the danger of repeating the acts of domination as our predecessor did. For instance, Tiplut Nongbri writes how her experience of doing ethnography in her ancestral village in Meghalaya, in northeast India, was haunted by the shadow of a previous American ethnographer, and unfavorable prevailing conditions as people doubted her loyalty as she was settled in New Delhi. As recently northeastern States are gaining more attention from those who study societies in India, she goes on to remind novices that it is pertinent to use senses properly to avoid major mistakes (p.334). In another article, Badri Narayan elucidates that his three monographs on political freedom was the end result of a painstaking teamwork that forged not only a top-down approach but also tried to form pavilion associations with adi-Dalits (pp. 359-376). At times,

while understanding deep plays, an anthropologist wears a white mask of indifference and professionalism because the divide between fieldworker and the subjects is a harsh reality as the case studies of Rahul Choragudi in southeast India (pp.377-393) and Hyun Jung Kim in New Delhi (pp.394-406) suggest. By contrast, Jesna Jayachandran encounters love expressed through the art of deception from Keralites living in transit spaces in a way alluding to the reader that journalists join power elites in the creation of ideologies (pp. 406-424).

I wish there were more articles on the manner in which cultural theories, political economy, and Indian sociology are put together forging varieties of interdisciplinary methods. While going through the book, I was also thinking about the limits of enumerative politics vindicated by post-colonial elites too. Anyway, I recommend this book to scholars who have cultivated the habit of visiting the field before writing about grounded reality and to readers who are looking for ideas to assemble information.

Manaf Kottakkunnummal