

that carry my article are: *Indigenous Psychology* edited by Virgilio G. Enriquez, 1990, Philippine Psychology Research and Training House, Diliman, and *Indigeneity and Universality in Social Science* edited by Partha Nath Mukherji and Chandan Sengupta. 2004. Sage Publications, New Delhi.

5. The latest example is about the use of the word “indigenous”. The Delhi Edition of Times of India of 30 September 2004 has an item on page 13, titled, “We are tribals, not indigenous”. The Report says: “The government’s decision amounts to a rejection of the demand by certain groups that tribal people should be classified as “indigenous”, a term popular with Western sociologists and anthropologists.” In my discussion on *Indigenization* of Social Sciences I have distinguished between indigenous and indigenized.

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Intellectual Interest, Ideas and Social Science Research: Trends and Perspectives

Amitabh Kundu

I consider it honour and privilege to be invited to speak at the annual conference of the Indian Social Science Association, paying a tribute to the work and life of Professor Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji. This nonetheless also gives me a feeling of challenge and responsibility as I find myself inadequate in several ways to rise up to this occasion. This great legendary figure who could transcend barriers of different branches of social sciences and link its quintessence with that of arts and aesthetics could provide a vision and perspective on the evolutionary process of culture and civilization in India. This perspective I believe must be kept as central in any effort at developing methodology for analyzing the process of contemporary social development.

Decades ago, Professor Mukerji had regretted the fact that "Sociology of knowledge does not go much beyond the statement of a tenuous connection between the weather of social change and climate of intellectual opinion". The understanding of this linkage nonetheless is extremely important in the context of the evolution and dramatic changes in the methodology of social science research in our contemporary times. This assumes still greater importance as interests of the global capital market have come to dictate and even determine the methodology of social analysis that currently feed into the policies and strategies of development at national and local levels. It is in this context that I have chosen in this lecture to examine, in the words of Dr. Mukerji, the role of "the verbalisers, the scribblers and the

rationalisers" in legitimizing the drifts and shifts in methodological premises and nuances and their impact on the process of social change.

Introduction

Pursuit of knowledge or expanding its frontiers is considered by a large section of researchers as an objective in itself, sublime enough not to require any external justification. Research enlightens the human soul and takes people closer to truth or sublimity. It determines the super structure which permeates and influences the material existence of human beings. To these researchers, unraveling the mystery of nature or of societal dynamics should be a reward in itself which humanity should hold high as a lofty idea, to be pursued through scientific investigation. Hence, anyone asking the question like how to apply the knowledge in solving real world problem would imply, to this school of thought, that the enquirer is in pursuit of an inferior and possibly less worthy knowledge. Philosophers like Socrates, Plato and Euclid in a way despised 'natural philosophy' which was equated to materialistic science. The famous story of the student, who asked Plato (probably legendary, told of Euclid as well) the relevance of the knowledge he has acquired in real practice, being turned out of the Academy by a slave after being given a small coin, carries the message that knowledge is basically for the abstract good of the soul and not for designing a practical policy oriented to a problem. This perspective has a universal appeal and a large following in university departments and research institutions in India even today.

Importance of Basic or Theoretical Research

India has the proud privilege of not merely having a tradition of developing fundamental knowledge since ancient period but also of producing a large number of scholars like Radhakrishnan, D.P. Mukerji, P.C. Mahalanobis, Amartya Sen etc., at our contemporary times. They have made seminal contributions in the development of knowledge as also socio-economic research relevant for policy. Currently, however, there are several researchers working at universities and research organizations in various branches and aspects of social sciences who are not particularly concerned whether

their studies are of direct relevance to contemporary development issues. Furthermore, one hears of resentments, complaints etc., when they are required to mobilize resources by engaging themselves in policy oriented projects.

It is argued that the researchers who have 'theoretical inclinations' should have the right and freedom to pursue basic or fundamental research and contribute to development of knowledge system *without any direct reference to societal problems*. Basic research is defined not as something which is irrelevant for society or development policy but that not being motivated or guided by immediate policy concerns. These researchers often take a critical view of the studies funded by agencies that are active in the development field, having a definite socio-political perspective on contemporary issues and well-defined development agenda. When the agency has a pre-defined research perspective, it is likely that the issues like "why this scheme?" would be bypassed as the focus would be on "how to implement the scheme"? It is argued that '*scientific truth*' becomes the major casualty within this perspective since vested interests tend to prevail and determine the direction of solutions.

Yet another line of criticism against policy oriented studies is that contemporary development policies have become neutral to socio-economic research. *Not many of the political leaders and even administrators responsible for policy making have the inclination, time and capacity to go through the relevant research studies*. Most of the seminars and workshops organized to 'bridge the gaps' turn out to be forums wherein politicians and bureaucrats give opening and valedictory addresses. The organizers record and send the policy recommendations of the seminar dutifully to the sponsoring public agency that are duly filed and forgotten. Notwithstanding the relevance of the studies and objectivity of data base, methodology etc., the conclusions are likely to be accepted only when these are in line with the thinking of the policy makers. Given this framework of decision making in the country, conducting serious policy research with a scientific commitment makes little sense, it is argued. Furthermore, an individual researcher gets the chance of influencing

policy only when (s)he decides to become a part of the government apparatus. But here again, the process of selecting the researchers precludes inclusion of possible dissenting voices, barring a few cases that become media news.

One interesting case highlights how marginal the government considers the contribution of researchers in development policy. Having foreign experts in decision making bodies of the government like Planning Commission, different Ministries and Departments etc. had become an issue of major political controversy in recent past. Notwithstanding the merit of the arguments in favour or against the proposition, it is shocking that the government, when confronted with the criticism of opening space for foreign interests in internal decision making, decided to resolve the issue by not associating any expert of Indian or foreign origin. The decision implicitly revealed that the government considers the contribution of these experts of marginal importance which can be dispensed with if that helps in staying clear of a controversy. Understandably, this can only strengthen the skepticism with regard to government functionaries being keen on having research inputs in decision making process.

Rationale for and Resistance to Policy Research in India

Many of the development departments of central, state and local governments, public sector units, para-state agencies etc., presently have substantial resources but little internal capacity to address research questions, emanating in the context of their own policies and programmes. In the absence of adequate in-house facilities, these have sought help of researchers from outside. Understandably, getting the stamp of approval from an outside researcher rather than the internal staff, even when the expertise is available, enhances the credibility of the programmes in public. Similarly, many of the international development cum banking agencies have sought validation of their projects and perspectives by engaging consultants. This has been considered important also for contextualizing their projects and mobilizing public opinion in their favour. The private corporate sector and non-governmental organisations have also solicited research

support for better designing of activities and their proper implementation.

There has been, however, resistance from a section of researchers to go in for policy research. This has often been attributed to their reluctance to switch over from 'scholarly work to management oriented system' of research. For undertaking a policy linked study sponsored by a development agency, a researcher has to adopt a system of accountability (which is mechanical but often annoying and time consuming), of monitoring and meeting deadlines for periodic submission of progress reports / accounts and for completing the study. A lot of entrepreneurship initiatives are expected of scholars for success in getting a project, it is alleged. Added to that are the hassles involved in project management and delivery of the output in a required format.

The opposition to policy oriented research could be largely due to the indolence on the part of researchers to shake off their lethargic syndrome and make efforts to become aware of the contemporary policy issues and their socio-economic implications. In many universities in India, the syllabi approved decades ago in academic bodies determine the scope and coverage of teaching, examination and research. There is a low level equilibrium of interests, determined on the basis of the principle of Pareto Optimality wherein all players seem happy or resigned. The equilibrium serves the 'interest' of all concerned - the students, teachers and educational administrators. Understandably, no one wants to destabilize the balance or to strive for equilibrium at a higher level of academic excellence. The resistance to policy research or anything new can, thus, be viewed as an alibi for building a rationale for not disturbing the peaceful life of limited academic engagement, currently prevailing in several research institutions and university systems.

It is nonetheless true that a few social scientists have kept away from policy research due to their conviction that policy makers are unrelenting to scientific argument and capable of brushing aside all inconvenient research results for pursuing their vested interests.

However, withdrawal of these scholars from the initiatives of bridging the gap between research and policy can only make matters worse and strengthen the hands of the vested interest. One can, on the other hand, cite cases wherein research results have impacted on the thinking of the government, brought about constitutional amendments, sensitized the bureaucracy, created popular movement and led to path breaking judgments by judiciary. Indeed, the impact is generally not direct and immediate and may even be imperceptible in the short run but that could not be an argument for despair and academic surrender. There are unfortunately, not many studies demonstrating the linkage between research and development policy or quantifying the societal benefits of an improved policy decision, when backed up by research. There are serious methodological issues involved in assessing the impact of research since the costs and benefits are often non-measurable, indirect and accrue with a considerable time lag. It would, nonetheless, be naive to deny the importance of research in policy making under any political disposition in the country.

It may not be fair to hold that political leaders and policy makers always work with a secret personal agenda. Many among them sincerely and desperately look for definite evidence for continuing with a definite set of programmes, modifying or discarding these altogether. They need an empirical basis for justifying their action. Planning Commission and the Ministries concerned with development, for example, need professional inputs in defining poverty or expanding its scope and coverage, identifying backward regions for directing a part of their funds to target population in the context of the programmes of poverty alleviation. Their purposes are genuine; they sincerely seek guidance for going ahead in implementation of their schemes in the most appropriate manner. Indeed, they would not like to be told by a purist academician or a model builder through their commissioned study that poverty and backwardness have multiple dimensions and hence it is impossible to attach a numerical value to that or that ranking of districts or states in terms of backwardness is illogical. Similarly, a government department launching Special Economic Zones (SEZ) for employment

generation in rural areas can be pardoned for conducting a study to identify the optimal locations and not for questioning the political economy of SEZ itself.

Unwillingness of social scientists to dirty their hands with practical questions and remain above political controversy has indeed opened the windows and doors for vested interests. Such inhibitions combined with their incapacity to come out with definite policy perspectives due to lack of consensus has enabled the political leaders to operate freely in policy space. The 'principled approach' of avoiding explicit value judgment has thus resulted in marginalization of social scientists.

It is a happy development that researchers are slowly becoming aware of the inanity of taking a high brow and puritanical approach with regard to neutrality and objectivity of research and of sacrificing even the limited space available in policy making. Amartya Sen, for example, has been squarely critical of welfare economics due to its inadequacy in not only not finding solutions to crucial social problems pertaining to poverty and hunger but also for not having the capacity to pose the questions in a right manner. His seminal contributions on the theory of collective choice notwithstanding, much of his recent writings directly impinge on contemporary development policy. Likewise, many other senior researchers have at a later stage in their career, shifted from pure theoretical issues to those that are problem oriented. A few have even admitted that their lifetime's work in social or economic theory has made little impact in changing the face of the earth or global / national policy in the desired direction than their less sophisticated problem oriented research.

One important illustrative case would be that of building composite indices with the objective of ranking alternative situations, policy configurations, regions or countries. Indeed, obtaining collective ordering based on ordering by individual members of a community was considered an "impossible task" within the strict confines of welfare economics, after the dictate that came from none else than Kenneth J. Arrow in the early fifties. The same can be said of the exercises of constructing indices of aggregative development,

combining a set of socio-economic indicators. Interestingly, these exercises have gained enormous popularity and respectability in our contemporary times. Indeed, ranking of countries (or regions) in terms of their development commitments or performance, as given by UN and other international organizations (or national governments), has put the former in a competitive mode in the arena of social and human development. Happily, many top-ranking economists have lent their names and support to such exercises realizing that these have led to larger allocation of resource in the areas of social concern and improving performance of public agencies. Unfortunately, research with high level theoretical and empirical rigour, is not known to have achieved this kind of impact within a short time.

A section of social scientists within the traditional academic system in India are coming forward to address the research needs of the state and public agencies by accepting sponsored research projects as mentioned above and this must be welcomed. Many among them have sought funds from private foundations and international development agencies that have flowed in rather generously in the present market friendly period of globalization. Understandably, those willing to take up the policy research have been in high demand which have heightened their national visibility. Even if this is attributed to their market friendliness in their approach, it must not be held against them in the present globalizing environment provided they are pursuing policy research within explicit and well defined analytical frame and with empirical rigour.

New Institutions and their Modalities of Policy Research: An Area of Concern

Notwithstanding whether it is laziness or well reasoned reservations deterring the social scientists taking up the challenge of policy research and putting forward clear strategic options before the planners, media and general public, this has prompted the development agencies, including the government, seek easier options. Private research institutions, consultancy organizations, individual consultants etc., have come forward to meet the demand of policy-

oriented research, their number multiplying several times during the last decade and a half. Many of them are doing a roaring business. Not only have they shown greater efficiency in bidding for these projects with appropriate formats and flexibility in meeting the stipulations of the sponsoring agencies than their counterparts within the university system, but they have also developed the capacity to meet the monitoring formalities, submit progress reports as per stipulations and complete the project within the given time frame.

Good Research: A Casualty of 'Fast Research'

The efficiency of the new generation research agencies in meeting the obligatory deadlines for progress report and final report submission and other logistic requirements as also compliance of accounts formalities in the prescribed format has often been achieved at the cost of quality of research and through oversimplification of the complexity of the problem under consideration. It is not a matter of great secret that in many cases, the agencies have been made aware ex-ante of the directions in which solutions are being sought by the sponsoring organization. The latter also have found the agencies efficient and less problematic since these come up with deliverables as per the project requirements within the stipulated time. The agencies have often shown maturity or common sense not to ask questions beyond the Memorandum of Understanding and the intelligence to anticipate and work with the given policy perspective.

The relationships between these agencies and their sponsors in public or private sector have shaped up excellently well during the last few years. A few of the researchers under the university system have also found it convenient to work through this route as this has enabled them to pursue their academics without much bureaucratic hassle as also earn handsome honoraria, bypassing the procedural formalities. They are conscious that the objective of such research studies is to satisfy the stakeholders and a few decision makers and not to face the scrutiny of high level scholarship or get into an open public debate. As a result, the academic output is guided by practical considerations like timely submission of the project report to the best satisfaction of the clients.

For the private research agencies, there is an exigency of completing the project in hand and move on to the next study which more often than not leads to compromising with the rigour in data analysis and limiting the depth, scope and coverage of investigation. Many of these agencies have research advisory committees but they mostly advice on how to ensure satisfaction of the clients and enlarge the business of research. Given this perspective, the twin objectives of doing good research and doing good business can go together only up to a certain point.

The agencies entrusted with the research task often come out with conclusions that sound reasonable and acceptable. However, these are arrived at often not through systematic analysis of the data but through discussions with "informed people," concerned officials in the field and the bureaucrats responsible for releasing the instalments of the grant. In defence of such studies, it can be argued that complexity of societal problems and that of social science analyses often result in uncertainty, ambiguity and equivocal solutions. The conclusions or recommendations, therefore, cannot and indeed, should not be strictly linked to the results of statistical analysis of the available data. Understandably, policy makers would like to be presented with a definitive policy scenario and its impact unequivocally. In the absence of this, the people affected by the policy may be in a dilemma or confusion which would reduce the acceptability of the policy instrument. Further, as noted above, paucity of time often forces the consultants to put forward only a broad vision by skipping the detailed analysis and let the exact projects and schemes emerge from the latter. Understandably, they often do not make their data base, methodology and statistical results public for smooth sailing of the project.

Often the research agencies generate their own database for the analysis rather than utilizing the available secondary data on the subject. Indeed, understanding the conceptual and empirical issues linked to the process of collection and analyses of the existing database, over-viewing the methodological debates on that etc., involve considerable time and effort. Consequently, collecting data to meet the requirements of the study has become an easy way out. However, as

the time and financial resources available for such studies are often limited, questions have been raised pertaining to adequacies and biases in data collection, objectivity in designing the questionnaire and neutrality of the canvassing mechanism, besides methodological questions regarding sampling and non-sampling errors due to small sample size. The robustness of the estimate, thus generated at national or state level and their suitability to be fed into policy, have also been questioned.

It is really unfortunate that many of the large international organizations having a long-term development stake in India have done scarcely little to utilize or strengthen the existing data system in the country, despite the latter being considered more robust than even those in many developed countries. Instead of supporting creation of temporally and cross sectionally comparable data base, they have encouraged researchers / agencies to generate field level data and undertake guided research projects in the country.

Easy Doorway for Vested Interests

Many of the new generation research agencies have shown their willingness to limit themselves to a given ideological perspective, use the recommended data base and methodology and even frame solutions in the directions identified by the sponsoring organizations. In situations when multiple solutions are possible with varying levels of probability, the agencies have gone by their socio-political judgment and come out with recommendations that are practical and acceptable. They often do not make the procedures for data analysis or the method of selecting the exact solution public to avoid controversy on the limitations of the exercise or the hidden agenda.

Many of the credit rating agencies in the country, for example, are rating development projects of states or local bodies in terms of their credit worthiness in the market. They come out with alpha numeric rating which gives a common user a feeling that it is emerging through a complex, scientific and foolproof process. The agencies are reluctant to divulge the exact methodology for arriving at the rating. They would argue that the rating is not based on the commercial returns or

other information available in the project documents since long term development concerns and certain social obligations are given due weightage in arriving at the final rating. This is a reasonable proposition on which none may have an objection. They would nonetheless not mention the method of incorporating these concerns into the evaluation framework and or arriving at the final rating. It could be argued, possibly not without a reason that a transparent and explicit delineation of the methodology would result in manipulation of the data pertaining to the development project as the information base, particularly at local level, are often not collected within a standardized format, outside the sphere of influence of interested parties.

One may note that a few of the organizations that are into credit rating, influencing the selection of projects and resource mobilization by the development organizations, assisting in launching and monitoring these are also undertaking research studies on their behalf. CRISIL, ICRA, CARE etc., the agencies that carry considerable weight in shaping opinions in capital market and in implementation of several urban sector projects also have research wings to analyse the trends, pattern and perspective of urbanization and set a perspective for future development. Understandably, this 'perspective' would be affected by the projects for which the agencies have done credit rating and are interested in promoting. This leads to intermixing of interests that would adversely affect the "objectivity of analysis" and the capability to respond to the concerns for environment, equity and social justice in building the perspective or vision of development.

It should be a matter of concern that such perspectives are getting translated into projects and schemes by 'stakeholders' who actually are the organizations or persons that have a financial stake in the project through provisioning of land, finance and expertise. When they meet to work out a strategy for implementation in "stake holder's meeting", that have often been made mandatory, the objective turns out to be that of building compromises for sharing the benefits. Indeed, such meetings are attended by a few senior academics, retired bureaucrats and community leaders who try to make themselves visible and

audible. Understandably, the conflict of interest among persons attending the meeting is generally sharp and consequently the consensus does not go beyond specifying a broad vision that successfully underplay or hide the areas of dissention. Such open-ended vision documents could only promote a market based perspective, undermining important social concerns. This can be attributed to the lack of specificity in the documents and propositions being built into it without any reference to empirical evidence or methodology of analysis.

Another factor which has helped these agencies gain status is their capability to put the city or region development authorities, seeking the consultancy services, in contact with national and global actors., identified as possible collaborators in the project. The former not only provide the clients a clear cut action agenda with appropriate prioritization but also give a roadmap for project implementation, including a list of collaborators or stake holders. In fact, the latter are taken into confidence by the agencies in the process of project preparation. The clients could hardly ask for more. They are no longer struck with a grandiose design or ambitious Master Plans for which there are no takers, as was the case before. A list of possible and willing partners and a clear-cut strategy for mobilizing financial resources is what a local authority requires. Even when the agency gives only a vision document, it is prepared in a manner that allows its immediate translation into a set of concrete projects. The authority can straightaway start commissioning the projects since the stake holders have implicitly agreed to their role and contribution. The only issue of serious concern is whether this mechanism of project preparation does not imply a departure of the past practice of incorporating socio-environmental dimensions in the development vision and does it not open the door for vested interests.

Research Studies Guided by Ideas and Visions

It is possible to argue that the strong vested interests capturing or controlling planning and decision making process is difficult in a democratic set up like in India. One may agree with John Maynard

Keynes that the importance of "ideas" in setting up a vision and selection of projects and schemes has not been recognized or investigated adequately. Keynes holds that "the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist.... I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas... the ideas which civil servants and politicians and even agitators apply to current events are not likely to be the newest". Undoubtedly, it is far more difficult to fight out a misconceived or goaded idea and hence the risks from that are far greater from that than from a well identified vested interest.

It is nonetheless correct to hold that vested interests more often than not hide behind such "ideas", making it difficult to be identified and thus gain general empathy. Indeed, Professor D.P. Mukerji had argued that most of the ideas at our contemporary times can, without much difficulty, be traced to certain group or sectarian interest. The latter, nonetheless, must assimilate and accommodate, he argued, the concerns of somewhat diverse interest groups in order to acquire the status of an idea for making an impact on policy. It should transform itself from a particular to a general conceptual category and derive legitimacy within a larger analytical framework. In this, "various means of communication, crude such as radio blasts, flashing headlines, uniforms and flags or as subtle as theorizing, symbolizing, idealizing and all the paraphernalia of the so-called intellectual interest" are helpful. Pressure groups and lobbies are facts of democratic life, always active in moulding public opinion. However, in order to do that in a democratic system, they must fabricate their interests intelligently through their 'verbalizers, scribblers and rationalizers' so as to be passed on smoothly and innocuously to other groups, considered allies. Or alternately, these could be linked to objectives considered sublime for humanity or in larger social interest. It must undergo a process of crystallization "so that the sectional interests appear to be social, universal and eternal". Indeed, after this

"degree of abstraction has been attained, *ideas* (emphasis added) seem to acquire an inner momentum of their own".

Globalization has brought to the forefront a large number of national and international research agencies and consultancy firms in India, as mentioned above, that have a high standing in academic arena and big names to flaunt as their resource personnel. A distinct change in perspective of research is perceivable with their entry in the country that cannot be attributed to a definite vested interest. Their strong point, besides their global experience and internationally acclaimed staff, is their capacity to project a vision of development or promote "ideas" like good governance, transparency, accountability, decentralization, legal streamlining etc. Many of these have no time, patience or even expertise to undertake detailed socio-economic analyses that characterized similar project preparation in the country, even before a decade. These are guided by the 'ideas' as noted above and this alleviated the need for an in-depth analysis. They elaborate and interpret these ideas in a particular manner and create a vision of development based on that. Since they are able to mobilize widespread support for the ideas nationally and internationally, it becomes easy to sell the vision to policy makers without having to translate it into a development scenario.

One important illustrative case would be preparation of Master Plans at city level. Several of the metropolitan cities have assigned this responsibility to the national and global research agencies that have mushroomed in recent years. These have come up with documents that can be called, and indeed are often known as, *vision documents*. Detailed projections of demographic and socio-economic parameters have been considered unnecessary as these documents are prepared based on 'the globally acknowledged ideas'. Furthermore, it is argued that the organizations implementing the Plans have no control or mandate over the socio-economic parameters and consequently need not bring these under the ambit of policy and even the vision document. Once such a document is accepted and the stakeholders identified, it is for the latter to detail out the schemes, projects, and modalities for implementation as also deal with their socio-economic

consequences. Indeed, replacement of Master Plans by vision documents has increased the scope of 'ideas', not based on any rigorous research of current development process, in decision making.

The days of city Master Plans that required engagement of teams of researchers, analysing land use pattern, population distribution and location of economic activities going to zonal or even ward level, undertaking validation of results through working group discussions, consultations, workshops etc., seem to be over. These procedures delay finalization of plan and produce a plan which is inflexible, impracticable and non-implementable, it is alleged. Understandably, the difficulties have become manifold in the period of globalization that has seen *withdrawal of state agencies from many spheres*. A vision document, on the other hand, has been hailed as less time consuming, practical and least constraining as it only gives a broad framework leaving the task of detailing out to stakeholders.

Unfortunately, serious research has become a casualty in the process. The vision, in the context of say a city development plan becomes a manufactured consensus based on 'an idea' articulated in very general terms like what should be broad morphology of the city, how environmental and equity concerns need to be addressed, what would be the requirements or expectations of the stakeholders from public agencies etc. Understandably, such vision documents have plenty of rhetoric and stipulations like 'all the projects must incorporate concern for environment, equity, social justice' etc. It at best delineates only the broad contours of development strategy and the stakeholders are expected to work out the details within a participatory mode of governance. Unfortunately, it gives no specific detail on, for example, how many and where the slum dwellers will be accommodated - within the city core or its periphery; how would they access basic amenities; who would provide funds for these etc. No definite indicator is worked out by which the fulfilment of the broad objectives or stipulations can be monitored. This undoubtedly opens up the doors for vested interests although the 'idea' itself cannot be blamed for that since there would be several other genuine interest groups, backing up the idea.

Compromising the Methodology of Research

The national level organizations in different countries, created to promote, guide and monitor social science research, have from time to time urged the researchers to take up policy oriented studies, proposed modalities for doing so and made available resources for the purpose. Researchers have been advised to develop their proposals in consultation with policy makers and involve the latter in various stages of data collection, analysis and drafting of the report. Policy makers and administrators, nonetheless, have generally not been very enthusiastic about reports since that involves efforts on their part to study these and their policy implications. Further, they might find some of the results inconvenient in the context of their own dispositions or ongoing programmes. Also, when the planners and policy makers are actively engaged in the consultation process, there is a risk that they would interfere in the conduct of the research which may not be desirable.

An important criticism levelled against the researchers under the university system has been that they do virtually little for dissemination or 'marketing' of their findings which is responsible for their limited impact on policy. They have, therefore, been advised to bring out brochures, pamphlets, video films etc., highlighting the conclusions of the studies, their dissemination through newsletters, newspapers, journals and other media channels. One would argue that these are worth consideration although this might imply researchers making some efforts, stepping down from their high academic pedestals. There is no harm if they come out of their shell and take initiative to interact with the decision making process and make themselves approachable and comprehensible. However, there are great dangers of compromising with integrity and objectivity of research when researchers are out to sell their products. For improving marketability of research output and making these acceptable for policy makers, researchers may adopt different kinds of methodologies. Hammering out a few attractive figures through data adjustments, highlighting success stories and underplaying their contextual specificities, constructing and sporting composite indices

with fanciful titles etc., are some of the tricks of the trade that seem to have become popular in recent times. Generating controversies deliberately at the stage of data collection / analyses, creating media hype and public expectation regarding the research study etc., have also been noted to impact positively on the marketability. These, however, have often led to compromising the quality of the study. Surprisingly, that has often been considered of marginal significance in the study. Surprisingly, that has often been considered or marginal significance in the context of the overwhelming benefits if results of the study are accepted by policy makers. The hiatus between good research and policy research and its implications for the choice of projects and their implementation, therefore, needs to be given serious attention.

The Way Forward

The need for bridging the gap between research and policy cannot be over emphasized in our contemporary times. It is indeed true that social scientists have the responsibility of looking beyond the immediate developmental issues. They must raise questions pertaining to macro level political economy, structural parameters etc., affecting the perspectives in the long run and put forward a vision that may not be immediately implementable in the field. They should be able to comment on the superstructure that governs the structure of the society and economy. However, this cannot be an excuse for shying away from the challenge of analysing the contemporary development scenario.

The response of the academic community under the traditional system of universities and research institutions in the country in meeting this challenge unfortunately has at best been tardy. Vast potential or researches are, thus, unfortunately remaining unutilized. Correspondingly, one notices mushrooming of private research agencies, consultancy firms and researchers on their own. Many of these have succeeded in research business by taking up any project that came their way through formal or personal networks. The logic succeeding in research business has often forced them to compromise

on the scope and coverage of investigation, quality of database and rigour and depth of empirical investigation. One cannot but feel sorry for this as serious research has been a casualty of this process. All this has happened in the name of promoting policy research. It would be important to create awareness regarding the dangers of pursuing this easy research path. The equilibrium of conveniences of all parties concerned - the sponsor, researchers and implementers - poses a major threat to healthy research in the country which must be challenged. This is a responsibility that the social scientists of today's generation can afford to shirk only at the cost of making policy decisions being left to bad or motivated research.

Massive funds have become available from international organizations and private channels for research in recent years. These unfortunately are being cornered by the research agencies mentioned above, that have more management and less research capability. Their number has multiplied due to high profitability in this sector. In many cases, the "required deliverables" of the projects are churned out mechanically, keeping the interests and requirements of the sponsoring agencies as the key objective. This is a matter of serious concern since these are the ones that are feeding into policy and determining the programmes and projects of both public as well as private agencies in the development sphere. The major challenge would be to ensure that the ideas or visions that are currently underlying the research methodology are backed up by rigorous empirical analysis within a theoretical frame. Unfortunately, the research agencies mostly fall for the tools and techniques and adopt the analytical framework that are currently in vogue and help in meeting the formalities of monitoring and project deadline.

Notwithstanding the lukewarm response of Indian academia, working within the traditional system for decades in getting into policy research for a variety of reasons, the number opting for it has increased in recent years. This is primarily due to dictations and persuasions from the government urging the universities and research institutions to mobilize at least a part of their resources through core grant or project funding-from government departments, public and semi-

public agencies, other national and international organizations and private institutions. This trend of increased engagement of academics in policy research must be welcomed.

The researchers here must get out of their lethargic shells and take initiative for undertaking research projects. For this fund have become available from sources other than the traditional sources like University Grants Commission, Indian Council of Social Science Research etc. Massive funds are available from development departments of the government, both at central as well as state levels. More importantly, funds are available from outside the government, as noted above. To facilitate the researchers in this initiative, the university / institute administrations must review their procedural requirements and simplify bureaucratic formalities. Correspondingly, the researchers must also learn to comply with the requirements of project preparation, submission of progress reports, accounting and meeting the deadlines. It is only then that they would be able to get in a big way into policy oriented and problem solving studies, enabling them to play a role in shaping, modifying and monitoring the programmes and projects at central, state and local levels.

*** Professor D.P. Mukherji Memorial Lecture delivered on the occasion of International Conference of ISSA held from September 29 to October 3, 2007 at Agra (India).**

Professor Amitabh Kundu, an economist by training. taught at the Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He was Awarded **Prof. D P Mukerji Fellowship for Senior Social Scientists-2007** of the Indian Social Science Association at the International Conference held at Agra from September 29 to October 3, 2007.

Some Suggested Readings: Indian Sociology

Rajiv Gupta

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