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The last decade has seen a growing interest in alternative research paradigms in social science research. Much of the impetus for this search for alternatives has come from the experiences of professionally trained researchers themselves who found their research paradigm inadequate to provide answers to all the questions they had. Yet another push towards search for alternatives has emerged from the continuing failures of developmental efforts in the Third World as well as enhanced visibility of pockets of poverty within the First World. As accepted and prevalent models for development, growth and change begin to show cracks, policy-makers and administrators are yelling for "something" that may work, thereby restoring confidence in their positions of authority and themselves.

At the same time, there are increasing trends of successful development efforts initiated and organised by common people across the world. These have been variously labelled as "rebellions", "revolts", "revolutions", "movements", etc. Such successful efforts by common people, in many instances poor, illiterate and rural people, underscore the "correctness" of their knowledge and paradigms for development and change: after all, they must have based their efforts on "right" assumptions as they have succeeded.

The frustrated professional researchers and dejected planners/administrators appear to be now looking into these successful attempts by common people in order to seek those alternatives. 'Peoples' Participation as a catch-all phrase has emerged partly due to this 'run for the gold'. And now, the President of the World Bank as well as the Party Chiefs of some of the most revolutionary states have given a similar 'clarion' call for Peoples' Participation - in development, peace and perhaps war as well! The term 'Participation' has found greatest currency in the last decade - a term which is used with different meanings, a terms which leads to confusion, a term that is also abused.

Participatory Research (PR) as a concept, approach and movement also had its birth and meteoric growth during this very last decade. Many allege that PR is as much a part of the contemporary fad as the World Bank's pronouncements on People's Participation. While there may be some basis for this allegation, this paper attempts to clarify PR as it is today in practice and what it may/should be in future so that such allegations may be soundly refuted. The experiences and trends in Asian PR provide the basis for my arguments, though I have frequently borrowed from my colleagues in other parts of the world as well.

Motive Force in PR:

Right from its inception till date, there have been two basic motive forces in the emergence and growth of PR (Tandon, 1980). The first motive force concerns itself with the discomforts of some professional researchers who found the classical research paradigm insufficient as well as oppressive. The classical research paradigm lays emphasis on value-neutrality of the researcher; makes objectivity as the hallmark of research process; suggests complete unilateral control by the researcher over the entire research processes; treats people as objects only responding to the researcher's questions; and attempts to study people and social phenomena as natural sciences do. Much has been written on these aspects and limitations of classical research paradigm. The important point here is that PR is an expression, at least in part, against these limitations of the dominant paradigm.

The second motive force for PR has emanated from the continued and ever-increasing exploitation and oppression of a large majority of people. In many ways, the power of the oppressors is derived from their superior knowledge or access to those who possess such knowledge. The lack of knowledge about legal rights of a sharecropper or landholding patterns to a landless labourer or the balance-sheet of a corporation to a contract labourer are some of the common place illustrations of the same. Knowledge has been and will continue

to be a source of power. PR has been an attempt to shift this balance of power in favour of the have-nots.

There are some important ways in which the two motive forces are inter-related. One of the critical functions of dominant research paradigm is to socialize professional researchers. This socialization does not limit itself to mere learning of skills of research. It extends itself to the conceptual frameworks guiding research as well as the value positions underlying it. For example, harmony model of society as opposed to dialectical, conflict model has been ingrained in most sociologists trained in the West, their researches are, therefore, guided by harmony model (some call it structural functional model ?)

The socialization into value premises of neutrality and objectivity is perhaps more critical. A professional researcher thus socialized considers himself above ideology and in fact, makes attempts, mostly unsuccessful, to remove ideology from his/her research. His/her research shows 'what is, 'how is', it rarely shows 'why is' because it may reveal his/her ideology (for example, Harijans are poor because they are lazy). And, she/he considers it irrelevant to say 'what it should be.' Such a stance, therefore, absolves a researcher from taking any positions in his/her work.

Another important way in which the dominant research paradigm is linked to ongoing exploitation is by ascribing a professional expertise to research. This implies that research is what only professionally trained persons can undertake. And such professionally trained persons invariably come from the haves. The have-nots, therefore, lack access to them, thereby lacking some knowledge.

The essence of the above argument is that PR is an attempt to provide an alternative to dominant research paradigm as well as to provide access to knowledge to the have-nots. It is this twin emphasis in PR which distinguishes it from other fads and makes it more than a set of new

techniques alone. Because of its ideological component, it is perhaps useful to view PR within a theory of society which is described below.

Theory of Society

It is not possible to present a detailed theory of contemporary societies in this short paper. Only a brief outline of some of the relevant elements of this theory is presented here. All societies are characterized by, broadly speaking, two sets of people: the haves and the have-nots.. The haves are those who are rich, educated, control positions of power in government, business and trade, own resources like capital, land etc., have access to those who own or control resources, are socially high in status, economically well-off and politically powerful. Invariably, their number is small and they constitute an internally cohesive and well-organised group. A large majority of people, on the other hand, are the have-nots. They are politically weak, unorganized, poor, landless, unskilled, ignorant, illiterate, etc. In reality, there may be several layers of haves and have-nots and they can be specifically identified in a concrete situation rather clearly. For example, in the Asian context, the small and marginal farmers, landless labourers, migrant workers, women, unskilled industrial workers, etc. constitute bulk of the have-nots.

The dynamics of a society is such that the haves want to maintain their positions of privilege and power and the have-nots want to usurp it. Over the years, in reality, more and more people in Asia are joining the ranks of have-nots. There are essentially two main mechanisms by which this exploitation or oppression is taking place (Saint, 1981). One of them can be called direct and another indirect.

The direct mechanism of exploitation is that where the exploiter is immediately available and visible, where local processes of exchange and control are used to maintain the positions of the haves. For example, take the case of a typical Indian village. Here, the landlord and moneylender

are the haves; they use ignorance of marginal farmers and landless labourers to perpetuate exploitation; customs and traditions are used against the have-nots; legal provisions are ignored by the haves; land is usurped by the haves; low or no wages are paid to the have-nots; the have-nots are socially outcast; the haves act as political brokers of the village; etc. In this situation, the exploitation is visible, immediate and identifiable. The resources in question are within the community and it is possible for the have-nots to collectively assert themselves against the power of the haves.

The indirect mechanism is a direct outcome of the processes of modernization in the last 3-4 decades. The process of exploitation here is reflected through increasing dependence of villagers on urban market mechanisms, transfer of resources away from the villages, new plants/dams/schemes which erode the local communities. The oppressors are invisible here; science and technology are used against common people, advanced knowledge is taken as the basis for maintaining control; governments, large corporations, financial institutions and planning bodies influence small communities remotely. With increasing linkages in the international arena, such a mechanism operates globally. Multinational corporations, foreign governments and agencies may collude with national institutions in this mechanism. It is not uncommon, for example, that a decision made in the World Bank headquarters in Washington, D.C. to aid a giant hydro-electric project in North Karnataka in India may end up uprooting a million persons engaged in subsistence agriculture in the area. This indirect mechanism is becoming increasingly more powerful; it is difficult to understand, operates remotely and cannot be countered by local action alone.

It is within this framework of society that the role of knowledge and characteristics of PR will be discussed.

Knowledge as Power

Knowledge is the core issue in PR. The overriding purpose of all research is knowledge. Historically, knowledge-generation has been an ongoing process in people's life.

Before the advent of modern science, people had a way of knowing, conceptualizing and disseminating knowledge. Even today, those segments of population which are only marginally affected by modern education, engage in similar modes of knowledge-generation, utilization and dissemination. This has been labelled as 'popular knowledge'. The effectiveness of these traditional processes of knowledge generation, utilisation and dissemination can be established by the fact that large bodies of religious scriptures in Indian history travelled several centuries before even being written up.

With the advent of modern sciences, beginning with natural sciences and leading to social sciences, knowledge has become a commodity. There is a market mechanism for this commodity: some experts produce knowledge, other experts consume it; the production of knowledge has become a specialized profession and only those trained in that profession can legitimately produce it; large institutions of research and training have developed as factories to produce knowledge and knowledge-producers; national and international networks of knowledge-producers and consumers have been erected; transfer of knowledge has entered the international market and provides greatest economic and political leverage to those advanced in this business (Arnove, 1981); further sophistication is being introduced in the production and transportation processes of knowledge (computers and microfilming are just two examples); national and international bodies, manned by "reputed" professionals, have come up to monitor and control the quality of production of knowledge; strict norms and standards have been laid down for this; individual producers of knowledge who follow these norms are handsomely rewarded through professorships, scholarships and other appointments; those who deviate are ostracized, punished and rejected (Gouldner, 1970).

These developments in the field of knowledge-generation and utilization have made knowledge as the single most important basis of power and control. As a result, ordinary people are not considered either knowledgeable or capable of knowing. Therefore, decisions affecting ordinary people

are shown to be based on 'expert' knowledge and any attempts by ordinary people to counter those decisions are labelled as 'uninformed', 'pedestrian', etc.

A related outcome of these developments in knowledge generation and dissemination processes is the alienation of people from those attempting to generate such knowledge. For instance, researchers are finding it rather difficult to obtain authentic data. This has a social-psychological reason. An ordinary person is only considered a respondent in a research project. He has no influence over the researcher, the questions asked or the use of such research. He is neither aware of, nor interested in this research. It is possible to enhance the authenticity of data by arousing respondents' interest. Financial incentives have failed to do so. What the respondent may like is influence over research and its outcome. The researcher may be unwilling to concede this if his overriding concern is objectivity and he fears criticism of the professional research community. He is therefore, caught in a bind.

One possible way out of this bind is to redefine the purpose of knowledge as power to ordinary people. This implies democratization of knowledge-generation and reduction in monopolistic control over the commodity of knowledge. This further implies that the balance of power may shift from the fists of few to the hands of many. If the ordinary people, the have-nots, begin to have influence over the processes of knowledge generation, utilization and dissemination, they can use the power of knowledge to counter trends of oppression against them. It may also provide the researcher an opportunity to get authentic information. It may, therefore, help him to generate valid knowledge which represents reality correctly.

Participatory Research appears to provide this opportunity.

Present Characteristics of PR

The concept, approach and methodology of participatory research as it has evolved over the past few years, has several characteristics. They are enumerated here briefly:

1. PR is a process of knowing and acting. People engaged in PR simultaneously enhance their understanding and knowledge of a particular situation as well as take action to change it to their benefit. To that extent, PR attempts to remove the established dichotomy of knowing and utilizing that knowledge. Knowledge for the sake of knowing alone is deemphasized; knowing is linked to a concrete action. This enhances the quality of knowledge as well as informs the basis for action.
2. The process of PR is initiated in the context of a concrete reality which the have-nots intend to change. Therefore, an existing problem provides the initial motivation for engaging in PR. In situations where people are already aware of a problem and articulate enough about it, they themselves may initiate PR. They may or may not use the resources of experts from outside. In other situations, some outsiders, be they activists or educators or researchers, may provide the initial problem focus. However, the involvement of people from the situation in the process, even if it begins with external push, is a necessary element of PR.
3. While participation of people in the processes of knowing and acting is a necessary aspect of PR, the extent and nature of this participation varies considerably. Where initiative to engage in a process of PR comes from people of the situation, their participation is quite widespread. In most such cases, they participate in the methodology of data-collection, analysis of data, planning and taking action etc. In other cases where initiative comes externally, the participation of people from the situation is initially limited but tends to increase in scope and depth as the process moves on. They may not be so involved in methods of data collection and analysis as they may be in planning and taking action, etc.
4. This leads to the issue of control in PR. The people of the situation must have control over the process of knowing and acting. It is easier to obtain control when initiative comes from the people themselves. In case of external initiative, it is a slow process by which people of the situation begin to control the PR. The external party may not relinquish

control so easily. This gets further complicated if this external party is an expert. Experts have a tendency to control others; ordinary people tend to voluntarily submit to expert's control. In either event, it is imperative that the processes of PR shift control over the process of knowing and knowledge to the people in the situation.

5. The methodology of PR attempts to reduce or eliminate the limitations of classical research. It employs methods of data-collection which are prevalent in classical research. However, it also emphasises qualitative and phenomenological methods which are generally considered "unscientific" in the classical model. The methodology of PR, however, stresses interpersonal communication among different parties and demands clarification of the motives of external party, if any.

6. One of the important characteristics of PR is its collective nature. As evolved over the years, the process of PR requires groups of people to engage together. The most important step in this context is collective analysis of a given situation. It is an important distinction from the classical research paradigm which makes research an individual effort. PR is a collective enterprise and this is reflected in its different steps.

An important outcome of this characteristic of PR has been the creation of organisations among the have-nots. As described earlier, many of the have-nots, in the Asian context, are unorganised and isolated. The process of PR brings such persons together; and collective sharing, analysis and action generate strong connections between them. Over a period of time, these connections grow into organizations of the have-nots. This has been demonstrated many times in the rural Asian context.

7. Finally, the process of PR is an educative experience for those engaged in it. The people in the situation become aware and more knowledgeable through their engagement in PR. They become knowledgeable about methods of knowing and analysis; they become aware of their situation and possible

ways to change that situation. It is this component of learning for all that makes PR a distinct approach.

Examined in the light of above characteristics, PR has made valuable contributions in Asia and the world over. It has been used to bring about improvements in villages, urban slums, tribal habitats, etc. It has been effectively engaged in adult literacy, primary health care, agricultural practice, economic enterprise, etc. It has also been brought in from outside as a tool for local confrontation. It has contributed to people's organization, conscientization, and liberation. It has highlighted possible approaches to development. But in all these efforts, particularly in Asia, it has confined itself to micro situations (a hamlet, a slum, a colony) and concerned itself with the have-nots (landless labourer, migrant worker, tribal, women, etc.) It is now time for PR to address itself to the other side as well.

Future Directions for PR

As argued earlier, most experiences in PR, particularly in Asia, have focused upon micro settings. These have undoubtedly helped in countering the direct mechanism of exploitation. However, there is, as shown previously, an increasing impact of the indirect mechanism on the lives of ordinary people. Moreover, this indirect mechanism operates through the processes of modernization and uses "expert" knowledge as the basis for making its case. In order to counter this mechanism, "expert" knowledge from the point-of-view of ordinary people is to be generated and disseminated. It is in this process that I see an important future role of PR: giving the have-nots the power of knowledge. A future role of this kind may have many important elements:

1. Firstly, the "expert" knowledge being used by the planners and decision-makers needs to be thoroughly exposed and challenged. This expose can demonstrate both the incompleteness of the assumptions on which this knowledge is posited and the inadequacy of the knowledge itself. However, for planners and decision-makers to take note of this expose, it has to be fashioned, at least in form and language, exactly after the way of that "expert" knowledge. This implies that

the professional researcher can bring to bear on the expose his/her professional skills. To that extent, the role of professionally trained researcher becomes crucial.

2. However, it is important to underscore the alliance of this professional researcher with some groups of have-nots. The expose is not merely an academic exercise but intended to contribute towards the empowerment of the have-nots. This alliance has to be more than a mere emotional sympathy. Many professional researchers are presently engaged in exposes of multinational corporations, foreign aid and government policies. Yet these are individual efforts inspired by personal motivations. While all such efforts are valuable contributions to the cause of the have-nots, they would not classify as PR. For the PR, an explicit alliance with a group of have-nots is essential, so that they can participate in this inquiry for expose.

3. It may be somewhat unrealistic to expect nascent groups of have-nots to contribute towards this sophisticated inquiry in expose. Yet, their involvement is central in PR. What is certainly possible is to initiate a process of continuous dialogue between the professional researcher and the group of have-nots during the course of inquiry for expose. This will certainly make them better informed about and more aware of the functioning of indirect mechanism of exploitation. In any event, a translation of expose into common people's language is the minimum that must be achieved in order to link the expose to the lives of the common people.

4. Finally, it is conceivable that the knowledge of common people - popular knowledge - may form an important basis for expose and alternative "expertise". It has been shown repeatedly that common people have a way of knowing and a store of knowledge that has escaped the attention of planners and decision-makers. One of the tasks of a professional researcher in PR may be to translate this store of knowledge in the dominant form - a form that planners and decision-makers understand and accept - so that their knowledge could influence the "expert" knowledge. It is clear that the popular knowledge, unless translated into the domi-

nant form and language, can not provide a basis for consideration by planners and decision-makers.

The above aspects provide only a partial outline for this future role of PR. Much more needs to be considered, practised and conceptualized. There are several issues that require further clarity even within this outline. An important theme requiring further clarity is the linkage between macro and micro research. It appears that if PR has to play an empowering role, it has to focus itself on both micro and macro issues. Given this perspective, it is crucial to develop modes and models for this macro and micro foci: simultaneous, sequential or both or ? Similarly, the new direction of PR suggests an important role for professional researchers. This opens up the thorny questions of inter-action and influence between the researcher and the ordinary people. The nature of 'organic intellectual' may also need to be clarified in this context.

Many more such issues can be identified. I hope that this paper will generate further debate and clarity on this new direction and role of PR. It appears a logical next step.

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